

UCEN Manchester Board

Minutes of the meeting held on 26 June 2024 at Openshaw Campus.

Present: Rachel Curry (Principal), Philip Johnson, Malcolm Todd (Chair), John Thornhill, Justice Ellis

Apologies: Ann Limb

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 (Deputy Principal and Dean), Janet Faulkner (Director of Academic Standards), Adam Hewitt (Group Quality Director), Orla Wood (Divisional Finance Director), Lorna Lloyd-Williams (Company Secretary and General Counsel), Donna Reid (Governance Officer), Sarah-Jane Gilmore (Deputy Company Secretary), Edward Lack (LTE Group Director Quality and Standards) For item 25/24: Dan Goh (Consulting Data Scientist - DataHE), Greg Moody (Consulting Data Scientist – DataHE),

For item 26/24: Sal Brower (Student Union Rep – UCEN Manchester)

Part A

13/24	Declarations The Company Secretary confirmed that apologies were received from Ann Limb.
14/24	Declarations of interest There were no declarations of interest.
15/24	Part A minutes of the meeting of the UCEN Manchester Board held on 14 March 2024 The Part A minutes of the meeting of the UCEN Manchester Board held on 14 March 2024, were received and approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chair in hard copy.
16/24	Matters Arising The company secretary took the Board through the action sheet as detailed in the papers.
	Malcolm Todd (Chair) left the meeting
17/24	Letter from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State dated 27 March 2024 The company secretary presented to the Board, a Letter from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State dated 27 March 2024, which was provided for information.
	Malcolm Todd (Chair) rejoined the meeting
18/24	Principal's Overview <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Principal provided an overview of the content of the meeting and highlighted that the Autumn semester is expected to have an intense period of review and test within and across both The Manchester College and UCEN Manchester to align the various strands of future curriculum and a resourcing strategy, specifically within the context of:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes to Government policy, following the general election and how this will affect further education. • the mid-point review of the UCEN Manchester strategy (with recommendations by December 2024) and how this sits alongside the application for Degree Awarding Powers (DAPs) and the TMC strategy • Post-16 capacity (in relation to the balance and mix of provision across both the College and UCEN Manchester) which among other factors, could involve adjustments to the estate strategy.
19/24	<p>Quality & Standards Update including QEP progress report</p> <p>The Board were provided with an overview of UCEN Manchester's quality and standards activity by the Group Quality Director with reference to the Higher Education Internal Quality Reviews (HE IQRs) and Progress Updates, as well as updates on recent CPD and the HE Reviews of Learning (HE RoLs). The paper also provided an update on current retention and attendance in UCEN Manchester, and there was a progress report from UCEN Manchester's Quality Enhancement Plans (QEPs) for 2023/24, which included a summary highlighting the key areas of risk and an indication of any changes in risk level since the previous Divisional Board.</p> <p>HE IQRs and Progress Updates</p> <p>The HE IQRs and Progress Updates were undertaken by members of the LTE Group Quality Team, led by the Group Quality Director (Higher Education) or the Advanced Practitioner (Quality Improvement) for Higher Education, and the reports were written and edited by the same team. The School of Construction & Engineering had been highlighted as a potential area of concern by the Vice Dean of UCEN Manchester due to a change of management and teaching staff in the school, and senior leaders in UCEN Manchester wanted to understand whether there were any underlying issues or themes. Progress Updates were completed in the School of Computing & Cybersecurity and on the theme of attendance. Following the HE IQR and Progress Updates, several recommendations were made to senior leaders in UCEN Manchester, and these were presented at the recent Quality and Standards Committee.</p> <p>The lines of enquiry for the HE IQR in the School of Construction & Engineering included, but were not limited to, external examiner/verifier (EE/EV) reports, programme and module handbooks, assessment policies and procedures, standardisation and moderation processes, and discussions with students and staff.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was clear evidence that programmes in the School of Construction & Engineering delivered qualifications that met the expected threshold standards, and no essential actions were noted as part of the external examiner's feedback. • The IV standards and processes of the awarding body had been rigorously adhered to, and there was evidence that a well-established process is in place to support student achievement. • Students were aware of their target grades and made their own choices of what they wanted to achieve, which was usually based on their personal aspirations or the amount of time they could realistically commit to the course. Support to attain high grades was provided by the course tutor, including one-to-one discussions and supporting resources. • The School used external expertise to support its programmes, and assessment and classification processes that were reliable, fair and transparent. • The impact of the newly appointed Senior Lecturer/Programme Leader had been extremely positive for the School, with the EE commenting that "the recently appointed Programme Leader has had to pick up the programme mid-year but after a discussion, it is evident she has a clear and effective vision for the future management of the programme".

