

## UCEN Manchester Board

Minutes of the meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2025 at Openshaw Campus.

**Present:** Rachel Curry (Principal), Philip Johnson, Alison Blackburn (Interim Chair), John Thornhill, Cheryl Dunn, Ellen Letton

**Apologies:** Dame Ann Limb DBE DL

**In Attendance:** Rhona Bradley (LTE Governor for Safeguarding), 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), Orla Wood (Divisional Finance Director), Lorna Lloyd-Williams (Company Secretary and General Counsel), Donna Reid (Governance Officer), Adam Hewitt (Group Quality Director HE) and Sarah-Jane Gilmore (Deputy Company Secretary)

*Prior to the start of the meeting the Chair welcomed attendees and undertook a round of introductions. The Chair explained she had agreed to take up the role of Interim Chair of the UCEN Manchester Board.*

*A presentation was also made on behalf of the Board to Janet Faulkner, Director of Academic Standards, ahead of her impending retirement. Janet was thanked for her significant contribution to UCEN Manchester, with particular recognition to the Degree Awarding Powers process and assessment.*

<b>19/25</b>	<p><b>Apologies</b></p> <p>Apologies were received from Dame Ann Limb DBE DL</p>
<b>20/25</b>	<p><b>Declarations of interest</b></p> <p>None received.</p>
<b>21/25</b>	<p><b>Minutes of the meeting of the UCEN Manchester Board held on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2024</b></p> <p>The minutes of the meeting of the UCEN Manchester Board held on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2024 were received and approved as an accurate record to be signed by the Chair in hard copy.</p>
<b>22/25</b>	<p><b>Matters Arising</b></p> <p>The Company Secretary noted one matter had been completed (ie the use of AI was to be reported on within the current meeting) and that the second matter (an update on research and scholarship) was scheduled for the June meeting.</p> <p>A member noted there had been a lengthy discussion regarding whether the Cube was an appropriate HE environment and whether this challenge/consideration was being built into the strategy. The Principal advised that once the strategic review was completed, the enablers to the delivery of the strategy would be considered i.e. what was required to deliver the strategy, including student accommodation.</p> <p>A member queried the application of the approach to AI and academic integrity, the CEO advised in this context it was linked entirely to the learner, the main AI work would come to the May strategy day.</p>

	<p>The Deputy Principal &amp; Dean advised staff were using AI. Embedding a group approach would come from the AI Steering group being led by the Managing Director of TP/MOL. Numerous tools were already in use and would be evaluated in terms of risk/cost of support/availability/updating and through discussion with teaching staff. Training for colleagues would be required along with an Acceptable Use Policy. The Chair felt that the paper provided assurance that this was under review, but suggested Board would want to hear more at the next meeting. A member endorsed the principles cited but cautioned that students may well be further advanced in this field than the LTE Group so there must be clarity about how they are asked to acknowledge use and application.</p> <p><b>Action: Director of Academic Standards to refer the Board points back to the Academic Board and an update to be provided at the next UCEN Manchester Board.</b></p>
23/25	<p><b>Principal's Overview</b></p> <p>The Principal noted that her overview of the meeting set out the areas to be covered by reports.</p>
24/25	<p><b>Degree Awarding Powers Update</b></p> <p>The report was received from the NDAPs assessment team on 11 December. The report stated that "the team concluded that the group is ready to operate with New DAPs" and that the overarching New DAPs criterion was met.</p> <p>The Board was advised it was a positive report which drew out good practice. The plan did contain a milestone for a review of terms of reference of boards and committees and a review of the structure, but the assessment team did not feel that this were sufficiently explicit. The NDAP plan had therefore been amended to ensure that it now specifically covered these points.</p> <p>The plan (provided in the Board pack) was split into years and quarters of years with identified actions to ensure the criteria were met in full by the end of the probationary period. The plan would be monitored by the Academic Board and UCEN Manchester Divisional Board to ensure that actions were completed. It was noted that the plan may change over time as new areas for development or priorities were identified.</p> <p>As confirmation of the awarding of DAPs was yet to be received, the validation schedule had been changed to September 2026 to align with the UCAS cycle and enable the 1-year notice required for removing provision from the existing validating partners.</p> <p>A member asked if there was a need to review the Terms of Reference of Academic Board and the relationship with UCEN board; the Director of Academic Standards advised the assessment team had reviewed and were comfortable with the Terms of Reference for the Academic Board but did suggest that the relationship with UCEN Manchester Divisional Board could be more clearly defined. It was agreed that Terms of Reference for the UCEN Manchester Divisional Board and a related scheme of delegation to Academic Board and from the LTE Group Board should be reviewed in tandem, within the context of the terms of reference for Academic Board having already been considered and found appropriate by the DAP assessment team.</p> <p><b>Action: The Chair and Company Secretary to discuss the UCEN Manchester Divisional Board Terms of Reference</b></p> <p><b>Action: The Director of Academic Standards to update the action plan on the interim work that is in train</b></p>
25/25	<p><b>UCEN Manchester Strategy</b></p> <p>The Deputy Principal and Dean presented the paper regarding the UCEN Manchester Strategy. He explained that the strategy had been reviewed, and as previously reported research had been undertaken in 2024 using external company DataHE and the LTE Group Insight Team. The conclusions from this work had been presented at December Board and emerging themes highlighted.</p>

