

**Minutes of the University of Suffolk  
Board Meeting  
Wednesday 30 October 2024  
W310, Waterfront Building, Ipswich**

**Present:**

Ian Ailles (IA) (Chair), Dr Jennifer Barnes (JB) (Deputy Chair), Steve Clarke (SC), Professor Mohammad Dastbaz (MD), Dr Pauline Essah (PE), Professor Jenny Higham (JH), Dame Lin Homer (LH), Dr Sara Hurley (SH) (via Teams from agenda item 5.A.), Judith Krone (JK), Katie Pickard (KP), Andrew Smith (AS) (Senior Independent Director), Professor Toby Wilkinson (TW), Dr Reilly Willis (RWI), Lewis Woolston (LW).

**In attendance:**

John Cavani (JC) Director of Marketing, Communications and International (for agenda item 4.A.), Fiona Fisk (FF) (University Secretary), Jason Kirk (JKi) (Director of Finance and Planning and Company Secretary), Debbi Newstead (DN) (Administrator to the Board and Executive Manager), Rosanne Wijnberg (RWj) (Interim Chief Operating Officer).

Professor Jenny Higham and Dr Reilly Willis were both welcomed to their first Board meeting. Dr Jennifer Barnes was formally thanked for her contribution over the last nine years being her last meeting, and Sean Preston acknowledged and thanked also noting that he had left the University since the last meeting.

**1. Apologies**

Jenny Leeder (JL).

**2. Declaration of Interests**

LW declared an interest in agenda item 6.B.

**3. Minutes of the last Meeting and Matters Arising****A. Minutes**

The minutes from the meetings held on 2 July and 30 September 2024 were agreed as accurate records. The Board agreed that subject to the confidential text being removed as approved, the minutes should be published.

**B. Matters Arising**

Board members agreed that the checklist from the meeting on 2 July 2024 summarised all matters arising.

**4. Presentation****A. Update on Marketing, Communications and International Strategy**

John Cavani, Director of Marketing, Communications and International attended for this item and provided an update on the strategy, the work that been done over the last year and future planned activity. The following comments and points were made:

- i. The University has two main sponsorship partners, Brighten the Corners and Ipswich Town Football Club covering music and sports, both important to the student experience.
- ii. The introduction of business partners, the Hub and a new website have improved communications both internally and externally, noting that this is the start of a trajectory to improve communication.
- iii. Continuing to build on the brand remains a key priority, in 2026 the University will be 10 years old, and the intention is to use this as a vehicle for enhanced promotional activity.
- iv. The significant improvement in the international market this year and the importance of ensuring a good student experience was discussed. All alumni are ambassadors for the university but international alumni as agents are even more so. Feedback from students and how the University and the Students' Union can measure this was raised.
- v. Some of the University's priorities competed against one another, the identification of which should be the focus was discussed. With this in mind the next piece of work will focus on research and discovery of stakeholders; board, business, staff, students, to work out what is important for each group to then decide what priorities were taken forward. How the process might run was shared and it was noted that the Senate/Board workshop on 27 November 2024 would be the starting point. Alignment with the Civic University agreement was discussed.

## **B. Update on Coastal and Rural Oral Health Project**

JH provided a verbal update on the progress of the Dental CIC, reporting that the University had been awarded highly commended at the recent NHS Parliamentary Awards which saw over 900 submissions. The Board received the update and asked how they could be better ambassadors to promote dentistry. SH committed to producing an elevator pitch for the Board to use for next meeting.

**Action: SH to produce an elevator pitch for the next meeting.**

## **5. Standing Items**

### **A. Vice-Chancellor's Update**

The Board received and noted the Vice-Chancellor's confidential update. The Board discussed the HE sector more generally noting that there were four or five institutions seriously struggling financially, and that the recent confirmation of an increase in national insurance presented additional challenges for all.

### **B. Students' Union Update**

The Board received and noted the update on activity of the Students' Union (SU) over the last year, their plans for the rest of the year and services they offer. The following points were made:

- i. Identifying course reps from both Global Banking School (GBS) and London School of Commerce (LSC) was a priority as these groups were hard for the SU to represent being off campus and students unable to pop into the SU offices.
- ii. Succession planning for some of the societies that closed as students graduated were being explored. With such a broad student demographic it was queried how the SU catered for the social programme. A cautious approach was taken to new activities where events were tried a couple of times to see what was popular before being committed to.

- iii. It was reported that this had been the most successful freshers' week this year, in particular the home away from home campaign had been particularly successful which focused on working with those that were struggling being away from home.
- iv. The availability of advice sessions was significantly overstretched so the team were looking at training others in the team to help with the less complex cases.
- v. Sizewell C had donated money for the foodbank and other activities. Ways that others more generally could donate to the foodbank was discussed.

**Action: KP to circulate an email with dates of events for the Board to attend SU activities.**

### **C. Student Recruitment and Financial Update**

The Board received the update on student recruitment and its impact on the budget, noting the increase in employer national insurance contributions announced in the budget was another pressure to be factored in.

Much more rigour was put into setting the budget this year with a focus on rebalancing the Ipswich/partnerships income. It was noted that the transformation programme was essential to becoming more sustainable.

## **6. Governance**

### **A. Chair's Update Report**

The Board received and discussed the report which focused on appraisals and themes from those conversations. The theme of strategy and better involvement at an earlier stage was noted. A plan would be created which looked at some of the themes around training and strategy to discuss at the February meeting.

