Board of Governors Strategy day
T8-20 Blue Zone Tower Building, Holloway Campus ( N7 8DB )
Monday 9 February 2026, 10:00 AM — 4 :00 PM GMT

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| **Present:** | Baron Anyangwe | Independent Governor |
| | Urmi Dutta- Roy | Independent Governor |
| | Julie Hall | Vice Chancellor |
| | Tijs Broeke | Independent Governor and Chair of the Board of Governors |
| | Muniya Barua | Independent Governor |
| | Petra Wend | Independent Governor |
| | Andrea Stark | Independent Governor |
| | Munesh Mahtani | Independent Governor |
| | David Morrall | Independent Governor |
| | Claire Locke | Staff Governor |
| | Gerry McDonald | Independent Governor |
| | Fahmida Yesmin | Student Governor |
| | Olaide Phillips | Academic Governor |
| **Also present:** | Eugene McCrossan | Chief Operating Officer |
| | Gary Davies | DVC Student Recruitment and Business Development |
| | Nikki Le Faou | University Secretary (minutes) |
| | Nona McDuff | DVC and Provost |
| | Billy Ahmed | Governance Officer |
| **Apologies:** | Valerie Leipheimer | Independent Governor |
| | Sanam Arora | Independent Governor |
| | Rajjo Mondol | Student Governor |

## 1. Welcome, Apologies, Announcements and Declarations of Interest

**Apologies**: Apologies had been received from Independent Governor Valerie Leipeimer, Student Governor Rajjo Mondol and Independent Governor Sanam Aurora.

**Declarations of Interest:** There were no declarations of interest.

**Chair's announcement:** Board and Committee effectiveness surveys are still open, Governors were encouraged to complete them if they had not already done so.

## 2. Minutes, matters arising and formal business

### 2.1. Minutes of the 20th November 2025 Board of Governors meeting

The Board of Governors approved the minutes of the 20th November 2025 meeting of the Board of Governors.

### 2.2. Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

## 2.3. Committee appointment

For Approval - Presented by Nikki Le Faou

The Board approved the appointment of Olaide Phillips to the Governance Committee and People, Finance and Resources Committee with immediate effect.

## 3. Strategy day - Introduction from the Vice Chancellor

The Board was advised that the purpose of the day, was to:

- Develop a shared understanding of progress to date.
- Identify opportunities and challenges for the future across each of the Strategic Plan's themes.
- Discuss the University's Risk Appetite.
- Begin to identify the new Key Performance Indicators.

The Board noted the challenge of developing a new Strategic Plan amid significant sector volatility, recognising that such planning typically assumes a degree of stability that is currently lacking. While reaffirming the value of a clear mission and vision, the Board stressed the need for continued agility and adaptability to ensure resilience in a rapidly changing environment.

## 3.1. Strategic Plan update/ overview

Presented by Julie Hall

The Board of Governors received an update from the Vice-Chancellor on the continued development of the University's 2032 Strategic Plan. The discussion covered the emerging vision, mission, values, strategic themes, and enabling strategies, alongside early thinking on the University's future size and shape.

An updated articulation of the mission and vision was presented, with the full Strategic Plan expected to be ready for launch in early summer 2026. Throughout the day, presentations would be provided to demonstrate how the strategic themes and enabling strategies will evolve over time to support this ambition.

**Looking Toward 2032**

The Board considered what the University might look like by 2032, identifying several areas of potential development:

- Innovative delivery models, including Level 3 and 4 pathways delivered in collaboration with external providers.

- Ongoing portfolio reviews would ensure agile development in growth areas to ensure the portfolio remained attractive, such as the developments undertaken in Built Environment, Engineering, Aviation, Health, Professional Services and Digital Technologies.

- Strengthen institutional mechanisms respect of philanthropy and research and knowledge exchange in impactful areas and increased collaboration.

- Continue to review academic shape to enable greater flexibility.

- Increased collaboration to enhance our operating model, with early interest already evident in shared resources.

- Focus on compliance and de-risking our operation.

**Conclusions**

The Board of Governors noted the update.

## 3.2. Where we have come from - progress over the life of the 2020/25 Strategic Plan

Presented by Julie Hall

Over the life of the 2020–2025 Strategic Plan, the University made strong and steady progress despite significant external challenges.