The information provided to this meeting set out the work undertaken since the last Board to present the concept of and vision for UCEN Manchester to gain Board feedback. The detail had been shared with the UCEN Leadership Team and included their vision for the areas for which they were responsible. It had also been presented to all UCEN Manchester colleagues at the recent at the Festival of Learning HE Symposium and to the Group Executive Team.

The Deputy Principal and Dean took the Board through the slides which covered the themes as set out below and 'concept to vision' for each area:

- Theme One – National Reach
- Theme Two – Local Place Based

The Deputy Principal and Dean noted the questions for discussion as per the slide:

- Can one vision be shaped that represents two different characteristics?
- Can both sit under the UCEN Manchester umbrella, each with its own vision and different objectives, and potentially different branding?
- Could the higher technical strand sit within The Manchester College and UCEN Manchester embody the 'small university' concept?

The Deputy Principal and Dean advised following UCEN Manchester Board feedback on concept and vision, these and draft strategic objectives were to be developed for discussion at the LTE Group Strategy session on 20-21 May 2025.

The Chair noted the value of the Student Governor's view on the paper and requested more detail on timing; the Deputy Principal and Dean advised timing would be linked to the steer received from the UCEN Manchester Board in their feedback but the outline plan was to take away and include feedback from the Board in order to link into the wider group strategy session in May, and then to report back to UCEN Manchester Board in June for their approval before consideration by the LTE Group Board in July 2025.

The CEO agreed with this, advising that broadly the ambition was to take input from UCEN Manchester Principalship/Board and LTE Executive to bring to the May Strategy meeting with outline recommendations – he noted the caveat that the HE Reform paper, due in the summer, would need to be reviewed and included. It was therefore likely that there would then be a short pause whilst any implications arising from the Government's HE review on the UCEN Manchester strategy were assessed.

The Student Governor advised from her perspective UCEN Manchester had a sense of community, similar to her experience at A Level, and this was one of the reasons she selected it. She added that the courses feel very different and distinct.

A member advised they liked the tagline 'believe in different' as UCEN Manchester is different from a standard university as a small/specialist and pedagogically focused organisation. A member agreed that there was potential for the two strands to sit within the umbrella and that there was potential to further evolve the higher technical strand. It was noted that the Lifelong Loan Entitlement had been put back to Jan-2027 and the Higher Technical space was still to be clarified by Government. In relation to national reach of the arts-based data the CEO felt this demonstrated that it could co-exist alongside the more local higher technical route

A member considered that the delineation was clear and that creative arts was a standalone route, as this was the route with a clear degree focus and DAPs was based on largely the creative disciplines so this could be seen as a key strand to the future of UCEN Manchester. The member could see the vision on the first strand but that he lacked the detailed knowledge of Higher Technical pathways but, noted the focus should always be on what will draw in the students (be that geography/classroom v lecture theatre etc.). The Principal advised the proposals were underpinned by the research undertaken which included student feedback. As part of the next iteration more work was to be undertaken with the students to better understand what may be needed to enable

