

UCEN Manchester Board

Minutes of the meeting held on 3rd July 2025 at Openshaw Campus.

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

Apologies: Dame Ann Limb DBE DL

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), Orla Wood (Divisional Finance Director), Lorna Lloyd-Williams (Company Secretary and General Counsel), Donna Reid (Governance Officer), Adam Hewitt (Group Quality Director HE), Sarah-Jane Gilmore (Deputy Company Secretary) and Sal Brewer (Student Union President) for item 44/25.

Prior to the start of the meeting and on behalf of the Board, the Chair thanked Lorna Lloyd-Williams (Company Secretary and General Counsel) for her hard work and wished her the very best for the future. Lorna advised it had been a privilege to work with the Board and alongside the Chair, thanked all members and wished them well for the future.

34/25	Apologies Apologies were received from Dame Ann Limb.
35/25	Declarations of interest None received.
36/25	Minutes of the meeting of the UCEN Manchester Board held on 6th December 2024 The minutes of the meeting of the UCEN Manchester Board held on 21 st March 2025 were received and approved as an accurate record to be signed by the Chair in hard copy.
37/25	Matters Arising The Company Secretary noted one matter outstanding (an update on research and scholarship) was to be reported to the Board in Autumn 2025. All other items were noted as complete through coverage in the agenda. On Prevent Training it was noted this had been rolled out to Governors. A joint TMC/UCEN Manchester Prevent Action Plan was currently in place with a summary attached to the Matters Arising. This was shared and confirmed as part of the Ofsted inspection of The Manchester College in Spring 2025. A separate UCEN Manchester Plan was to be developed in Autumn 2025 and provided to Board subsequently.
38/25	Principal's Overview The Principal advised her report provided a summary of what was contained in the full pack. On the Risk Register it was noted that a review had been undertaken by the Vice Principal Resources, Planning and Performance and Deputy Principal and Dean. Some downward trends in risk had been identified, there were no additional risks or increases in relation to risk, and the register remained under review. In relation to the product offering/fees a member asked if the proposal to increase fees could cause an issue; the Deputy Principal and Dean advised there had been a debate around the impact of fees changes, setting fees too low/reducing fees is often seen as counterproductive as it could suggest

	<p>reduced quality. There had been no obvious detrimental effect in student recruitment over previous years directly or indirectly aligned to fee increases and the recent research undertaken confirmed that fees were not a significant factor in student choice. A member felt that in students' decision making the fee was less of a factor, with the course, geography and environment being their key consideration.</p> <p>The Chair noted that controls around failure of internal governance processes was noted as 'partially effective'; the Deputy Principal and Dean explained this was due to awareness of incoming conditions e.g. sexual harassment, freedom of speech that would need to be managed to ensure compliance with as opposed to concern regarding the effectiveness of current controls.</p>
39/25	<p>Degree Awarding Powers Update</p> <p>The Deputy Principal and Dean explained that the Chair of the LTE Group Board was notified by the Office for Students (OfS) on 9 June 2025 that the decision had been made to grant New DAPs to the LTE Group. A New DAPs order would be received in due course to take effect from 1 January 2026, allowing UCEN Manchester to enrol the first students onto in-house validated degrees from September 2026. He added this was the culmination of a huge amount of work by colleagues.</p> <p>On next steps it was noted that as the award was 'New DAPs', there was a probationary period during which UCEN Manchester could only validate degrees in specific areas (CAH-25 – Design and creative and performing arts, CAH-11 – Computing and CAH-17 – Business and management). Some courses listed by OfS in the correspondence received were noted as incorrect but the advice received from them was not to be concerned by this.</p> <p>The outcome letter had also asked for information regarding the titles and levels of any exit awards that may be awarded to students who leave their course before completing the full qualification -this was to be provided prior to issuing the DAPs Order. The OfS were notified of the exit awards intended to be offered on 16 June 2025: Level 4 – Certificate in Higher Education, Level 5 – Diploma in Higher Education & Level 6 – BA degree (without Honours).</p> <p>The proposed validation cycle for the first 3 years of the DAPs plan was provided within the pack. Programmes for the 4th year of the cycle could be introduced if they fell within the CAHs outlined above. At the Curriculum Management Panel on 16 May 2025 it was agreed to hold 3 validation events in autumn 2025 to validate the first 7 BA (Hons) degrees to be introduced from September 2026:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • September – Film Production • October – Acting; Musical Theatre; Theatre & Performance • November – 3D Game Art & VFX; Animation; Music & Sound Production. <p>The Board was advised that the immediate priority was to put in place the necessary structures and procedures to validate the above degrees. Work on this had already started and a UCEN Manchester Programme Approval, Review and Modification Handbook had been produced. The DAPs plan would be reported back to board in November 2025 and updated at each meeting thereafter.</p> <p>A member asked if opportunities through the LLE had been considered; the Deputy Principal and Dean was aware of opportunities regarding LLE and consideration had been given to how this might be implemented e.g. validating programmes that allowed for units to be funded through LLE especially in areas where a more local market was attracted.</p> <p>A member noted that creative industries was a clear part of the Industrial Strategy and queried if there was a plan for LTE Group to start thinking about the degree programmes to be validated that could support the Industrial Strategy & LLE. The Deputy Principal and Dean advised this was already in progress to enable all courses to become a degree (after HND/HNC) by way of a top up.</p> <p>A member also asked how credit transfer would be managed to the benefit of all institutions in GM e.g. animation is there a module for upskill/reskill; the Vice Principal Adult and Vice Dean explained there was an area of work ongoing in Manchester regarding a digital skills framework for GM. This laid out occupational skills required. It focused on 3 main degree pathways and how they aligned to the digital skills framework and how the credits could be synergised.</p>