- Assessment materials were contextualised to include relatable scenarios using projects based in the Manchester area. The guidelines were clear and learning outcomes and assessment criteria, including requirements to attain a Pass, Merit or Distinction, were explicit.
- Students reported that feedback was developmental, with one student describing how the tutor had a one-to-one meeting with her to discuss how to improve her work from Merit to Distinction.
- The students were very clear during the HE IQR discussion that the current tutor had made a difference to the quality of teaching and learning on the course.
- Students benefitted from very good learning resources and sessions were delivered in recently renovated classrooms.
- Students felt well-supported, and one told the EE that they appreciated the approachability of tutors. Students also reported to the EE that library staff were very supportive.
- Students felt that they were very well supported to achieve successful outcomes, they were able to discuss their intended grades and were generally ambitious about their intended achievement.

The following recommendations were shared with senior leaders in UCEN Manchester and have either been actioned already or are in hand:

- Implement a student tracking system so that they can see what they have completed and what the mark is, so there is no confusion about which units are outstanding.
- Keep interview records for all applicants interviewed to maintain an auditable trail for each student.
- Tutors should continue to develop the quantity and quality of formative feedback given to students and make greater use of in-text feedback and comments.
- Module handbooks and assignment briefs should state that work will be returned within 15 working days and include the date that will be.
- Students should receive an overview of assignment submission dates across all modules.
- Alternative strategies to enhance the student voice should be developed to ensure that students are given an opportunity to raise their concerns.
- Ensure that the information on the UCEN Manchester website is up-to-date and accurate.

Students whose first language is not English was highlighted by the chair as an area for attention, as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision is currently very limited and needs to be addressed.

It was also noted that a large proportion of ESOL learners were health students. An ESOL pilot that took place last year has been considered as general practice throughout the college going forwards.

The Board were advised that there were a few areas of inconsistency based on feedback on assignments, and attendance expectations etc.

It was noted that although there was consistency within departments and teams, there were some inconsistencies in terms of compliance between faculties. Concerns that inconsistencies could dilute the brand and culture of the organization were discussed.

The current CPD model was discussed and was noted to be due for review.

The challenges around data metrics and how they are currently being measured was discussed, specifically in the context of the OfS requirements. Whilst it was acknowledged

	<p>that the current system measured what was required, it was labour intensive and needed to be improved.</p> <p>The Board were advised that the data team have been provided with a preliminary list of future requirements, with further information and details being fed in from the LTE Group Quality team.</p> <p>Action: Group Director of Quality to provide the Board with an update on the current data system at the next meeting and its alignment with OfS metrics.</p> <p>The approach to research and scholarship was discussed; whether this included regional impact and how it fitted in with career progression and workload expectations for staff.</p> <p>Action: The chair requested that the UCEN Manchester leadership team bring an update on research and scholarship to the next Board meeting for discussion. (Governance Team to add to Business Cycle).</p>
20/24	<p>Update from Academic Board</p> <p>The Divisional Board were provided with an overview of the minutes and main themes from Academic Board and an update on Degree Awarding Powers (DAPs).</p> <p>The Deputy Principal & Dean and Director of Academic Standards asked for approval of the updated Terms of Reference for the Academic Board as outlined in the draft minutes of the Academic Board held on 6th June 2024.</p> <p>Slight amendments were proposed including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Library representation at Academic Board. • Monitoring of the new Access and Participation Plan (APP) via an APP Working Group. <p>The Teaching, Learning and Enhancement Committee had updated the Assessment and Moderation Policy and this had been proposed to Academic Board. The amendments included making assessment briefs more inclusive, changes to the moderations of policies, refreshed teaching strategies, and monitoring performance of the provision throughout the year. The academic members have also now established an APP working group, which has led to minor changes in the TOR. The Board heard that the changes have already made a significant impact. The involvement of teaching staff has been increased, the academic oversight has improved, and the quality of the discussions overall have improved with the students.</p> <p>The chair suggested that the Academic Board minutes could potentially be more detailed in future to ensure the discussion was captured in full.</p> <p>It was noted that the academic deliberative structures would be tested as part of the DAP process, and in parallel discussions would take place about whether these structures would need to evolve should DAP approval be given.</p> <p>The Board were provided with an update of the DAPs application as follows:</p> <p>Following a meeting with the Office for Students it was agreed that the New DAPs plan would be submitted by 14th June 2024. It was anticipated that the follow up visit will take place in the last week in September or early October, and a date is to be confirmed. Following the visit the assessment team would provide a written report for the Academic Board to review and make representations.</p>

