

UCEN Manchester Board Meeting

Minutes of the meeting held on 25th June 2026 at Openshaw Campus.

Present	Alison Blackburn (Chair/Governor), Rachel Curry (Principal/Governor), John Thornhill (CEO/Governor), Cheryl Dunn (Co-optee), Philip Johnson (Governor), Rhona Bradley (Governor) and Maureen Khumalo (Student Governor)
Apologies	None
In Attendance	Adam Hewitt (Group Quality Director HE), 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) and Sarah-Jane Gilmore (Acting Director of Governance)

PART A

The meeting opened at 10:34am and was quorate with at least 4 members present including at least two LTE Group governors. It was noted that Philip Johnson would chair the meeting as Alison Blackburn had been delayed at an appointment.		
30/26	Apologies No apologies were received.	
31/26	Declarations of interest No new declarations of interest or loyalty were made to the standing register of interests or in relation to any specific agenda items.	
32/26	Minutes of the meeting of the UCEN Manchester Board The minutes of the meeting of the UCEN Manchester Board held on 12th March 2026 were received and approved as an accurate record to be signed by the Chair in hard copy.	
33/26	Meeting Actions and Matters Arising The Board noted that most actions from the previous meetings were completed with one ongoing:	
	Action	Update
	Deputy Principal and Dean to consider visuals to best present the acronym and an expanded form of the name alongside strategy in Autumn 2025	Work is ongoing in relation to this as part of the wider LTE Group brand architecture which will be reported to Group Board
34/26	Principal's Overview The Principal presented an overview of the key items for consideration at the meeting, highlighting strong progress against the Degree Awarding Powers plan, the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register and the approval route for fee rate increases to Group Board. The Board noted the update on developments relating to the Office for Students revised approach to quality and the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). It was reported that further detail was awaited and that a more detailed report would be provided when available. Members noted that some aspects remained undecided and that the sector was awaiting further clarity, including on the OfS's work to	

	minimise bureaucracy. It was also noted that TEF Bronze now indicated 'meeting minimum quality requirements' (i.e. B3 conditions) as opposed to high quality. A Governor queried how franchise arrangements would be treated within the emerging OfS position. It was advised that franchises were understood to be separately under review and that franchisees with more than 300 students would be required to register with the OfS and be subject to TEF requirements. The Board received the Principal's Overview for information.
35/26	UCEN Manchester Strategy 2030 – Agreement of KPIs for 2026/27 The Board considered the proposed first-year targets and actions supporting the UCEN Manchester Strategy. It was noted that the plan included strategic objectives, KPIs and a number of supporting targets and actions. Some measures were quantitative, while others were qualitative and would require further development as implementation progressed. [PART REDACTED] The Board discussed the approach to scholarship and educational gains. In response to questions, it was explained that the Annual Symposium had developed from earlier CPD models and now enabled staff to undertake project-based work in their own areas to assess potential improvements, share research and support collaboration. A Governor asked whether the approach to scholarship was underpinned by a clear framework. It was reported that the previous approach had been more restrictive and that the current ambition was to develop a more open practitioner-led model. A Governor queried the proposed target that appropriate staff within each programme team should be qualified to at least one level above the level they teach and hold Advance HE Fellowship by 2027, noting the associated cost and effort. It was confirmed that this would not apply to all staff, but that relevant staff would be encouraged and supported to undertake the appropriate development, including where relevant for non-teaching roles. Members also asked whether a framework existed to define the process and what constituted appropriate team membership. It was noted that this would be developed as part of the targets and that the formalisation of the Programme Leader role had been the first step in this process. Members challenged the level of ambition in the plan and asked that timelines and accountable owners be made clearer. It was confirmed that the timelines were for completion within the academic year 2026/27 and that ownership would be added as the plan was translated into an operational delivery plan, consistent with the approach used for The Manchester College. The Board also noted that relevant KPIs would feed into the Group Scorecard and be reported through Group governance. The Board asked that dependencies be explicitly drawn out, particularly in relation to higher apprenticeships and the need for employer access and engagement. It was also noted that the strategic document would be developed further as a more accessible and visually engaging strategy document. ACTION: A common format for operational delivery plans, including owners, timelines and dependencies, as part of the Destination 30 plan be agreed as proposed by UCEN Manchester Board Delegate: CEO, Principal and Managing Director, Novus. Timescale: To be confirmed. The Board received and approved the UCEN Manchester annual targets/actions for 2026/27 and note the development of the UCEN Manchester Strategy 2030 delivery plan.
Alison Blackburn joined the meeting at 10:55	
36/26	Equality of Opportunity Risk Register The paper updated the Board on progress against the Access and Participation Plan (APP) and associated Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR). The APP focused on three key intervention areas: Access, Success, and Mental Health, with targets running to 2028–29. The paper provided assurance that strong progress was being made, with no areas currently identified as high risk.