	<p>creative and higher technical to work side by side. A member asked the Student Governor if she would prefer to be part of TMC or UCEN Manchester and she advised that for Higher Technical she'd want to be in UCEN Manchester to feel a progression had been made. The Principal added that many Higher Technical students are part time.</p> <p>A member felt that if the faculties could be supported in UCEN Manchester that would be more beneficial rather than unpicking what now sat within UCEN Manchester as both routes required a specific HE level of support. The Principal suggested that the two could co-exist, potentially with different requirements but under the same umbrella. A member asked Rhona Bradley as an observer for her view; she advised of her visit to UCEN Manchester in 2024 where she spoke to students and staff and observed the overlaps. There was frustration in securing theatre time due to activity of the college. Students thought the facilities were excellent but wanted a more bespoke separation. An anecdotal example was provided where a student withdrew from a UCEN Manchester photography course and went to MMU as they felt they were not getting the university experience. However, others wanted a smaller more supportive environment as evidenced by the research.</p> <p>The Deputy Principal and Dean advised 'believe in different' had been embraced by staff; the Director of Student Experience and Engagement felt it was important to think about the future market and incoming students who were presenting with more support needs and not wanting to be one of many without a personal approach</p> <p>Vice Principal Adult and Vice Dean felt there was clear purpose and vision for the two areas (technical/creative) and support was available; he noted the students in each cohort have differing expectations. The CEO noted immediate change wasn't required but ongoing thought should be considered to ensuring the 'HE' experience was provided to both in different ways given the group's plans for strategic delivery in the next few years.</p> <p>The Chair noted the need to understand how students perceive branding and separation. The Deputy Principal and Dean felt that understanding students' perception of ethos, approach and support was also key and added that there was no intention to have 2 Academic Boards for example.</p> <p>A member noted that usually strategy work was proposed to the Board by the Executive and asked if this area would be at that stage in May; the CEO confirmed this and advised that the Board would be asked to agree a direction of travel.</p> <p>In conclusion, the Board felt that the two distinct elements could sit together under the UCEN Manchester 'umbrella' and that given that they were both higher education and needed specific support and academic infrastructure, moving higher technical into the College would not be the right strategic direction.</p>
26/25	<p><b>Quality &amp; Standards Update including QEP Progress Report</b></p> <p>The Group Quality Director HE advised an initial Teacher Education Deep Dive of UCEN Manchester's Initial Teacher Education (ITE) provision was carried out in November 2024. Due to a change in how ITE is inspected in England, UCEN Manchester would be the lead for its own programmes for the first time, and the purpose of the Deep Dive was to identify recommendations for the curriculum area to ensure that leaders, managers and colleagues are prepared. The Deep Dive was supported by colleagues from The Manchester College's Quality Team, including the Vice Principal for Quality.</p> <p>The Board were advised that all inspections of ITE in England had since been postponed by Ofsted until at least January 2026, and further changes to Ofsted inspection frameworks were planned before this date. The lines of enquiry for the Deep Dive included meetings with leaders and managers, lecturers, employers, mentors, and trainees, observations of teaching and learning, and desk-based scrutiny of trainees' work and curriculum administration.</p> <p>The Group Quality Team Director advised the Board there were a number of positive outcomes and a summary of the recommendations was presented as part of the report.</p>

	<p>The Vice Principal Adult and Vice Dean advised the report had been very helpful and occurred at the same time as plans were being developed for the Teaching Academy. He added that there were no risks in the recommendations and work was ongoing to deliver the required actions.</p> <p>The CEO explained he had recently completed several prison visits and had met colleagues from Novus who were about to embark on a UCEN Manchester programme; they were very positive about the flexibility of hybrid attendance and local delivery where possible.</p> <p>The Director of Academic Standards assured the Board the team were aware of the changes to quality by the OfS and were keeping a watchful eye.</p> <p>The Chair asked if the actions from the Deep Dive were recommendations or requirements; the Group Quality Director advised they had been treated as recommendations by the management group team and that in 12 months time they were to be reviewed and progress would be rag rated for reporting back to Board. A member felt there were a high number of recommendations and asked how comfortable the Group Quality Director felt at the end of the deep dive; the Group Quality Director assured Board he was comfortable with the number or recommendations and confident that there were the right people in place to deliver.</p> <p>The Progress Update of the Tutorial and Support IQR was undertaken by the Group Quality Director HE and the Advanced Practitioner Quality Improvement (HE) in January/February 2025, and the report provided to the Board was written and edited by the same team. Potential inconsistencies in tutorial and support across UCEN Manchester had been highlighted as a possible issue by the Vice Dean of UCEN Manchester in January 2024, and senior leaders in UCEN Manchester wanted to know if there were any underlying issues or themes emerging. Following the initial HE IQR a number of recommendations were made to senior leaders in UCEN Manchester, and a Progress Update was completed 12 months later to provide feedback on enhancements made against the original recommendations. Strong progress was evident.</p>
27/25	<p><b>Update From Academic Board</b></p> <p>The Deputy Principal &amp; Dean advised three policies (Attendance and Engagement, Admissions and RPL) had been approved by Academic Board; policy approval would included in the review of the UCEN Manchester Terms of Reference to cover the delegation between the UCEN Manchester Divisional Board and the Academic Board.</p> <p>In relation to the development of the Teaching Academy the Deputy Principal and Dean explained that PGCEs had been offered for some time but the LTE Group had faced challenges in recruiting and retaining teaching staff, therefore the Academy grew out of the existing offer to develop a 'grow your own' approach.</p>
28/25	<p><b>Future U Update</b></p> <p>The Director of Student Experience &amp; Engagement explained that the Future U Student Support Team encompassed the following areas of student support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial support to students via UCEN Manchester Bursary</li> <li>• Disability</li> <li>• Careers and Employability</li> <li>• Mental Health and Wellbeing (See presentation)</li> <li>• Accommodation via Service Level Agreement with Manchester Student Homes (MSH) - following the mid-point strategy review, a proposal regarding accommodation had been prepared and would be considered by Principalship in the first instance as an enabler to the UCEN Manchester strategy</li> </ul> <p>The Director of Student Experience &amp; Engagement ran through the comprehensive report provided to Board and noted the positive outcomes.</p> <p>A member asked if bursaries were a one-off payment and the Director of Student Experience &amp;</p>