	<p>The OfS anticipated that the report would progress to the Quality Assurance Committee in January or March 2025 for a decision on whether UCEN Manchester can move forward to the 3-year probationary period, which would potentially allow UCEN Manchester to commence student enrolments on their own degrees from September 2025. It would be a requirement of the probationary period for UCEN Manchester to submit quarterly updates on its progress with the plan. It is envisaged that this could include visits from the assessment team to observe key meetings and to undertake staff and student meetings to triangulate evidence. The Board were advised that timeline and process updates from the OfS following submission of the plan would be provided at the next meeting.</p> <p>The Board were informed that the DAPs Self Evaluation and Plan, including a range of evidence, had been submitted to the OfS on 14th June. The UCEN Manchester Leadership team advised that they would continue to collate evidence as they were expecting further requests from the OfS.</p> <p>The Director of Academic Standards asked the Board to monitor the DAPs implementation which was outlined in the DAPs Update paper (item 8b).</p> <p>The Director of Academic Standards advised the Board of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Going forward, the Quarterly reports needed to be extremely detailed. • After approval had been given by the OfS, the proposal is to validate 18 degrees in the first three years, focusing on performing arts, film school and computing.
21/24	<p>Access and participation plan including Equality of Opportunity Risk Register</p> <p>The Board were provided with an overview of the UCEN Manchester Access and Participation Plan (APP) including the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register.</p> <p>The Board were advised that UCEN Manchester was required to submit the new Access and Participation Plan (2025-29) to the OfS by 31st July 2024. A draft plan identified the risks (i) and intervention strategies (ii), with the detail of these included within the paper for the Board to consider. Subsequent to any feedback, the investment plan (iii) would be completed, having taken into consideration the agreed interventions.</p> <p>At the previous Board several actions were identified to be completed by the Vice Principal and Vice Dean in readiness for considering the new APP, which have now made considerable progress.</p> <p>The Vice Principal and Vice Dean asked for approval from the Board on the risks that have been identified and the overall direction of the APP, before the report is finalised. The Board were advised that the deadline was 31st July 2024, and the aim was to complete within the next 14 days.</p> <p>The Board approved the identified risks and associated interventions for inclusion in the Access and Participation Plan.</p> <p>It was agreed that the finalised APP would be circulated by email to the Divisional Board for approval prior to submission.</p>
22/24	<p>OfS Annual Compliance Report</p> <p>The Board received an overview of the OfS Annual Compliance Report. The UCEN Manchester Divisional Board was asked to consider this paper for information and assurance.</p> <p>UCEN Manchester had received no notifications of failure to comply with any ongoing or specific conditions of registration and mechanisms are currently in place to ensure that this continues. The schedule within the overview set out when and how the Board can expect</p>

