

SOLIHULL COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY CENTRE

MINUTES OF THE CORPORATION MEETING HELD ON 2nd JULY 2020 ONLINE BY TEAMS, starting at 6pm

PRESENT: Barbara Hughes (Chair)
Paul Assinder
Stan Baldwin
John Callaghan (Principal)
Badri Gargeshnari
Mark Hayes (Staff Governor)
Lucy Lee
Tony Lucas
Sukhdeep Nijjar
Geraldine Swanton
Sally Tomlinson

IN ATTENDANCE: Lindsey Stewart (Deputy Principal and Stratford Chief Operating Officer)
Heather Evans (Vice Principal Finance)
Rebecca Gater (Vice Principal Quality and Curriculum)
Pete Haynes (Vice Principal HR and Student Services)
Rosa Wells (Executive Director Employment & Skills and IoT)
Theresa Lynch (Clerk)

The Chair welcomed all and explained that this was an additional meeting to follow up on the COVID-19 Special Interest Group that took place in May 2020 and to consider the proposed merger with the National College for Advanced Transport & Infrastructure (NCATI).

The Chair explained that today DfE had published new guidance regarding schools and colleges opening in September 2020. The information was being disseminated by the AOC and provided a good resource for understanding how the guidance impacted on the FE sector.

1. Apologies for Absence

There were apologies for absence from Paul Large.

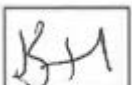
2. Declarations of Interest

There were no new declarations of interest in relation to the agenda.

3. COVID-19 Update

The Principal explained that following the publication of new guidance regarding re-opening the College in September 2020 the management had been working out how this would be implemented. It was noted that the DfE was keen that all schools and colleges re-open fully in the new academic year, but it was necessary to understand how this would work and the extent to which it was possible to support social distancing with a full return of students. The Principal noted that the government was keen to re-ignite the economy as the lockdown was starting to have a detrimental effect on a number of industries / sectors.

The Principal explained that under the previous guidance the plans for September included 50% attendance timetabling, so that only half the group would be in College at any one time. However, following the new guidance, this will not be necessary. The guidance is very much aimed at young people, who are being identified as low risk in terms of transmission and impact. Staff, however, should continue to be protected, maintaining a 2-metre distance from the students and wearing PPE, where appropriate. Detailed plans are being developed based on the current guidance. The College will now be marked out based on 1m-plus guidance and arrangements for the library and catering will be taken into account.



Arrangements for staff are being explored and the guidance does address how shielded and clinically vulnerable staff might start to re-socialise. It will be necessary to support staff to return and it may be necessary to have some difficult conversations where staff are reluctant to return. All measures will be taken to ensure staff feel confident about the COVID-19-related arrangements and the protection in place. It does, however, also state that where staff can work from home that they should continue to do so. Laptops will therefore be purchased to support this. There is also an element of the guidance that suggests that College should be planning for a second lockdown and ensuring online provision is continuing, as there may be a second wave, either locally or nationally. If there is a localised lockdown in Birmingham, it may be necessary to take a view regarding closure of the College as so many of the students are from the Birmingham area.

The Principal noted that there would be an increase in costs to cover additional PPE, increased security as there would need to be additional entrances/exits for the College and increased cleaning.

It was noted that the guidance did prohibit beauty therapy activities and singing and shouting and would therefore have an inevitable impact on some areas of provision include Hair and Beauty, Performing Arts. Creative solutions are currently being explored.

Q. Good evidence that COVID-19 is more of a risk for the BAME community – is the College looking at risk assessments for staff and/or learners?

A. The Principal explained that the guidance had not indicated that the BAME community was high risk. It had identified some high-risk groups. So it was felt that it may not be appropriate to treat people differently and make assumptions on behalf of the BAME community. Questionnaires have been sent to staff to ask them to identify any characteristics that make them vulnerable to raise these with their line managers and deal with these issues on a case-by-case basis. It is important to ensure that the College follows the guidance and it does not highlight the BAME community in particular. The conversations with each individual are key in ensuring that the College supports staff well and addresses their specific issues. This was supported on the basis that making assumptions about people based on their ethnicity or race could mean that the College would be vulnerable to a subsequent claim. Dealing with staff and students based on their individual profile and needs was extremely important.

Q. Could there be difficulties around staff coming back?

A. Yes, it could be an area of concern. All activity has been based on the DfE guidance and this will continue, but it will mean that more staff will need to be in College, so it will be necessary to be supportive, but clear that this must happen with all the necessary protection that will be in place. The Joint Consultative Group has been very supportive about working towards getting students back in College.

Q. How are students feeling about coming back into College?

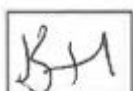
A. The Principal noted that some students had done very well working online, particularly Level 3 students who understand how to learn independently. Some poor attenders, whose issues were with their peers, have thrived online, so it is important to really enhance the online opportunities to provide a differentiated approach. It is, however, much more difficult to provide practical experiences, so there is a need for students to be in College and for learners who find it difficult to learn alone. There will a focus on vulnerable and EHCP students coming into College. Travelling on public transport may be an issue. The small numbers currently coming into College is going well and there have been no issues. Good communication will be needed for both staff and students and with getting plans for September finalised.