	<p>In relation to the GM credit transfer, the Principal advised that GM college principals had met with Vice Chancellors of GM universities and the universities were keen to develop a project across GM working with colleges on an agreed credit transfer system, linked to LLE and working collaboratively.</p> <p>The CEO explained there would be an opportunity to deliver communications once the DAPs order was received. On the previous validating partners, the Deputy Principal and Dean advised the Board that the relationship with the two universities was positive and complimentary responses had been received to the award. There was a requirement to provide one academic year's notice of intention to withdraw, and this formal process would be followed. The Deputy Principal and Dean advised partnerships with other providers would be maintained, e.g. Sheffield Hallam for Level 7.</p> <p>The CEO queried if there was any concern that MMU would withdraw, creating a risk to students completing their courses; the Deputy Principal and Dean advised the initial response from MMU had not indicated any change in position.</p> <p>A member asked if there had been any formal communication with OfS to seek clarification on the inaccurate programme list that they had included in the DAPs letter, especially in relation to any omitted. The Deputy Principal and Dean advised an email noting 'our understanding following discussion' would be sent to seek clarification and provide assurance to the Board.</p> <p>ACTION: Deputy Principal and Dean to seek clarification in writing from the OfS on the courses covered by New DAPs to place on record the position</p> <p>It was noted that further discussion was required on certificate wording e.g. LTE Group/UCEN Manchester/The Arden School of Theatre. The preference for the certificate to say UCEN Manchester was expressed</p> <p>ACTION: Deputy Principal and Dean to present progress against the DAPs plan at each Divisional Board meeting for oversight</p> <p>A member noted that the letter received stated the award was to the LTE Group, not UCEN Manchester; the Principal explained that the DAPS assessment report made it clear the award was actually for the LTE Group trading as UCEN Manchester. The DAP infrastructure sat within UCEN Manchester, so this would be the academic governance applied for any other business unit within the LTE Group that wished to develop new degree provision in the future. Total People/MOL, as a separate limited company, could potentially deliver as a validated partner of UCEN Manchester following the probationary period, but as currently constituted could not offer degrees directly under the LTE Group DAP approval.</p> <p>The Deputy Principal and Dean explained all activity required during the probationary period was within the DAPs plan that would come to each Board meeting.</p>
40/25	<p>UCEN Manchester Strategy</p> <p>The Deputy Principal & Dean noted that when Divisional Board met on 21 March 2025 they were comfortable with one vision with two key characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National reach provision – degree-level arts, media & theatre for 18–22-year-olds • Delivering higher level technical skills to meet the needs of Greater Manchester <p>This concept was taken forward and discussed at the LTE Group Board strategy days 20/21 May 2025, along with consideration of a longer-term test for separate HEI status & options for Apprenticeships.</p> <p>The presentation outlined the feedback from the strategy days and sought Divisional Board approval of the next iteration of objectives for LTE Group Board approval in July 2025 as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A member felt that the discussion relating to HEI should not be progressed now but should be retained on the agenda. • A member suggested there was significant work to do in relation to Brand Identity and queried if students join UCEN or a specific school e.g. the Arden School. The Principal updated that an external