	<p>assurance for each of the conditions of registration. Once approved this schedule will then be incorporated into the business cycles of the academic governance structure with oversight by the Board. The Board were advised that timings could vary from that detailed on the paper.</p>
23/24	<p>Policies</p> <p>HE Tuition Fee Policy 2025/26 The tuition fee policy for 2025/26 was received by the Board for review and approval.</p> <p>The Board heard that the wording of the policy had been amended to include the recommendations from the previous Board meeting. It was further brought to the Board's attention that the Tuition Fee Policy 2025/26 brought together existing documents, processes and procedures that are already in place into one concise document to set out clear intent. The UCEN Manchester Tuition Fee Policy, however, covered Higher Education courses only. Fees relating to Access courses, non-prescribed HE and Overseas Learners, whilst part of UCEN Manchester, were included in The Manchester College Tuition Fee Policy.</p> <p>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 in the event that continuation of study is not possible. UCEN Manchester will 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.</p> <p>There were minimal changes proposed from the 2024/25 policy. All amendments were in bold (for additions) or strikethrough (for deletions).</p> <p>Fees are reviewed on an annual basis and for 2025/26 two factors were taken into account in considering this year's proposals: competitor analysis and primary research.</p> <p>It was therefore proposed the Board approve the fees for 2025/26 as outlined in the table within the Tuition Fee Policy and Fees cover paper.</p> <p>The Board resolved to approve the HE Tuition Fee Policy and Fees for 2025/26.</p>
23/24	<p>Freedom of Speech and Guest Speaker Policy The paper regarding UCEN Manchester's position in complying with Office for Students (OfS) expectations in relation to freedom of speech was received by the Board, which highlighted the following:</p> <p>On 1st Aug 2024 the complaints scheme for freedom of speech would come into force. This applies to all staff and students studying at a registered HE provider and not just those studying or teaching on qualifications at level 4 and above. The Association of Colleges (AoC) has raised this with the OfS who have stated that they are in talks with the DfE at present but cannot say when these will be concluded. After which, the Director of Academic Standards hopes to be in a position to confirm whether the student union will be included or not.</p> <p>The Board were advised that the current policy has implications across the LTE Group and so this needs to be a group response. At present the existing Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech that applies to UCEN Manchester and The Manchester College appears to be up to date and in line with current requirements, but as the policy might need to apply to other parts of the LTE Group, operating on campus sites, , the Company Secretary and Legal</p>

	<p>Counsel would need to take advice and provide an update to the Board at its next meeting, outlining next steps.</p> <p>The Board was advised on UCEN Manchester's position as follows:</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. • A follow up has taken place with HR colleagues relating to freedom of speech requirements for academic staff • Governors on appointment panels would be required to receive training on freedom of speech. • The Company Secretary will advise colleagues regarding clarification on where the OfS jurisdiction starts and ends – i.e. delivering overseas, on-line and what the implications would also be for Novus students. <p>The Board resolved to approve the Freedom of Speech and Guest Speaker Policy in its current form</p>
24/24	<p>Performance Report</p> <p>The Board were provided with an overview of UCEN Manchester's Performance Report as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work had been carried out around the mental health and financial challenges that UCEN Manchester students are facing. • The national decline in adult student applications and the change in balance and mix of cohorts generally was highlighted. • The national decline in applications from students in low socio-economic communities was noted • The Board were advised that UCEN Manchester budget was aligned to checkpoint with income shortfalls mitigated in part. <p>The Principal advised that she had created a summary of headlines for the risk register which will be replicated for UCEN Manchester going forward</p>
25/24	<p>Mid-point Review of UCEN Manchester Strategy</p> <p>Dan Goh and Greg Moody of DataHE joined the meeting to present data analysis for UCEN Manchester.</p> <p>Following discussion of the Learner Enrolment Report 2023-24 at the UCEN Manchester Divisional Board on 23 November 2023, it was noted that enrolment numbers remained a challenge for UCEN Manchester, particularly in the Faculty of High Technical and Professional Industries.</p> <p>To receive assurance that the UCEN Manchester brand and curriculum portfolio remained effective and appropriate, the Board had requested that a mid-point review of the UCEN Manchester Strategy be conducted to help inform curriculum planning and recruitment activities in the forthcoming UCAS cycles.</p> <p>The mid-point review of the strategy is focused on five key themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand proposition/customer choice research • Competitor analysis • Data evidenced market analysis • Higher education policy/landscape review • UCEN Manchester infrastructure review, specifically in the context of the application for Degree Awarding Powers.