Growth had continued until 2023/24, underpinned by improved infrastructure, enhanced staff and student experience, and careful risk management. The period also saw national recognition for the University's commitment to education for social justice and its wider contribution to the community.

Key achievements during this period included:

- External recognition for value added, teaching quality, community impact, equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), and the Education for Social Justice Framework.
- £10 million investment in digital technologies, driving efficiencies and significantly improving the experience of both staff and students.
- Introduction of new, high-demand programmes in Health and the Built Environment, supporting sector needs and student employability.
- £25 million investment in the estate, modernising facilities and ensuring a safe, high-quality environment for learning and research.
- Strategic investment in academic staff, particularly those with a strong commitment to EDI and with active, impactful research and knowledge-exchange portfolios.
- Expansion of national and global partnerships, resulting in larger, stronger and higher-quality collaborations that enrich learning, research, and international engagement.
- Prudent financial management, with cash reserves maintained and no borrowing, despite a volatile external market and a sector-wide reduction in student numbers.

**Conclusions**:

The Board of Governors noted the update on progress and achievements over the life of the 2020-25 Strategic Plan.

## 3.3. Navigating challenging in the external environment - sustainable business model/ financial sustainability/ challenges and opportunities

Presented by Julie Hall

The Board reflected on the increasingly difficult operating environment faced by the higher education sector. Key challenges noted included:

-Limited control over student demand and tuition fee levels in a competitive, regulated market.
- Significant compliance requirements and rising uncontrollable costs, including National Insurance, technology licences and pensions.
- Volatile student recruitment driven by rapid Government policy shifts and increased competition.

The Board discussed the complex environment created by national and global instability:

- Rapidly shifting skills needs, requiring institutions to respond quickly.
- Significant data lags, making real-time planning and forecasting difficult.

- Volatility affecting long-term planning, with frequent changes to international policy, and funding frameworks.

Demographic trends were also discussed, including the projected increase in the population of 18-year-olds in the near term, and a further rise in those aged around 50 in the coming years. The University will need to respond carefully to these shifts, including exploring opportunities for short courses, reskilling, and lifelong learning. A working group is already preparing for greater flexibility in provision, acknowledging that becoming fully agile will take sustained effort.

The Board discussed the potential for greater collaboration across the sector. While some stakeholders remain cautious about shared services, there may be scope for partnership with non-competitor institutions where collaboration could strengthen resilience, reduce costs, or improve student experience.

**Conclusions:**

The Board considered the presentation.

## 3.4. Discussion

The Board discussed noted each of the University's strategic risks.

During the discussion, it was acknowledged that a considerable amount of inaccurate information has been circulating regarding the Schools' restructure consultation. It was also recognised that some staff had expressed concerns about recent estates projects, particularly in the context of proposed redundancies. These projects reflect long-term investments that were only now reaching completion, and no further such investment was planned given the current financial position.

The Board emphasised the importance of providing staff with regular and timely communications, supported by the careful sharing of accurate information.

## 4. Updates and future plans on each of the strands - what is next? (10 minute presentations, followed by discussions)

## 4.1. Global Reach

Presented by Gary Davies

The Board of Governors considered a presentation on Global reach - Marketing and recruitment strategy.

Following the presentation, the Board considered the following:

-  The importance of balancing ambition with realism, recognising that a diverse mix of income streams has historically strengthened resilience.
-  The need to articulate a clear institutional USP, with the University's strong personalised student experience identified as a key strength. This aligns with ongoing initiatives such as the "Real London" campaign.
- Opportunities linked to the University's Zone 2 location and proximity to major landmarks, including Arsenal.
- The University's strong digital presence, including being the most-liked UK university on TikTok.

**Conclusions**:

The Board of Governors considered the presentation and held an in depth discussion in relation to 'Global Reach'.

## 4.2. People

Presented by Eugene McCrossan

The Board of Governors was provided with a presentation on the University's People Strategy.

The Board noted the People Plan on a page document. The plan sets out several continuing priorities:

- Strengthening digital capability, including ongoing development of systems and digital confidence across the workforce.
- Embedding Oracle more fully across the organisation to ensure consistency and efficiency.
- Responding to staff feedback, particularly around reward and recognition and improving the visibility of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT).

The Board highlighted the importance of the plan remaining explicit about how the University is responding to the current external environment and operational context.