	<p>company was working with the LTE Group Marketing Team regarding brand/tone of voice and the UCEN Manchester identity would be considered alongside this work.</p> <p>The Board was advised that the vision statement was currently out to staff consultation and feedback was to be provided at Group Board. To date, 86% of staff said the name 'UCEN' should have a definition and rated 'place' very highly.</p> <p>The Chair noted that the Draft UCEN Strategic Objectives were presented for approval and recommendation to LTE Group Board. They had been discussed at the strategy day and socialised with staff for comments.</p> <p>The CEO suggested the inclusion of 'creative' in the headline of 'The destination for degree-level arts, media and theatre training in the North' given direction of travel and the LLE.</p> <p>ACTION: Deputy Principal and Dean to add 'creative' in the headline of 'The destination for degree-level arts, media and theatre training in the North' (The destination for 'creative' degree-level arts, media and theatre training in the North)</p> <p>The proposed expanded form of UCEN (Unique Collaborative Education Network) was discussed. A member felt it detracted from 'delivering excellence in Creative and Technical Higher Education'. The Student Governor was asked for input from her perspective and agreed there should be an expanded version of what was read as an acronym. She felt the suggestion was quite wordy but made sense and fitted UCEN quite well. The Principal noted that UCEN Manchester was considered to be quite unique in the opportunities it provided for different curricula to collaborate and the Dean advised he was not aware of another provider who operated as UCEN does. The CEO felt it would be better conveyed with a visual and the Marketing Team were working on this. The Group Quality Director HE asked where access fitted in; the Principal advised not every aspect such as 'access' had an objective but it was implicit.</p> <p>The UCEN Manchester Divisional Board agreed to recommend the vision and objectives to the LTE Group Board for approval.</p> <p>ACTION: Deputy Principal and Dean to consider visuals to best present the acronym and an expanded form of the name alongside strategy in Autumn 2025</p>
41/25	<p>Update from Academic Board</p> <p>The Vice Principal Adult and Vice Dean noted the report provided a summary of the Academic Board meeting, which referenced DAPs/strong student performance/updates on key policies/staff scholarship activity/AI discussion and UCEN Manchester commitment to supporting the LTE Group Strategy.</p> <p>A member asked if policies presented and approved by the Academic Board were specific to HE or group wide; the Vice Principal Adult and Vice Dean advised that this was policy specific, some covered just UCEN Manchester and others were The Manchester College policies, and some LTE Group wide. Work was ongoing to categorise all policies and whether they were UCEN/Group wide, how they were reviewed and who approved them. The Company Secretary advised this would feed into ongoing work to revise the UCEN Manchester Board Terms of Reference (which was to be reported to Group Board July 2025).</p> <p>ACTION: Vice Dean to report the schedule of policies to UCEN Manchester Divisional Board. Company Secretary to ensure specific policies for approval by UCEN Manchester Divisional Board are explicit in Terms of Reference.</p>
42/25	<p>Quality & Standards Update including QEP Progress Report</p> <p>The Group Quality Director HE explained the process of internal quality review. The School of Business & Law had been highlighted as a potential area of concern due to low pass rates for male, black and Asian students highlighted in their Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), and senior leaders in UCEN</p>