	<p>The paper and supporting slides provided an interim update on the mid-year review, the activity commissioned, and progress to date. The Board discussed and highlighted the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within the next 5 years, the brand identity for UCEN Manchester was important • The provision of courses and content pertinent to the workplace and the skills needs of Manchester/Greater Manchester needs to be Considered further • Competitor analysis with other institutions curriculums was helpful • The development of a social media presence needs to be explored for each segment. <p>The executive summary of the report highlighted the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are very strong headwinds in UK higher education; UK 18 entry is forecast to grow and older ages entry are decreasing. • UCEN Manchester had 455 undergraduate acceptances in 2023: 18-year-olds made up 40% of total acceptances, and growing, the Northwest 2/3 of acceptances, other regions were increasing, Art & Media made up 70% of acceptances and Arden makes up 45% of total acceptances. • Older age groups were driving the slight reduction in UCEN Manchester enrolments. An increase in the 18-year-old market share is not offsetting losses. • Forecasts indicate UCEN Manchester will stabilise at around 450 Full time undergraduate entrants per year from the UK. • Forecasts indicate a younger UCEN Manchester – both pools and market share negative for older ages. • UCEN Manchester is the largest of the ‘small’ Northwest education providers and there is scope for UCEN Manchester to grow to a 700+ intake. • The data showed a decrease in acceptance rates <p>Recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DataHE recommended investigating offers, replies and confirmations, focusing on the key groups and their locality. • Consider how to build on the success of The Arden School of Theatre model and reputation • Build offers that complement each other such as Arts Creative Digital Media <p>The Board members raised concern regarding the risks associated with narrowing down the offering too much.</p>
26/24	<p>Student Voice, inc. Annual Student Union Report Sal Brouwer, Student Union President joined the meeting at 13:10.</p> <p>The Board received the paper for the annual Student Union activity for the academic year 2023-24 and the following highlights were presented at the meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An overview of the structure and current activities of the Student Union. • The Student Union constitution currently covers both The Manchester College and UCEN Manchester. However, due to the resource allocation and complexities of both, operates largely within UCEN Manchester. • The aims and ethos of the Student Union namely: structured, inclusive, sustainable, and impactful. • Their work was supported by the Director of Student Experience and wider team and sits within the Student Experience and Engagement Department • The progress the Student Union have made throughout the academic year. <p>The Student Union President also highlighted a table that showed some of the activities and events that they are currently working on. He further explained that the focus is on</p>

	<p>sustainable events with the cost of living in mind for students; for example swap shops (collected clothes and books from staff and students etc).</p> <p>The Student Union President said that they had experienced some challenges, such as engagement and visibility and had struggled to reach all students with communications and surveys, which had had a negative impact on attendance levels at events.</p> <p>The Board were advised that the Student Union were staying connected and working collaboratively with societies so that they were able to remain active in planning events and campaigns.</p> <p>There have been challenges in covering UCEN Manchester and The Manchester College and the Student Union have been working with the Enrichment Team to set up joint societies between them both.</p> <p>In respect of capacity and resources, the Board were advised that the Student Union had a small budget to cover 1,200 UCEN Manchester members and more students at The Manchester College. The Student Union was working on employing members on a voluntary basis and then would take on one paid member so that they could continue to run campaigns.</p> <p>The challenges faced by the Student Union relating to the different offers and demographics of students was highlighted, such as trying to resolve the different asks and needs of the students of both UCEN Manchester and The Manchester College. The Principal offered to work with The Student Union on a possible solution. Having a separate TMC and UCENM student union was raised and discussed.</p> <p>The Student Union Football Team: The Student Union President advised the Board that he had received several enquiries about creating a women's football team; the Board members agreed that this would be a positive move in the interest of inclusivity for women's sport.</p>
	<p>Next meeting 6th December 2024</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Chair</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Date</p>

Meeting closed at 1.30pm