

UCEN Manchester Board

Minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2024 at Openshaw Campus.

Present: Ann Limb (via Teams), Rachel Curry (Principal), Philip Johnson, Malcolm Todd (Chair), John Thornhill, Amber Ahmed

Apologies: Justice Ellis

In Attendance: Mark Harris (Vice Principal Adult and Vice Dean), Wendy Pennington (Director of Student Experience and Engagement), Debbie Sanderson (Vice Principal Resources, Planning and Performance), Michael Walsh (Dean), Janet Faulkner (Director of Academic Standards), Adam Hewitt (Group Quality Team Director), Orla Wood (Divisional Finance Director), Lorna Lloyd-Williams (Company Secretary and General Counsel), Sherman Wu (Governance Officer), Rachel Robson (External Reviewer via Teams), Sarah Johnson (External Reviewer via Teams)

Robert Owen (Director of Curriculum HE - Directorate of Performing Arts and The Arden), Andrew Stephenson (Head of Department – The Arden School of Theatre), Graham Hicks (Departmental Team Leader – School of Performing Arts), Robert Purvis (Lecturer HE - The Arden School of Theatre) – for Minute No. 04/24

Jessica Hutchinson (Student - Musical Theatre Year 3), Nina Bussink (Student – Theatre and Performance Year 2) and Ella Roberts (Student – Theatre and Performance Year 2) – attended at the close of the formal meeting for lunch and Q&A.

Part A

01/24	<p>Declarations of interest</p> <p>The Chair declared an interest in relation to the investigation by the Office for Students (OfS) on Leeds Trinity University as set out in the HE landscape paper which was circulated to the Board prior to this meeting. It was notable to the Board that UCEN Manchester did not have any franchised provision.</p>
02/24	<p>Part A minutes of the meeting of the UCEN Manchester Board held on 23 November 2023</p> <p>The Part A minutes of the meeting of the UCEN Manchester Board held on 23 November 2023, were received and approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chair in hard copy.</p>

03/24	<p>Matters Arising</p> <p>The Board received an update for assurance and noted the actions completed including those items that had been incorporated into the agenda for the meeting in respect of National Student Survey and Degree Awarding Powers (DAP) Update. Additionally, the Board were advised that full mid-year review of UCEN Manchester was underway and the review would be presented to the June meeting. It was also planned to bring together Self Evaluation Document and Quality Enhancement Plan in UCEN Manchester and all other business units in the Group.</p>
04/24	<p>Curriculum Area Presentation (The Arden)</p> <p>The Board was presented with the background of The Arden, School of Theatre which was established in 1991 in association with the Royal Exchange and was recognised by industry bodies Spotlight and Equity as a drama school. The Arden sat within The Faculty for Creative Arts and Media Industries within UCEN Manchester and it was accredited by the Council of Dance, Drama and Musical Theatre (CDMT) since February 2024.</p> <p>The Board was then presented with the PowerPoint which covered the following items regarding the Arden:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure; • Offer; • Facilities; • Approach; • Years one to three under the Arden Model; • Student Outcomes; • Reputation; • Press presence; • Competition; • CDMT criteria; • Accreditation process; • Vision; • DAP; • Future; • Graduate's support; • Level 6 outcomes; and • The Teachers <p>The Board were advised that the Arden was keen to become a widening participation school with access for all. It was suggested that financial assistance be considered to support students with financial need to enable them to continue their studies. The Board asked if there were bursaries available for students who couldn't fund themselves to encourage widening participation. Members were advised that there was a general hardship fund but no specific bursaries to the Arden.</p> <p>A governor proposed establishing a connection with the Alumni to seek their financial support and she could assist in facilitating this connection.</p>

	<p>Members asked if the Arden was looking at a Saturday club as a method to giving opportunities to disadvantaged learners and it was confirmed this was the case.</p> <p>The Board questioned what the Arden school could do to become more successful. It was acknowledged that challenges such as facility usage and market growth existed and that these were key strategic issues that were being considered.</p>
05/24	<p>Overview of the content of the meeting</p> <p>The Principal provided an overview of the content of the meeting, emphasizing that UCEN Manchester's overall position was positive in terms of retention rate, progress against Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), first-sit pass rate, student voice outcomes and application numbers. It was notable that mid-point review of the UCEN strategy was underway and on schedule to feedback conclusions and recommendations in June 2024. The Board commended the concise two-page slide presentation as an effective summary of the meeting.</p>
06/24	<p>Quality Enhancement Plan Update (Semester 1)</p> <p>The Board were provided with an overview of UCEN Manchester's annual Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) for 2023-24 which had been developed by focusing on the areas for development identified in the UCEN Manchester Self Evaluation Document (SED). It was flagged that the QEP had arisen from the bottom-up approach whereby curriculum programmes and Schools self-evaluated first to provide the basis for self-evaluation across the business unit and the QEP was subject to monitoring from senior leaders and the first monitoring points had been in February 2024.</p> <p>In respect of School-level QEP Monitoring, it was flagged that the great majority of action points were rated as 'amber' on the grounds that action had been taken to address the areas for enhancement (AfE), but that data on impact and outcomes did not currently exist to suggest that the target had been fulfilled; in that event, the 'green' rating could not be given. It was anticipated that many of the 'amber' ratings would change when the QEPs were monitored during the subsequent monitoring points in April and August 2024.</p> <p>In respect of UCEN Manchester Business-unit Level QEP Monitoring in February 2024, it was highlighted that a good progress against AfEs identified in the SED and many of the QEP AfE targets were based around the ambition to gain DAPs. The following two key areas UCEN Manchester would address going forward were presented to the Board:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There had been huge improvements in the reporting of HE-specific data, and this must continue to evolve into a metric reporting structure recognisable in the HE sector • Retention rates for students at Level 4, which were too low, particularly in the Faculty of Higher Technical and Professional Industries, had been vastly improved by significant changes to assessment and student support. The Team were alert to these issues and would continue to work towards addressing the AfEs