	<p>Manchester wanted to know if there were any underlying issues or themes. Following the HE IQR, the overall judgement was 'Meets requirements'. A number of recommendations were made to senior leaders in UCEN Manchester, and these were presented at the recent Quality and Standards Committee.</p> <p>A member noted that library access had been raised previously and queried if there had been a delay addressing it or if it was an unsurmountable problem; the Group Quality Director HE explained this related to access to facilities at Openshaw and had already picked up by the resource group.</p> <p>The Vice Principal Adult and Vice Dean advised the library is the one support function that does not sit within Future U but that the library representative sat on the resource group. . Staff were encouraging student use of City Campus where access is better and were also encouraging access to online tools; he was confident progress was being made. The Vice Principal Resources, Planning and Performance advised she was working with the Vice Principal Adult and Vice Dean to resolve the issue. As noted the CCM library was open until 10pm and changes had been made at Openshaw. A separate Library space was to be created in the Cube. A member suggested the need to understand how impactful library work was by understanding how often books were reviewed and ensuring materials were appropriate for the course. It was confirmed that this took place each year with the curriculum teams. A member asked whether there was a library strategy; the Vice Principal Resources, Planning and Performance explained there was no formal strategy but an operational plan</p> <p>The Principal suggested that the library team be invited to present to Board on their work. The Director of Student Experience and Engagement felt that a presentation would hopefully provide assurance on all services offered.</p> <p>ACTION: Governance/Vice Principal Resources, Planning and Performance to brief and invite the Library Team to provide a presentation on the range of services offered</p> <p>A member asked if progression data was available; the Deputy Principal and Dean advised destination data is collected and HE data can be extracted from that.</p> <p>ACTION: Deputy Principal and Dean to report destination data to the next Board Meeting</p>
43/25	<p>Student Experience and Support Update</p> <p>The Director of Student Experience and Engagement explained that the report provided the Board with a progress overview of Student Experience, Participation and Support for the academic year 2024-2025 with the understanding that impact data will not be available until the Summer Assessment Boards have taken place. The Board was advised that the national student survey results were due on 9 July 2025. UCEN had a participation target of 86% and had achieved 80%. It was noted that UCEN Manchester participation was high relative to the national rate of 73.2% and it was proposed that the target be reviewed for future years. The CEO felt the target should reflect what was right for UCEN Manchester; a member noted that number of students eligible for survey was reducing and suggested a figure that was appropriately challenging but not unachievable. The Deputy Principal and Dean noted that targets are usually agreed at the Autumn Board and suggested this was considered in line with all other targets which was agreed.</p> <p>The report also covered Student Experience and Participation, including the Student Union and Future U Student Support, including Careers and Employability, Disability support, Mental Health and Well Being, student financial support and accommodation. The report included actions which were to be taken forward by the student experience and engagement team.</p> <p>Historically, the Student Union had operated across currently, UCEN and TMC although there was little engagement from TMC Students. The strategic review of the Student Union had been undertaken and aimed to reposition the Student Union to represent solely UCEN Manchester students, with a distinct identity, governance structure, and strategic direction aligned to UCEN Manchester. The constitution was to be reviewed. A member asked if there was a student representative per course or per level and was advised per course. It was noted that the Student Union would remain part of UCEN Manchester, there was no proposal for it to become a separate independent entity. It was noted that TMC had its</p>

	<p>own student voice infrastructure, with student ambassadors and course representatives ensuring that the student voice continued to be heard and remained a core priority for the College, reported through TMC Divisional Board at each meeting.</p> <p>The Board endorsed the Student Union focusing solely on UCEN Manchester</p> <p>Data had been provided on caseloads, the data was used to improve strategy and student services. Next year it was planned to review part time provision and accessing support 24/7 from anywhere.</p> <p>A member asked how the impact of the careers function was assessed; the Director of Student Experience and Engagement advised the careers team was made up of 1.4 staff.</p> <p>ACTION: Director of Student Experience and Engagement to provide data relating to the Careers Function including proportion of time spent on 1:1s</p>
44/25	<p>Annual Student Union Report</p> <p>The current Student Union President joined the meeting at this point to present the annual report.</p> <p>It was noted that the report was presented at a key point for the Students' Union, as the current officer team marks the first in role to serve a full two-year term. The continuity of this was noted to have enabled a more strategic and sustained approach to student representation and enhancement.</p> <p>A key area of work over the two years had been to strengthen student engagement and rebuild meaningful relationships with the National Union of Students (NUS).</p> <p>Additionally, the Union had embedded itself within the newly established Engagement and Participation Team, led by the Student Engagement and Participation Manager. This team had created a dedicated structure to drive forward inclusive, student-led initiatives and increase student voice across the UCEN Manchester student community.</p> <p>The Student Union President provided the board with an overview of work undertaken to help support students and increase Visibility and Engagement</p> <p>The Board were advised that the NUS campaigned for students on a national level and the work of the Student Union had ensured a connection which had in turn provided advice and guidance on how to keep the SU sustainable and impactful.</p> <p>Increased visibility had enabled the roles within the SU to be recruited to and goals and objectives had been set for 2025-26 all aiming to increase Student Voice</p> <p>The CEO suggested that the SU could be involved in the group strategy objective relating to carbon reduction.</p> <p>ACTION: Involve the Student Union in the group strategy objective relating to carbon reduction. Vice Principal Resources, Planning and Performance to action as appropriate.</p> <p>The Principal asked if any other support would be beneficial, the SU President advised curriculum support could be improved; the Director of Student Experience & Engagement felt this would be archived through the SU and Student Voice Team working together.</p>
45/25	<p>OFS Annual Compliance Report</p> <p>The Vice Principal Adult and Vice Dean advised there was very little change from previous years' compliance with ongoing registration conditions of the OFS.</p> <p>The Director of Student Experience & Engagement advised Board that UCEN Manchester was required, under the OfS conditions of registration, to provide assurance to its governing body regarding</p>