It was noted that the plan did not explicitly reference succession planning. Assurance was provided that this area was monitored by the Remuneration Committee, particularly in relation to senior roles, the Senior Management Team, and academic leadership. Bringing Deans and Professional Services Directors onto SLT was highlighted as an important step towards distributed leadership and strengthening succession pipelines.

The Board discussed the ongoing work to enhance communications and messaging across the University. Members reflected on whether the current approach sufficiently enables two-way engagement, and the importance of continued improvement in this area. The SLT was encouraged to maintain reflective practice when considering how staff voices are heard and responded to.

**Conclusions**:

The Board noted the update and considered next steps across the life of the strategy.

## 4.3. Research and Knowledge exchange

Presented by Nona McDuff

The Board of Governors considered a presentation that outlines progress to date with the Research and Knowledge Exchange (RKE) strategy, RKE plans to reflect the new strategic plan and impact on the University's statement of risk appetite in this area.

The University continued to reframe and sharpen our activities to:

- Align with the Government's Industrial Strategy, focusing on priority sectors such as digital, creative industries, clean energy and advanced manufacturing
- Integrating new UKRI strategic priorities, including strengthened support for curiosity-driven research, innovation-led economic growth, mission- oriented investment
- Enhancing our research-informed teaching to strengthen skills development, talent pathways and innovation capability and clearly articulating to students the benefits this brings to their success.
- Strengthening local, regional and international partnership to drive innovation-led growth and increase place- based global impact.

In terms of impact on the University's risk appetite regarding research and knowledge exchange, it was recommended that the risk appetite level remains at 'open'.

**Conclusions:**

The Board of Governors noted the update.

## 4.4. Student Success

Presented by Nona McDuff

The Board of Governors received a presentation on the University's Student Success strategic pillar.

Over the past two years, the University had made strong progress in delivering its Student Success Strategy. Early indicators suggest that reporting to the Office for Students (OfS) on continuation is on track, with completion rates remaining above regulatory thresholds. Targeted academic support, enhanced coaching, and closer work with employers have contributed to improved outcomes across key student groups.

Importantly, the University has closed the BAME–White employment gap, demonstrating the impact of sustained efforts to embed equity, diversity and inclusion across teaching, support, and employer engagement.

The next phase of the strategy will focus on deepening and accelerating progress. Anticipated increases in learner dependency—reflecting national trends in post-pandemic student support needs—have already been factored into future planning. Continued work to strengthen our culture of support and academic resilience will be essential.

The University will also prioritise the expansion of employer partnerships, building on existing relationships and making better use of local networks. Creating more opportunities for students to connect directly with employers—including through sector-specific webinars and clearer alignment between courses and employment pathways—will be an important area of development.

The Board noted that while progress has been strong, continued success requires an appetite for innovation. Key areas where greater boldness could drive further improvement include:

- Teaching Excellence: exploring more adaptive, engaging and personalised pedagogies.
- Curriculum Architecture: ensuring programmes remain flexible, future-focused and responsive to student needs.
- Digital Futures and Skills: embedding digital capability throughout the learning experience to prepare students for evolving employment markets.

The Board also acknowledged external risks, including potential number fluctuations linked to partners and increased competition from Russell Group institutions. While these pressures may influence the pipeline of applicants, the University remains committed to adapting its teaching and support to meet the needs of the students it serves.

The Board would return to the topic of employer partnerships at a future meeting to explore how members can help strengthen connections with local and regional industries, galvanising opportunities “on our doorstep” to support student success

**Conclusions:**

The Board considered the update.

## 5. Vivienne Stern, CEO of Universities UK - talk on the current higher education landscape and key policy developments affecting the sector and Q&A

Vivienne Stern (CEO, UUK) outlined the severe financial pressures on the Higher Education sector.

It was noted that growth is low, government has no fiscal room, and the unit of resource for teaching continues to fall in real terms.

Cumulative policy impacts mean the sector is projected to be £1.6bn down by 2025/26 and £4bn by 2029/30, with TRAC C–E institutions most affected.

The decline in international growth and the shrinking 18-year-old population was highlighted, warning of either intensified competition or more collective sector responses. Despite this, universities retain agency, with opportunities in collaboration, shared services, common frameworks, buying power and digital transformation.