**Action: FF to create a plan for the February meeting.**

### **B. Students' Union and University of Suffolk Memorandum of Understanding**

The Board approved the memorandum of understanding noting it had previously been approved by the Executive Committee. This was a framework to help the relationship of the two organisations. It was agreed that it would be reviewed in 12 months at which point an executive summary would be added.

### **C. Governance Review Proposal**

The Board approved the appointment process of an external consultant/organisation. The Board approved the establishment of a time specific steering group, and the scope of the review as set out in the paper. It was agreed that the scope would also include SU interaction and consider how the Dental CIC fed in. Subsidiaries more generally would be included to cover the possibility that more subsidiaries could be established in the future. The review outcomes would be brought back in July 2025 not the Autumn.

The Board received and noted the updated CUC mapping document.

### **D. Schedule of Delegation**

The Board approved the amendments to the schedule of delegation.

## **E. Board and Sub-Committee Terms of Reference**

The Board approved the Terms of Reference for the Board and its sub-committees which had been reviewed as part of the annual cycle, noting the merging of the Executive and Senior Leadership Team together. The suggested changes to the Dental CIC were generally agreed, except for the proposed membership amendment in relation to the Chief Executive Officer. This change would be considered as part of the Governance Review.

**Action: FF to feed in suggested TofR amendments into the Governance review.**

## **F. Schedule of Business**

The Board approved the schedule of business for the year as set out in the report subject to a couple of amendments. The assumptions for the Annual Financial Return (AFR) would be submitted to the November Board.

## **G. Procurement Policy**

The Board approved the updated procurement policy with its new approach, noting it had already been reviewed and supported by the Audit and Risk Committee.

# **7. Proposals**

## **A. Sustainability Task Group**

The Board endorsed the direction of travel, and the four priorities set out in the report. It agreed that a Board member with responsibility for sustainability and the setting up of a sustainability committee should feed into the Governance review. In the meantime, the task and finish group would continue. RWI suggested she pick up sustainability within the curriculum at Senate and agreed to join the task and finish group. The Board supported the implementation of an environmental management system but would leave the Executive to pick this up at an operational level.

**Action: FF to incorporate Priority 1 and 3 into the Governance Review. RWI to pick up the curriculum element with Senate and join the Group.**

## **B. University Naming of Buildings, Rooms, Facilities and Spaces Policy**

The Board approved the new policy subject to reviewing the proposed moderation and including an Independent Director on the advisory group to which TW volunteered. The group would meet before the next Board.

**Action FF: Group to meet before the next Board.**

## **C. Student Hub**

The Board discussed the proposals around the student hub and endorsed pursuing a new direction of travel, noting a fully costed project plan would be brought to the February meeting. Further conversations with some partners would be required and RWj would speak to the Students' Union to explore their requirements in more detail. It was noted that this alternative approach would minimise diluting students even further across the campus, would be less costly and address other parts of the estate that required investment.

**Action: RWj to bring a fully costed proposal to the February Board meeting.**

**8. Annual/Monthly Reports/Updates**

**A. Prevent Duty Compliance: 2023-24 Annual Data Return and Safeguarding Report**

FF summarised the confidential report which was approved by the Board for submission to the OfS. It was noted that the Audit and Risk Committee had already scrutinised and approved the report and that the return encompassed the Students' Union. Separately it was observed that the internal audit undertaken on safeguarding this year had received a good result.

**B. OfS B3 Student Outcomes Data**

The Board received the report, and noted the data around postgraduate study was an anomaly rather than poor results due to the way data was recorded in our systems, a resolution was being explored.

**C. NSS Outcomes Report**

The Board received and noted the outcomes from the National Student Survey (NSS). It was noted that next year there would be no questions regarding the Students' Union.

**9. Papers for Information**

**A. Internal Audit Annual Report**

The Board received and noted the confidential internal audit report that summarised the findings from the audits undertaken in 2023/24.

**B. Nominations Committee Minutes**

The Board received the confidential minutes from the Nominations Committee meetings held on 18 July and 25 September 2024.

**C. Audit and Risk Committee Minutes**

The Board received the confidential minutes from the Audit and Risk Committee meeting that was held on 8 October 2024.

**D. Senate Minutes**

The Board received the confidential minutes from Senate that was held on 12 June 2024.

**E. Executive Committee Minutes**

The Board received the confidential minutes from the Executive Committee meetings held on 2 and 24 September, and 15 October 2024.

**F. OfS Reportable Events Register**

The Board received the confidential reportable events register.

**G. Company Seal Register**

The Board received the confidential register.

**H. Mandatory Training Register**

The Board received the confidential register.

**I. Directors Register of Attendance**

The Board received the register of attendance for Board meetings.

**10. Any Other Business**

There was no further business for discussion.

**11. Dates of Next Meetings:**

Wednesday 27 November 2024 – 9.00 – Board/Senate Workshop

Wednesday 27 November 2024 – 13.00

Thursday 13 February 2025 – 13.00

Tuesday 8 April 2025 – 13.00

Tuesday 1 July 2025 – 13.00

Tuesday 28 October 2025 – 13.00

Tuesday 25 November 2025 – 13.00

The meeting closed at 5.15pm