	Key points • The APP is a regulatory requirement linked to the Office for Students (OfS), setting out how UCEN Manchester will address risks to equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups. • Early indicators show positive progress across the EORR, particularly in access and student retention. • The proportion of students from ethnic minority backgrounds accessing Creative Industries courses has reached the 24% target ahead of the 2028–29 deadline. • The proportion of male students accessing higher education courses has increased to 42%, exceeding the 40% target. • Retention gaps have reduced significantly: ○ The gap between IMD Q1 and IMD Q5 students has reduced to 0.7 percentage points. ○ The gap between Black and White students has closed, with both groups showing 96.3% retention in 2025–26. • Mental health and wellbeing awareness has improved, with the Student Experience Survey showing a rise from 80% to 84% satisfaction, although NSS results will not be available until July 2026. The APP supported UCEN Manchester’s 2030 strategic vision by contributing to long-term sustainability, collaborative learning experiences, and sector-leading student support. It also supported compliance with OfS registration requirements, particularly Condition A1, which requires approved access and participation plans and reasonable steps to comply with them. The Board received for assurance the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register.
37/26	Update from Academic Board The Board received an update from Academic Board, including two sets of minutes. It was noted that an additional meeting had been held due to the volume of work and that the number of Academic Board meetings would be reviewed for the following year. Members noted progress in relation to Degree Awarding Powers, including the validation of a further three degrees on 4 June. This brought the total number validated to date to nine, of which six were expected to recruit their first students in September 2026. Feedback had been sought from validation panel members and programme teams involved in the process. The Board challenged the suitability of current academic regulations to support potential modular delivery and asked what plan was in place to understand any changes required to enable different delivery models. It was explained that modular delivery would currently be expected to operate through programmes validated by another awarding body, and that further work was required. Members also noted that student feedback mechanisms would need to be considered as part of any future model. A Governor asked what had changed in relation to the proposed degree algorithm and whether the impact had been modelled. It was explained that previous arrangements had followed the approach adopted by validating partners, but that the development of UCEN Manchester’s own approach had taken account of OfS recommendations. Modelling had been undertaken and showed a reduction of less than 5% in outcomes. The Board received the Update from Academic Board for assurance.
38/26	Quality & Standards Update The Board received the Quality and Standards update, including preparation for an Ofsted inspection in relation to teacher education. Members asked whether the area remained on watch for an inspection before the end of the 2025/26 academic year; it was confirmed that this was now unlikely given that teaching had ended. Board were advised that regular meetings would continue to maintain focus and drive progress in preparation for an inspection in 2026/27. [PART REDACTED]

	The Board discussed consistency of assessment, which was recognised as a recurring theme and a clear OfS condition. It was reported that Academic Board had agreed principles of assessment and that a student-facing version had been created to explain the underlying approach. Members noted that Group Quality oversight provided an opportunity to identify and share learning across schools. This gave the Board assurance in relation to the approach being taken. Members queried student access to facilities and the approach to generative AI. It was reported that views on the use of AI were inconsistent and that this work would be connected to wider organisational activity on AI. The Board received the Quality & Standards Update for assurance.
39/26	Annual Report on Incidents of Harassment and/or Sexual Misconduct The Board received the annual report and considered the assurance provided in relation to the management of incidents of harassment and/or sexual misconduct within UCEN Manchester. [PART REDACTED] The Board received the Annual Report on Incidents of Harassment and/or Sexual Misconduct for assurance.
40/26	Future U & Student Voice The Board received the Future U and Student Voice report. It was noted that the format of future reporting would be reviewed, as the current report was lengthy, with a view to providing a clearer summary of key themes and priority tasks for the next academic year. Members discussed student accommodation and noted differing experiences of demand. The Board considered the reported higher level of need for health and wellbeing support compared with the sector average. Members queried whether this reflected greater need, stronger promotion of support, or other factors. It was reported that the position was likely to reflect a combination of factors. The Board asked whether UCEN Manchester could support the level of demand and whether further action was required. It was noted that increasing mental health reporting was being seen more widely, and that the level was not considered higher than the Manchester average. Members also noted that accommodation for students from outside the area could create a different profile of support need and vulnerability. The Student Governor advised that some students were unable to access services locally and therefore chose to speak to staff at UCEN Manchester or The Manchester College because they felt comfortable doing so. The Board noted that cross-Group arrangements were in place to review themes across business units and maintain support through existing teams and roles. Members suggested that accommodation should be considered as a potential future deep dive, noting that previous research for the strategy had identified accommodation as a key issue, although demand had subsequently reduced for a range of reasons. The Board also asked that the approach to surveying students be reviewed to ensure methods were engaging and appropriate for the student population. ACTION: Consider student accommodation as a future deep dive and review student survey methods to ensure they are accessible and engaging. Delegate: Dean/Vice Dean and Director of Student Experience and Engagement. Timescale: To be confirmed. The Board received the Future U and Student Voice report for assurance.
Joshua Lewis & Alleah Ali Joined	

