

**Approved Minutes**

**Present**

Graham Raikes, MBE (Chair)	Independent Governor	GR
Prof Patricia Hind (Joint Deputy Chair)	Independent Governor	PH
Emma van der Lugt (Joint Deputy Chair)	Independent Governor	EvdL
Prof Claire Taylor	Vice-Chancellor	CT
Louise Bridgett	Independent Governor	LB
Kate Doodson	Independent Governor	KD
Matt Evans	Independent Governor	ME
Rt Rev'd James Grier	Independent Governor	JG
Duncan Swift	Independent Governor	DS
Pete Waterfield	Professional Services Staff Governor	PW
Liam Williams	Student Governor, Marjon Student Union (MSU) President	LW

**In attendance**

Guy Bolt	Co-opted Board Member	GB
Rt Rev'd Dr Tim Dakin	Co-opted Board Member	TD
Prof Mark Llewellyn	Co-opted Board Member	ML
Prof John Scott, CBE	Co-opted Board Member	JS
Jennie Walker	Co-opted Board Member	JW
Rt Rev'd Nick McKinnel	Chancellor	NM
Kevin Dixon (items 7-11)	Interim Finance Director	KDi
Edmund Jacoby	MSU Deputy President	EJ
Jessamie Thomas	Governance Officer (note taker)	JT

**In attendance (Executive Leadership Team [ELT] members)**

Prof Michelle Jones	Deputy Vice-Chancellor & Provost	MJ
Katy Willis	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Success)	KW
Ann Holman	Chief Digital, Data & Technology Officer	AH
Stephen Plant	University Secretary & Registrar	SP
Lucy Pengelly	Executive Director, People & Culture	LP

**1. Welcome, Apologies & Declarations of Conflicts of Interests**

- 1.1 The Chair, Graham Raikes MBE, welcomed colleagues. A particular welcome was extended to: Professional Services Staff Governor, Pete Waterfield; Chief Digital, Data & Technology Officer, Ann Holman; Student Governor and MSU President, Liam Williams; MSU Deputy President, Edmund Jacoby.
- 1.2 At GR's invitation, the Rt Rev'd James Grier opened the meeting with a prayer.
- 1.3 Apologies were received from Governors: Vicky Hatton, Alex Hawtin, Fiona Nicholls, Dr Laura Wallis, Rev'd Tatiana Wilson, Jackie Westerman. Apologies were also received from Co-opted Board Members: Reena Bajaj, James Beckly and Katherine George.

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- 1.4 Written declarations of interest were contained in Part C, in the Governors' Handbook. GR invited Board of Governors' (BoG) members to share any updates; no new declarations were made.
  - 1.5 Sincere thanks were extended to Governor Alex Hawtin, who was unable to attend this meeting but had informed the Chair of the conclusion of his tenure, with effect from 1 August 2024. AH's tremendous contribution to the work of the Board, and particularly the Finance & Resources (F&R) Committee, during his two terms of office, were noted.
  - 1.6 GR commended Kate Doodson, Chair of the Board's Digital & Physical Infrastructure Group, on her Fellowship of the British Computer Society, the Chartered Institute for IT.
  - 1.7 GR congratulated the University's staff and students on the excellent National Student Survey (NSS) results, which had been recently published.
  - 1.8 GR asked if colleagues wished to 'unstar' any items in Part B. None were identified. Items 12 to 14 were **APPROVED**. Items 15 to 23 were noted, together with supporting papers in Part C. GR wished to thank the contributors of these papers, noting the wide range of matters covered.
- 2. Report from Vice-Chancellor**
- 2.1 The report was received. GR invited Vice-Chancellor, Prof Claire Taylor, to present a summary.
  - 2.2 CT's report contained commentary on key areas. CT reflected on her first year in post, particularly balancing immediate operational challenges with strategic development. CT highlighted her focus on raising Marjon's profile as a credible and impactful higher education (HE) provider and partner of choice within Plymouth, the region and beyond.
  - 2.3 CT expressed her pride in leading a University ranked amongst the UK's top 10 by students for Career Prospects, Lecturers and Teaching Quality, and Student Support. Marjon had again performed exceptionally well for Student Satisfaction (top 3 in England) and had featured in The Times Higher Education Global Impact Rankings for the first time.
  - 2.4 CT reflected on changes in the political landscape, following Labour's General Election success (4 July 2024). CT noted that she held regular meetings with all local MPs, setting out Marjon's strategic ambitions and ensuring their awareness of sector-wide challenges. CT was pleased to note that the Secretary of State for Education, Bridget Phillipson, Minister for Women and Equalities, was using similar language to that within Marjon 2030 strategy, around opportunity.
  - 2.5 In her UK HE sector overview, CT summarised discussions and shared analysis with regard to financial sustainability. CT's report contained an update on degree apprenticeship funding and the previous government's response to the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC's) review of the graduate route. CT commented on lifelong learning developments.
  - 2.6 As an outcome of having been awarded 'Gold' in the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) awards, CT noted that Marjon was included in the Office for Students' (OfS) analysis of ways in which to promote strategic improvement.
  - 2.7 In her Marjon overview, CT noted progress in meeting the objectives of the Foundational Delivery Plan, and how this would underpin the strategic ambitions of Marjon 2030.