The complexity of the current policy environment was highlighted, and it was emphasised that doing nothing is not an option. Consolidation is happening only at small scale in the sector, as mergers are costly; UUK’s next phase of work was expected to explore this further.

Despite the intense pressures facing the sector, it was noted that universities still have agency, and that the current ‘burning platform’ provides a timely opportunity to drive essential change.

**Conclusions:**

The Board of Governors welcomed the presentation and Q&A session.

## 6. Updates and progress on each of the strands (continued) - what is next?

## 6.1. Financial Sustainability - Facilities and infrastructure

Presented by Eugene McCrossan

The Board of Governors considered an update on the University's facilities and infrastructure in the context of financial sustainability challenges

It was noted that at the start of the last strategy period, the University faced a £250m backlog in estates investment. Given the slow down on estates related spend, it was acknowledged that a return to a similar position was, to some extent, inevitable when underlying backlogs remain unresolved. Failure to keep pace with essential maintenance eventually impacts the estate and leads to higher life-cycle costs. At the time of the previous strategy, the backlog included several critical and potentially dangerous issues that the University had no choice but to address.

The Board noted that while progress has been made on the estate, the long-term risk inherent in deferring maintenance remained a challenge. By contrast, it was observed that the University is in a stronger position with respect to digital infrastructure.

In addition to reviewing space utilisation, the University is also exploring opportunities for resource sharing with sector partners. Following the recent resignation of the Head of Cyber Security, options are being examined for a shared-resource model with another university.

**Interim financial update:**

The Board received an interim update following the presentation. It was noted that international recruitment targets had been missed by some considerable margin, which had been partially off-set by higher than expected UG Home recruitment. It was noted that this gave rise to a significant impact on the budget,  and was expected to increase the deficit by a further £3m for FY26/27. [redacted]

s.43(2) FOIA - commercial interests

## 6.2. Financial Sustainability - People

Presented by Julie Hall

The Board of Governors considered an update from the Vice Chancellor regarding Financial Sustainability and staffing costs. It was noted that staff costs remained the institution's largest area of expenditure. Given costs, and the significant pressure of year on year cost increases and the current financial environment, the need for regular review of activity, structures and resourcing levels was recognised as critical to safeguarding the University’s financial sustainability.

Financial sustainability cannot be addressed through one-off exercises; rather, it requires continuous oversight and the flexibility to adapt the staffing model as demand and costs fluctuate.

The Board of Governors considered the financial levers available to the University to support stability and financial sustainability. It was noted that capital expenditure had already been slowed, and that the ongoing consultation exercise was a key mechanism to reduce the University's overall cost base. Protecting cash as far as possible remains a priority, and work is now shifting toward budgeting for FY27.

[redacted]

s.43(2) FOIA - commercial interests

## 7. Key Priorities and targets

Presentation - Presented by Julie Hall

The Board of Governors held an discussion on the development of KPIs and targets, with broad alignment on the need for a strategic, focused, and context aware approach.

**Alignment with Strategy and Timing**

- The Board confirmed that KPIs must be fully aligned with the new institutional strategy.
- It was agreed that the Board would be involved in the Strategy’s launch activities, which was expected to be in May/ June 2026.

**Proposed areas of focus for KPI development**

The University will need to publish its KPIs at the point of launching the new 2032 Strategic plan. The following were identified as key areas of focus for KPI development:

[redacted]

[redacted]

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**Managing Volatility and Triggers**

- The sector's instability and the failure of previous projections to materialise underscore the importance of clear trigger points to support timely decision making.
- Work had been undertaken in respect of scenario planning and trigger points, however they are not yet widely shared with the Board. This would form part of the agenda for the March Board meeting.
- The Board acknowledged the need to adopt an agile, flexible planning approach, supported by regular open conversations with the senior team.

The Board confirmed the need for more open, agile, and ongoing conversations about how the University responds collectively to changing circumstances, reporting would need to include a regular analysis of student recruitment patterns and income against our 5 year plan. Given the sector's volatility and demographic uncertainty, the University may only be able to set a three year financial plan.

**Conclusions:**

The Board endorsed the overall direction for developing the key performance indicators that will accompany the new Strategic Plan. Further refinement would take place ahead of their final approval in May/ June.

## 8. Risk session

Presented by Eugene McCrossan

It was agreed that this item would be delayed to the March meeting owing to time constraints.