41/26	Annual Student Union Report The Board received a presentation from the Student Union President and Vice President. Members noted the aims for 2025/26 and discussed the impact of separating UCEN Manchester activity from wider college activity. It was reported that this had been beneficial and had enabled a stronger focus on higher education, enhancing the HE student experience. The Student Union President noted numerous events had been delivered during the year to build and improve the community and support social wellbeing. One example was ‘UCENs Got Talent’ which demonstrated the number of very talented students and attracted 45 students to audition. Events aimed to bring people together. Overall the events had improved student engagement, well-being, and connection, and enhanced skills alongside building confidence. A strategy questionnaire had been utilised to gain feedback, this received 51 responses, providing key insights, student experiences, and priorities. Responses showed positive perception satisfaction rating of 78%. Key priorities were established as the cost of living support and mental health and well-being, along with requests for more societies, clubs, and social activities. In 2026-27 using the student feedback, the team aimed to continue the development and promotion of student societies, continue building the social media presence of the Student Union to help promote events to students, and enhance the visibility and accessibility of the Student Union across campus Members welcomed the progress made and congratulated the team on their work. The Board recognised that the UCEN Manchester-specific focus had supported visible progress and thanked the team for the impact achieved over the year. The Deputy Principal and Dean noted an extract from the Sheffield Hallam University Partner Annual Report for UCEN Manchester: UCEN Manchester’s Students’ Union (SU) continues to be one of the most engaged and visible across SHU partner institutions, with strong leadership, regular communication and active inclusion of underrepresented groups. The SU model presents an example of best practice within FE delivered HE contexts. The Board received the Annual Student Union Report presentation for assurance.
Joshus Lewis & Alleah Ali left	
42/26	Performance Report The Chair noted that the Performance Report was to be taken as read and invited members to raise any observations and/or concerns. The Vice Principal Resources, Planning and Performance noted there were some key areas identified in the report which will be monitored, particularly conversion of applications to enrolments, which would be reported back in the autumn term. The financial position was noted as in line with checkpoint and working towards a settled budget for 2026-27. The Board received and approved the performance report.
43/26	Fee Rates 2027/28 [REDACTED] The Board approved the fee rates for 2027/28 for onward recommendation to the LTE Group Board.
44/26	Governance Update On the Terms of Reference Review the Principal noted that the new Senior Director of Academic Standards and Regulatory Compliance would work with the Acting Director of Governance to review the ToR relative to Academic Board and its sub-committees, UCEN Manchester Divisional Board, and the LTE

	Group Board in Autumn 2026 to ensure that they reflect all requirements related to Degree Awarding Powers. An update will be brought to the Board in December 2026. In relation to the Effectiveness Review Board noted the status of actions identified in the previous exercise and that the current assessment demonstrated that the Board had met its terms of reference over the course of the academic year. Board noted the Cycle of Business as a basis for delivery in the ensuing year. The Company Secretary advised Alison Blackburn had confirmed that she was content to continue as Chair of the UCEN Manchester Board for 2026–27. Action: Review of terms of reference to be undertaken and an update considered at the December meeting of the UCEN Manchester Divisional Board Delegate: Senior Director of Academic Standards and Regulatory Compliance/Acting Director of Governance Timescale: November 2026 The Board approved the Governance Update.
Date of next meeting November 2026	
	----- Chair ----- Date
Meeting closed at 13:30	