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- 2.8 CT provided details of the collaborative approach taken by Marjon and the Arts University Plymouth (AUP). Noting that Dame Judith Petts' tenure as the University of Plymouth's (UoP) Vice-Chancellor had concluded, her successor, Prof Richard Davies, would commence in post in October and would be warmly welcomed to Marjon to be part of these discussions. CT commended the collaboration taking place between the three universities' student unions.
- 2.9 CT's report concluded with a section on news and communications over recent months, showcasing a range of accolades and innovation.
- 2.10 In response to a query around growth plans for international student numbers and whether this presented accommodation challenges, Deputy Vice-Chancellor & Provost, Prof Michelle Jones, noted that recruitment would be phased, much would be at postgraduate level and it was anticipated that there would be a demand for accommodation in the City as well as on campus.
- 2.11 CT was thanked for the report and update.

### **3. Report from Marjon Student Union (MSU) President**

- 3.1 The report from Student Governor and MSU President, Liam Williams, was received. GR invited LW to present an overview.
- 3.2 LW thanked a number of individuals for their support and paid tribute to his predecessor Sarah Boyd. LW looked forward to working with Edmund Jacoby, MSU Deputy President and outlined their priorities for the year ahead. LW provided information on sabbatical posts, trustees, governance, MSU's NSS ranking (6<sup>th</sup> in the UK) and the May Ball.
- 3.3 In response to a question around fulfilling the remit of a Women's Officer if this post remained vacant, LW confirmed that support would be sought from charity initiatives or individuals experienced in this area.
- 3.4 MJ suggested that MSU reflect further on how the student profile would evolve, in line with the Marjon 2030 strategy, and therefore how to strengthen the appeal and value of MSU to a diverse student body, on and off campus, including those on apprenticeships.
- 3.5 LW was thanked for the report.

### **4. Report on Student Population Data**

- 4.1 The report was received. GR invited Pro Vice-Chancellor, Student Success, Katy Willis to provide an overview.
- 4.2 KW's report contained analysis and commentary regarding the current student population and future retention. It was set out in two parts, to focus on changes to the current population and the expected intake in September, including considerations around risk and opportunities. Following discussion, and in response to a question, KW confirmed her view that the analysis and assumptions underpinning student numbers and budget proposals were prudent.
- 4.3 In the context of encouraging conversion to 'firm accepts' BoG noted potential benefits of early interviews, for those programmes requiring an interview as part of the admission

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- process. BoG also discussed the entry tariff, the perception and impact of setting this either relatively high or low and the importance of the tariff not being an obstacle to accessibility.
- 4.4 KW responded to a question around the monitoring of student population data and how key areas were reflected in reports. CT noted that there would be further reflection around the optimum formatting of these and the development of KPIs.
- 4.5 In response to a question, KW confirmed that a revised process, to provide guidance and support to students considering withdrawing had been introduced.
- 4.6 In response to a question as to how extend recruitment targets, KW felt that this would correlate with the marketing budget. KW gave examples of activities underway, much of these tailored to individuals, to support applicants and encourage conversion.
- 4.7 GR thanked ELT for their work and for this discussion. KW was thanked for the report.

#### **5. Access and Participation Plan – Development Update**

- 5.1 The report was received. GR invited KW to present an overview.
- 5.2 KW reminded BoG of the rationale behind the Access and Participation Plan (APP), OfS' requirements with regard to submission and the University's current position in terms of successful delivery. KW invited BoG members to review and comment on the main plan, proposed targets and spend commitments. While formal sign-off by BoG was not required, BoG's engagement, understanding and challenge would continue to be key.
- 5.3 KW invited discussion and provided responses to questions around recruitment data and initiatives to improve outcomes. KW gave examples of Marjon's work with employers, charities and schemes to support people into work; BoG was reminded that 'graduate outcomes' was a metric by which universities were held to account by OfS and which fed into the Teaching Excellence Framework.
- 5.4 In response to a question on the cost per student of the work of the student support team, KW acknowledged the challenge of achieving sector-wide consistency in capturing and benchmarking this due to significant differences in types of student intake and differences in what is offered and measured.
- 5.5 The suggestion was made that it may be beneficial to include strategic partnerships earlier in the cycle and in the transition piece. **ACTION: KW**
- 5.6 BoG was content with the position and commended KW for her work. KW was thanked for the report and update.

