



Minutes of the seventy-eighth meeting of the Board of Directors, held on 28 June 2022 at the OIA office, Reading

- Present:** Dame Suzi Leather (Chair)
Adesewa Adebisi, Andrew Chandler, Natasha Dhumma, Wendy Finlay, Dave Hall, Martin Kirke, Andy Mack, Kevin Mundy, Jon Renyard, Sophie Williams
- Apologies:** Professor Alistair Fitt (Paul Layzell), Jonathan Rees
- Secretary:** Sarah Liddell (Company Secretary)
- In Attendance:** Ben Elger (Chief Executive)
Felicity Mitchell (Independent Adjudicator)
Zoë Babb (Head of the Adjudication Team)
Barry McHale (Student Liaison Officer)
Jennifer Runde (Communications Officer) (note-taker)

22/14 Chair's business

There was no Chair's business.

22/15 Membership

The Chair welcomed Zoë Babb (Head of the Adjudication Team), Barry McHale (Student Liaison Officer) as staff observer, and Jennifer Runde (Communications Officer) to the meeting.

22/16 Declarations of interests

There were no declarations of interest.

22/17 Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the seventy-seventh meeting of the Board held on 30 March 2022 were **approved**.

22/18 Matters arising from the minutes and actions log update

The Board received a record of the matters arising from the minutes and actions log update.

There were no other matters arising.

22/19 Nominations and Remuneration Committee

The Board received the unconfirmed minutes of the twenty-sixth meeting of the Nominations and Remuneration Committee held on 10 May 2022.

The Committee had given initial consideration to Directors' terms of office in preparation for the upcoming transition in terms of both the governance review and the Chair and Deputy Chair reaching the end of their terms of office in 2023. While serving nine years should not become the norm, continuity and flexibility will be important through the transition period.

Wendy Finlay and Sophie Williams have both agreed in principle to serve a third term of up to three years and were thanked for this.

Chloe Field, incoming NUS Vice-President (Higher Education) will be appointed under the current governance structure, for two years from 1 July 2022.

The new governance arrangements envisage the split of the Nominations and Remuneration Committee into two separate committees. We hope to coincide this with the introduction of the new governance arrangements, but it would be helpful to have the Nominations & Governance Committee in place for the Chair recruitment, so membership of the two new committees will be considered before November 2022.

22/20 Report from the Independent Adjudicator and the Chief Executive

The Board received the quarterly report from the Independent Adjudicator and the Chief Executive.

The Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Bill has cleared the Senedd. The Bill incorporated some suggestions raised in sub-committees, especially around strengthening mental health support. The expansion of our role to further education complaints is not contentious. The move to the implementation phase is likely to be gradual so there are no immediate implications for our workload or budget. We will take account of the Welsh government's other priorities as the legislation is much wider than

our remit, and some details of our membership and coverage are yet to be confirmed. In due course we will need to prepare and consult on amended Rules of the Scheme. It was **agreed** that a paper will be brought to the Board in December 2022 as an initial outline roadmap towards implementation, and that the expansion of our remit in Wales will be made a standing item on the Board agenda.

The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill is now in the House of Lords.

Following the recent closure of ALRA and the report from the Public Accounts Committee on the financial health of the sector, we have taken opportunities to reiterate our view that there is a need for better protection including financial provision for students in the event of a market exit.

Work to progress our governance arrangements is continuing.

There was some discussion of autism and disability more widely. Our Good Practice Framework includes a section on Supporting disabled students. Our Disability Experts Panel is a valuable resource for our casework, and we recently had an excellent training session on autism and neurodiversity which was very useful for case-handlers, including for how to tailor communications with autistic students. It can be difficult for students that existing information about their disability and agreed support is not transferred from secondary school level to further or higher education.

Work is progressing well on the update of the Handling complaints and academic appeals section of the Good Practice Framework, with a steering group meeting due to take place next month.

We have restarted face-to-face visits to providers and student representative bodies and we are continuing to hold our student discussion groups and to contribute to external conferences and events.

The insights we get into students' experiences of our service are valuable in informing organisational initiatives such as our kindness and communications work. Our equality, diversity and inclusion work is ongoing. We are continuing to reach out to diverse candidates in our recruitment. We have made good progress with looking at our casework data by ethnicity. We are also continuing to get insights through our outreach, for example our student discussion groups with students of different ethnicities.

22/21 KPIs

The Board received a report on KPIs from the Chief Executive.

Turnaround timescales remain a priority but it was recognised that there are good reasons why some complaints take longer to review and we need to continue to review cases carefully. Effective communication and providing updates during our process is very important. It was **agreed** to include some further information about how we communicate with students about our timescales for the September Board meeting.

22/22 Financial matters

The Board received the Finance Report to May 2022 and a paper on financial planning from the Chief Executive.

We are moving forward with the review of the case-related element of subscriptions. We want to listen to views and make sure that it continues to work as fairly as possible. We have had a good response to our invitation for expressions of interest in participating in a focus group.

22/23 Report from the Company Secretary

The Board received the quarterly report from the Company Secretary. Our regulatory submissions are up to date.

22/24 Any other business

There was no other business.

22/25 Reflections on the meeting

22/26 Dates of future meetings

- Friday 23 September 2022 at 10.30am
- Wednesday 7 December 2022 at 10.30am

Sarah Liddell
Company Secretary

11 July 2022