	<p>compliance with the conditions as set out in the report. When and how Board received assurance for each condition had been integrated into the committee structure's business cycles feeding into the Board. To date, there had been no notifications of failure to comply with any ongoing or specific conditions.</p> <p>The report also set out an update on UCEN Manchester's compliance with the new Condition E6: Harassment and sexual misconduct.</p> <p>The Quality Team had been engaged to provide external test and challenge.</p> <p>Freedom of Speech was being addressed. The existing code of practice would be reviewed and tested against the new guidance from the OfS . The CEO suggested checking in with Luminate as an organization with a separate HEI within its structure.</p> <p>ACTION: The Dean to review with the Company Secretary to ensure the Code of Conduct previously approved by Board remained appropriate under the new guidance.</p>
46/25	<p>Performance Report</p> <p>The Deputy Principal and Dean reported a generally positive trend in applications, with acceptances increased from last year. The CEO noted he was pleased to see the year-on-year progress and the update provided on The Manchester Film School.</p> <p>The Divisional Finance Director advised the budget processes for 2025-26 had been finalised, it had been an exceptional year of late announcements from the DFE.</p> <p>The Chair noted the report was for approval but it was confirmed this should be assurance.</p>
47/25	<p>HE Fees 2026-27 (including HE Fees Policy 2026-27)</p> <p>Minor changes to the fees policy were noted as not significant and had been highlighted for ease of reference in the attached draft. A proposal was presented on fee rates for 2026/27. The proposal for 2026/27 was that 3-year BA (Hons) degrees, 1-year BA (Hons) Top up degrees and 2-year FdA degrees in the Faculty of Creative Arts and Media Industries were all increased to £9,535 to bring all courses offered in the Faculty of Creative Arts and Media, including those to be validated by UCEN Manchester own degree awarding powers, into the same tier. It was also proposed that all courses in Tier C be increased to £8,500 (3%) to recognise the inflationary pressures on delivery of this provision. It was noted that these rates would not be adjusted again if the government applied an indexation increase to fee rates – unless the increase was more than the 3%). It was noted that these fees were proposed in accordance with what was known and no fee cap updates had been received from the government or OfS at this point. It was also noted that the HE Reform paper was due to be published which might outline the approach to tuition fees going forward.</p> <p>It was resolved to approve the fee policy and fee rates for 2026/27, for onward recommendation to Group Board.</p> <p>The UCEN Manchester Divisional Board also resolved to approve for onward recommendation to the LTE group Board that it approve, in advance, the application to the 2026/27 HE tuition fees any further inflationary increase to the undergraduate tuition fee cap in England should one be made subsequently, whilst noting that the Tier C courses would not be adjusted again, unless the increase was greater than 3%.</p>
48/25	<p>Governance</p> <p>The Company Secretary suggested once the revised Terms of Reference (TOR) was approved that it should be reviewed by UCEN Manchester Board annually.</p> <p>It was resolved to approve, for recommendation to Group Board the revised UCEN Manchester TOR</p>

	<p>ACTION: Company Secretary to add UCEN Manchester TOR Review to Board Cycle of Business</p> <p>On the Cycle of Business, the Company Secretary advised this should be used as guidance as to what should be expected at each meeting.</p> <p>It was resolved to approve, for recommendation to Group Board the UCEN Manchester Cycle of Business</p> <p>The Board Effectiveness Review assessed performance against the TOR; this had been reviewed with the Chair and was to be reviewed with the Dean following the Board Meeting. It would then be issued to the UCEN Board via email for comment/approval; then used as one of the tools for the Board Self-Assessment which would be reported to Governance Committee and subsequently Group Board in the Autumn term.</p>
49/25	<p>Date of next meeting 13th November 2025</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Chair</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Date</p>

Meeting closed at 1.36pm