*A 10 minute break was taken at this point.*

#### **6. Marjon 2030 Strategy**

- 6.1 The report was received. GR invited CT and MJ to present an overview.
- 6.2 CT reminded BoG of her vision for Marjon, which she had shared as part of her appointment process in December 2022, to establish Marjon as a beacon of possibility and opportunity. CT's high-level vision for growth was presented within the strategy.
- 6.3 MJ reminded BoG of the work underpinning the development of the Marjon 2030 strategy, entitled 'Inconvenient Excellence'. MJ noted that progress, updates and the

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draft strategy and high level success measures had been shared in multiple formats. Engagement with internal and external stakeholders had been extensive. Launch activities were planned for autumn 2024. MJ explained that the strategic framework outlined the strategic delivery planning process, with initial high level annual priorities for 2024-25 included for information. The intention was that indicative overarching high level success measures of Marjon 2030 should enable BoG to monitor strategic progress. Further clarification of the success measures (including operational sustainability), benchmarks and trajectories would follow.

- 6.4 BoG went on to discuss with CT and MJ the approach to setting KPIs, for example, whether these should be aspirational or conservative, to monitor success or to drive behaviour. With regard to campus utilisation, it was suggested that a social purpose index, or a social return on investment could be incorporated. **ACTION: MJ**
- 6.5 The question was asked as to the positioning of health and wellbeing in the layers of the strategy and specifically how to balance growth and commercial growth whilst ensuring that health and wellbeing were a balancing metric. CT noted that health and wellbeing were being considered as a strand within the curriculum framework, to encourage widening opportunities and feed into the APP. CT and KW would reflect further on this, to potentially incorporate further within the Marjon 2030 Strategy. **ACTION: CT/KW**
- 6.6 In response to a hypothetical question as to how an impact report to be drafted in 2030 would look, CT highlighted student number growth as being central to the strategy's success. BoG concurred that financial strength would be absolutely key, as would striking the appropriate balance between commercial, student and social-purpose interests.
- 6.7 In response to a question around how to maintain staff accountability and motivation, CT confirmed that targets sitting below the high level KPIs would be mapped. Personal development reviews (PDRs) and discussions at department level, would reference targets aligned to the four strategic priorities. Further consideration of how staff may respond to Marjon 2030 and what the overall objectives were could be helpful. **ACTION: CT/MJ**
- 6.8 BoG noted the research-active staff target and also considered how this related to the Research Excellence Framework (REF); it was suggested it may be helpful to review the wording so as to capture the distinction between research active for REF purposes versus Research Degree Awarding Powers (RDAP) **ACTION: MJ**
- 6.9 BoG commended CT, MJ and ELT on their vision and the clarity of the document. BoG **APPROVED** the Marjon 2030 strategy and strategic framework.
- 6.10 CT and MJ were thanked for the report and update.

*Interim Finance Director, Kevin Dixon, joined the meeting.*

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#### **7. Finance Review**

- 7.1 The report was received. GR invited CT, with Interim Finance Director Kevin Dixon, to present an overview.
- 7.2 CT reminded BoG that a Finance Review had been carried out by the University's internal auditors, TIAA, at BoG's request and an initial report issued in February 2024. This follow-up report had been received by Finance & Resources (F&R) Committee in June and discussed by Audit Committee in July.
- 7.3 Following discussion, BoG was satisfied with the progress being recorded against the recommendations and the assurances contained within the report. BoG noted that a further update would be provided to Audit Committee at its next meeting.
- 7.4 CT and KDi were thanked for the report. Thanks would be conveyed to Director of Internal Audit, Clarence Mpofu. GR commended the leadership team on their work in this area.