	<p>The Board were advised that mid-year performance indicators has shown that where UCEN Manchester had targeted improvements these had been strong. Governors challenged about the direction of travel for each of the indicators and what were the risk areas?</p> <p>The Board asked if there were any issues which had to draw the Board's concern. The Principal highlighted that the retention rate and teaching quality were two specific concerns which needed to be addressed. The Board was assured that a summary highlighting the key areas of risks and indicating any changes in risk levels would be provided at next meeting.</p> <p>ACTION: Group Quality Team Leader to provide a summary highlighting the key areas of risk and the changes in risk levels.</p>
07/24	<p>HE Tuition Fee Policy 2025/26</p> <p>The tuition fee policy for 2025/26 was received by the Board for review and approval.</p> <p>It was flagged that the policy brought together existing documents, processes and procedures that were already in place into one concise document. Currently, there was a single Tuition Fee Policy covering The Manchester College and UCEN Manchester, whilst a single entity and Fee Policy set out in the report was relevant to UCEN Manchester students only. The Policy incorporated the relevant details required by the Student Protection Plan, in particular guidance from the Office for Students in relation to student refunds and compensation if continuation of study was not possible. The Board were advised that UCEN Manchester would aim to teach out a programme wherever possible and as such no compensation would be due, however alternative scenarios were set out in the policy and the respective compensation stated. It was notable that there were minimal changes proposed from the 2024/25 policy. The Board noted the changes to the policy but it was agreed that it would be brought back for approval once details of the fees had been included. It was noted that the policy needed to be aligned to the access and participation plan. Upon being asked the Company Secretary advised that if the policy related to HE fees only it could be approved by UCEN divisional board in June.</p> <p>Action: Dean to bring revised policy to next meeting</p> <p>Freedom of Speech and Guest Speaker Policy</p> <p>The paper regarding UCEN's position in complying with Office for Students (OfS) expectations in relation to freedom of speech was received by the Board.</p> <p>The Board were advised the following position of UCEN Manchester:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The existing Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech was currently being reviewed to ensure that it complied with the new requirements • Key staff were attending OfS webinars on freedom of speech • An existing process for guest speakers which were currently being reviewed against the new requirements. This would be applicable to all TMC/UCEN Manchester guest speakers • The position with the students' union was currently being reviewed

	<p>An update on the regulation of Students' Union on freedom of speech obtained at OfS webinar was presented to the Board, highlighting that OfS was currently compiling a list of the relevant students' unions that they would monitor/regulate and would publish the information on the OfS website by 1 August 2024 and guidance for students' union about their free speech duties would be published. It was flagged that there was no clear guidance from OfS as to how this would apply to small universities who covered 16-18 provision (like UCEN Manchester) and the intention for this aspect was to be discussed during the consultation period.</p> <p>Proposals for the new free speech complaints scheme were presented to the Board and it was noted that the Director of Student Experience and Engagement would attend at the next available conference on the 23rd April to gain further information and insights.</p> <p>The Board emphasized that in the paper must be included the power of the OfS to impose legal and financial penalties. The chair explained that UCEN must actively promote freedom of speech.</p>
08/24	<p>Student Voice, including NSS Action Plan</p> <p>The Board received an update on the student voice strategy from term one, along with an outline of progress against the National Student Survey (NSS) Action Plan. The report detailed some of the student voice mechanisms which were scheduled and delivered in term one, giving assurances to the Board that the student voice was an integral part of UCEN Manchester. Good participation and engagement were evident with the varied student voice mechanisms and good progress was being made following student feedback and with the National Student Survey (NSS) action plan.</p> <p>The report also summarized the findings from student review with the following key points highlighted:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcomes from the Student Experience Survey, completed in December 2023, indicated positive improvements in student perceptions overall. • In respect of Organisation and Management, there was 73% satisfaction which was 24%-point improvement compared to the previous NSS scores • In respect of Assessment and Feedback, there was 81% satisfaction which was 9%-point improvement • In respect of how well we communicated the Mental Health and Wellbeing support services, there was 80% satisfaction which was 27%-point improvement • Whilst student perceptions of Learning Resource improved by 5%-points (to 70%), this remained an area of focus such as the learning resource at the Cube, the Shena Simon Campus learning environment, the identity of Schools within the City Centre Campus, student access to the theatre/rehearsal spaces, IT matters.

	<p>The Board inquired about the management of space usage, questioning if there was any measures in place. It was explained that a timetable governed space utilization, though a robust solution was necessary due to increasing demand.</p> <p><i>Ann Limb, Rachel Robson and Sarah Johnson left the meeting.</i></p>
	<p>RESOLVED that as the items to be considered were deemed commercially sensitive, the Board moved into confidential session.</p>
	<p>-----</p> <p>Chair</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Date</p>

Meeting closed at 1.30pm Lunch and Student Q&A .