	<p>Engagement advised applications can be made each year.</p> <p>A member noted in relation to any recommendation to increase the bursary allocation, that this was an area for UCEN Manchester Divisional Board consideration under the Access and Participation Agreement. The Academic Board could review the impact of spending but would not make financial decisions. It was noted that depending on the level of expenditure some decisions were delegated to members of the Executive/Principalship under the Financial Regulations.</p>
29/25	<p><b>Safeguarding Update and Bespoke Training for Board Members</b></p> <p>The Director of Student Experience and Engagement &amp; Head of Student Advice, Support and Wellbeing presented a bespoke training session to members which included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roles and Responsibilities for Safeguarding at UCEN Manchester</li> <li>• Legislative Frameworks and The Prevent Duty</li> <li>• Guiding Principles</li> <li>• Regulatory Frameworks</li> <li>• Sexual Misconduct</li> </ul> <p>The Board was advised that under the Prevent Duty adults did not receive the same external agency support as under 18s, so the approach was proportionate. With younger students it was possible to liaise with the parents, with adults permission had to be provided to hold a wellbeing contact.</p> <p>Rhona Bradley (LTE Governor for Safeguarding) advised on duty of care the boundaries were more fluid; under statutory duties there was a duty to report/disclose. The TMC/UCEN Manchester Prevent Action Plan was scrutinised by Ofsted and was determined to be a strong action plan.</p> <p><b>Action: Director of Student Experience and Engagement to share the Prevent Action Plan with UCEN Manchester Board.</b></p> <p>A member asked if 'Prevent' reports were treated in the same way as Safeguarding and this was confirmed.</p> <p>In August 2024, the OfS announced a new condition of funding with which HEIs are expected to be compliant by August 2025. The Board were advised that key strands covered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff and students understanding the stance on intimate staff/student relationships</li> <li>• Students being able to access information in relation to regulation E6 easily and in one place</li> <li>• Students should know how to report incidents of harassment and sexual misconduct and understand how investigations are conducted</li> <li>• Training should be provided to both staff and students so that they understand the policies and procedures in place</li> </ul> <p>Work was in train in all of these areas and UCEN Manchester's action plan was scrutinised as a standing item of the Quality and Standards Committee.</p> <p>Governors were assured that there was oversight of this area through the role held by Rhona Bradley. A member asked if the Board had oversight of numbers in adult safeguarding and the Principal advised there had been information provided previously and would ensure that this was the case going forward.</p> <p><b>Action: Director of Student Experience and Engagement to include an overview of safeguarding volumes and staff safeguarding matters such as DBS to UCEN Manchester Divisional Board.</b></p>
30/25	<p><b>Access and Participation Plan Update</b></p> <p>The report provided the Board with a progress update on the Access and Participation Plan (APP) 2020-21 to 2024-25 and the newly approved APP 2025-26 and beyond. The report advised in preparation for the new plan the previous plan had been concluded, and the report provided a comprehensive summary of the progress made against each of the objectives outlined in the</p>

	<p>previous plan, with insight into the individual activities that underpinned the headline objectives.</p> <p>By reviewing and analysing the data collected over the past five years, valuable insights were gained into the effectiveness of strategies and initiatives. These insights were instrumental in shaping the new Access and Participation Plan, ensuring that it was data-driven and tailored to address the evolving needs of the diverse student body. Several of the previous objectives were carried forward into the new plan.</p> <p>No questions or queries were raised by Governors.</p>
<b>31/25</b>	<p><b>Performance Report</b></p> <p>Key points from the Performance Report were noted as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The split between programmes in Computing changed year on year</li> <li>• A deep dive had been undertaken in Film Production</li> <li>• SFX/Make Up hit a peak last year, applications were down but quality of applications was higher</li> </ul> <p>On risk, a member felt that the mitigating actions would be beneficial, and the Company Secretary advised this would be included ongoing.</p> <p><b>Action: The CEO suggested that the learning from a walkthrough of enrolment at the Film School be bought back to the next meeting.</b></p> <p><b>Action: Vice Principal, Planning, Performance and Resources to include an overview of mitigating actions in future reports</b></p>
<b>32/25</b>	<p>A member expressed thanks to Alison Blackburn for agreeing to act as interim Chair of UCEN Manchester Divisional Board.</p>
<b>33/25</b>	<p>Next meeting 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2025</p> <p>-----</p> <p><b>Chair</b></p> <p>-----</p> <p><b>Date</b></p>

**Meeting closed at 1.34pm**