#### **8. Management Accounts Year-End Update**

- 8.1 The report was received. GR invited CT and KDi to present an overview.
- 8.2 CT noted that the report contained an update on the current year financial position to year-end 31 July 2024, based upon actuals to the end of April 2024. The appendices were: mid-year review, collated budget and forecast deficit; mid-year review non-staff expenditure target savings; weekly cash flow monitoring (4 June 2024); management accounts (period 10).
- 8.3 As recorded within the Risk Register, and consistent with sector feedback, financial sustainability remained high risk. Work was ongoing to mitigate this, including through close liaison with the bank around the loan covenant. GR confirmed that he had attended a meeting with CT, KDi and the bank relationship manager on campus, which had been positive. KDi confirmed that the cashflow position was being carefully monitored and the bank was being kept informed. The bank was aware of the challenges arising from the profiling of funding from the government's Student Loan Company.
- 8.4 At CT's invitation, KDi summarised the programme of cost control which had been implemented to address the budget deficit. BoG noted the current position and the estimated year-end operational position.
- 8.5 In response to a question, KDi confirmed that improved availability of data would allow for more effective debt collection. CT acknowledged the suggestion from a BoG member that an interim manager with situational experience could boost the efficacy and capacity of the finance team, however CT was confident of having sufficient access to appropriate expertise. CT confirmed that a financial controller had been recruited, the capacity of the finance team was being reprofiled and the remit of the executive Finance Director role was under consideration.
- 8.6 Chair of Finance & Resources (F&R) Committee, Prof Patricia Hind, confirmed that the Committee had been kept in touch with developments and supported ELT's approach and actions. Regular financial updates had been issued to the Committee; following a break over the summer to allow for work on the year-end audit process, these would resume.

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- 8.7 BoG acknowledged the progress made. Notwithstanding this, there remained an expectation of further improvement in the income and expenditure position by the financial year-end.
- 8.8 CT and KDi were thanked for the report and update.

#### **9. Draft Budget Proposals (Income and Expenditure) 2024-25**

- 9.1 The report was received. GR invited CT to present an overview.
- 9.2 CT highlighted headlines from the report's narrative, noting that F&R Committee had considered the proposals at its meeting in June. Rigorous control, underpinned by prudence and accurate data, would remain central to managing the position. MJ reminded BoG that the student fee barely covered universities' operating costs, which was causing issues across the sector. CT confirmed that building cash reserves and stabilising cashflow were her priority and noted that potential income-generating opportunities were being discussed by ELT.
- 9.3 CT went through key assumptions and invited questions from BoG. Questions were posed around anticipated levels of student recruitment and the student growth plan. In response to questions around cost control and efficiencies, CT gave examples of how these would be driven, including through digital transformation. BoG commended ELT on the prudence of projections but also requested analysis of the 'best case scenario' which would flow from income-generating opportunities to promote growth. This would allow BoG to assess the point of profit-generation and to approach the sign off of the financial statements for at least the year ahead with a clear understanding of the position. On this basis, GR asked that the budget proposals be refined for F&R Committee and BoG's consideration. **ACTION: CT/KDi**

*Matt Evans left the meeting.*

#### • **MSU Annual Financial Support**

- 9.4 The report was received. GR invited SP to present an overview.
- 9.5 BoG was reminded that the MSU was an autonomous charity, yet financially and constitutionally accountable to the University. As well as financial support, LW acknowledged the value of the professional advice which ELT members provided. BoG commended the MSU on its work and achievements.
- 9.6 BoG **APPROVED** the MSU funding request for 2024-25, at £135,261, which was unchanged from 2023-24.

#### **Student Fees 2025-26**

- 9.7 The report was received. GR invited SP to present an overview.
- 9.8 SP explained BoG's role in reviewing and approving those fees which were not set by OfS. BoG discussed with SP the rationale behind the proposals. BoG **APPROVED** fee proposals for 2025-26, as contained in the report.
- 9.9 CT and SP were thanked for the report and update.

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#### **10. Health & Safety Statement of Intent**

- 10.1 The report was received. GR invited SP to present an overview.
- 10.2 Following discussion, BoG was satisfied with the position and **APPROVED** the Health & Safety Statement of Intent, to be published on the University's website.
- 10.3 SP was thanked for the report and update.

#### **11. Update from Committees**

- **Report from Committee Chairs**

- 11.1 GR invited Chairs to provide a verbal update; minutes of meetings were contained in Part C.
- 11.2 As part of the People & Organisational Sub-Committee (P&OD) update, Executive Director of People & Culture, Lucy Pengelly, noted that P&OD had reviewed the Athena Swan bronze award final draft submission and had endorsed the approach being taken. GR commended the team on their work and the progress being made towards accreditation.

- **Board Membership and Succession Planning**

- 11.3 The report was received. GR noted that upon conclusion of his 1-1 meetings with BoG members, membership proposals would be brought to Governance & Nominations Committee for review and to BoG for approval. BoG was reminded that succession planning was a priority, noting the imminent conclusion of the tenure of some experienced BoG members, including both Deputy Chairs. A review of the priority skills needed by the BoG to move the University forward with its strategic objectives would be carried out following the launch of Marjon 2030.
- 11.4 BoG noted the appointments of Pete Waterfield, Professional Services Staff Governor and Liam Williams, Student Governor, and congratulated them on their election success.
- 11.5 Digital & Physical Infrastructure Group (DPIG) membership for Pete Waterfield and Ann Holman was **APPROVED**.

- **Board Effectiveness Report and Statement**

- 11.6 The report was received. GR noted that the report contained a summary of the Board Effectiveness Review Process 2023-24, encompassing Governor Effectiveness, Board Effectiveness, Committee Effectiveness and the Chair's Effectiveness. A number of strands had fed into this process to provide a comprehensive review; BoG members and ELT were thanked for their contributions and feedback.
- 11.7 GR invited BoG to consider the Chair's Annual Report (Appendix A). The report reflected his conversations with BoG members and summarised key issues and themes for BoG's attention. In particular, GR commended the Vice-Chancellor on her achievements and strategic focus during her first full year in post.
- 11.8 GR noted the expertise of BoG members in a range of areas, and their willingness to support ELT in an advisory manner, which he suggested could be done while respecting the appropriate Board-Executive split in respect of strategic/operational activity.

*GR withdrew from the meeting to allow for a discussion of the Chair's Effectiveness*



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- 11.9 Joint Deputy Chairs of BoG, Prof Patricia Hind and Emma van der Lugt confirmed that Governance & Nominations Committee had received and discussed their report on the Chair's Effectiveness. The Committee had confirmed its robust endorsement of his performance as Chair and the Deputy Chairs summarised the discussions around this. It was suggested that BoG may find it useful to see the extent of GR's engagement with Marjon and stakeholders, which had been shared with the Committee. **ACTION: JT** The Deputy Chairs highlighted the need to consider succession planning. While not a constitutional requirement to do so, BoG **CONFIRMED** the suitability of the Chair to continue in post for 2024-25.

*GR returned to the meeting. GR was thanked for his tremendous dedication to the role.*

- 11.10 BoG confirmed that the Board Effectiveness Review Process (in Part C) was comprehensive and appropriate. It was noted that a peer review of BoG effectiveness with similar-sized HEIs may be beneficial.
- 11.11 The Board Effectiveness Statement 2024-25 (Appendix B) was **APPROVED** and would be published on the University's website.
- 11.12 Governance Officer, Jessamie Thomas, was thanked for the reports.

**Reserved Business** – See *RB minutes*.

#### **Close**

GR invited colleagues to consider whether any of the meeting's discussions impacted on the current Risk Register; no new risks were identified.

In closing the meeting, GR thanked BoG for their support and challenge.

#### **Part B**

The following reports were received and approved:

12. Minutes of Previous BoG Meeting (Extraordinary BoG Meeting 22.04.2024) were received as an accurate record and **APPROVED** with no amendments.
13. Financial Regulations were **APPROVED**.
14. Governors' Handbook was **APPROVED**.

The following reports were received for information:

15. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting
16. Risk Management Update, inclusive of Risk Register
17. MSU Reports:  
-i. Election Report  
-ii. Minutes of Annual General Meeting
18. HESA Staff Return
19. Gender Pay Gap Report

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- 20. Report from Digital & Physical Infrastructure Group (DPIG) meeting 30.04.2024
- 21. Marjon Tenancies
- 22. Amended Bank Loan Approval
- 23. OfS Correspondence: Protests on campus - tackling harassment and securing freedom of speech

**Part C**

The following reports were received as supplementary information:

- C2** Sector Financial Sustainability Overview
- C11** Board Effectiveness: Online Survey Responses
- C11** Board Effectiveness Review Process
- C14** Governors' Handbook 2024-25, including Committee and Senate Terms of Reference 2024-25 and the Board's Register of Interests
- C** Minutes of Committees/Sub-Committees:  
(a) Audit Committee M2 12.03.2024 (b) Finance & Resources Committee: M2 09.02.2024; M3 08.03.2024 (c) Governance & Nominations Committee M2 28.02.2024; (d) People & Organisational Development Sub-Committee 05.06.2024 (unapproved) (d) Senate 28.02.2024; 01.05.2024 (e) Digital & Physical Infrastructure Group (DPIG) 30.04.2024
- C** Schedule of Meeting Dates 2024-25