Q. What are the COVID-19-related costs?

A. Details will be presented at Corporation on 8th July 2020 outlining the costs relating to COVID-19.

Q. How inclusive are the plans in terms of student and staff input?

A. The surveys reflected on how things had been during the closure, but also asked about feelings about returning in August. The link to the guidance released on 2nd July 2020 will be



circulated to all staff. There have been a number of meetings with the JCG. Managers have been asked to discuss plans with their staff and obtain feedback. The Principal has had Q&A sessions with staff and these have involved about 40-50 staff at each session. Interaction generally has been positive. The survey did confirm that staff felt that communication had been good and that they had felt included throughout the process.

Reset and recovery plan – the Chair noted that the detailed plan had been circulated. Clarity was sought regarding the categories and it was noted that it related to the inherent and residual risk levels and related mitigation. It was noted that it was a live document and would be reviewed and updated following the recent guidance published. The Clerk noted that there would be a poll on BoardEffects for Governors to complete to confirm their approval. **ACTION.**

The Vice Principal HR and Student Services presented the student survey outcomes and noted that this replaced the usual May progression survey that students completed. Action had to be taken very quickly upon closure to move onto remote learning. The results were very positive from 2,277 respondents across all student groups. About 75% of students were content with the amount of information received about their learning, with slightly higher levels of satisfaction in the 16-18 year olds. Satisfaction for EHCP learnings was in line with the overall cohort.

Q. Would satisfaction for 19+ students normally be lower than that for 16-18?

A. No not usually – we have been able to identify the areas where students were less satisfied, so it would be possible to target support in that curriculum area if there was another lockdown.

The Chair noted that the feedback was largely positive, however, there were still about 200 students who disagreed strongly with some of the statements.

Q. Could governors see the comments from students as was provided for the staff survey?

A. To some extent, it would be expected that students doing a practical subject might be dissatisfied. It may be that some students are sharing laptops or have limited online access. It may be that some of the issues were not issues relating to the College. Adults may have some issues as there were areas where some staff did not call them as often as they expected. Ofsted would be publishing 10 surveys that they had carried out and this would be useful to compare with the College. A summary of the Student Survey comments would be provided for Governors. **ACTION.**

Q. The questions relating to not knowing who to contact or how to get support were a concern.

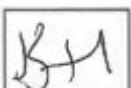
A. The responses had been analysed down to course level, so it was possible to target where the concerns lay and see where action was being taken and, should a second lockdown occur, these areas would be targeted for support.

It was noted that the response from staff about the excellent communication by the management, but particularly by the Principal, was particularly good during a very difficult time.

RESOLVED to approve the College's re-opening arrangements following the COVID-19 crisis and closure.

4. **National College for Advanced Transport & Infrastructure (NCATI) SPA – Expression of Interest**

The Principal provided information regarding the context of the National College and the current situation regarding the request for expressions of interest to merge with NCATI. He noted that building a new Hub at Aston, when the space in the national college could be used seemed to be a waste of public money. The Executive Director Employment & Skills and IoT would lead the project working in partnership with the HEIs and colleges involved in the IoT. All partners were supportive of the project. It was noted that discussions had taken place with Doncaster College and Sheffield Hallam University, who were submitting a bid for the NCATI in Doncaster. They were going ahead on the same basis and there would be on-going liaison with them to ensure the national nature of the College was maintained.



The Principal confirmed that the expression of interest was based on the NCATI's debt being cleared prior to merger and subject to the normal full legal and financial due diligence process.

A potential merger was very attractive, dependent on the agreement relating to debt, but it was noted that a full commitment would not be necessary until later in the process when the full details were known. The ESFA and FE Commissioner seemed content with the initial discussion, being very aware that a number of providers in the sector at the moment were likely to have a very low appetite for risk following the problems raised during the COVID-19 crisis.

The Executive Director Employment & Skills and IoT confirmed that it was not planned that the merged college would be a delivery college, instead, it was anticipated that it would perform like an IoT. It would be a Hub for the partners with specific specialism to deliver to large group sizes. This ensured that the cost base was kept low, whilst ensuring a lively and dynamic college in a central location.

Q. Will the specialist equipment that was planned for the IoT still be part of the plan?

A. There would be both the High-Speed 2 specialist equipment and that planned for the IoT in the NCATI building. This will then be available for all engineering students at the partner institutions across the region. There will be some delivery but it will be minimal.

Q. Why did the National College fail? Was it due to mismanagement or was the project flawed in some way?

A. The College was set up to provide skills for HS2 that were not going to be required for 10 years. Further, it was put next to two Birmingham universities, but neither were involved in the project. In essence the project was flawed from its inception. In the planned merger it will provide the front to a number of key educational institutions in the region working in partnership and using current skills and specialisms, with a small amount of delivery onsite. It will provide a good opportunity to plan the strategic delivery of level 6, 7 and 8 engineering with the colleges providing levels 4 and 5 in partnership.

Q. What is the timescale for the project?

A. The presentation will be the 28th July 2020. The Principal, the Executive Director Employment & Skills and IoT and a representative from Aston University will present to the panel. Thereafter there will be a need for the current learners to transfer to the new provider as soon as possible. The ESFA and FE Commissioner want the process completed by December 2020.

Q. What is the situation regarding staff?

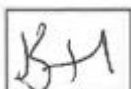
A. The NCATI staffing seems to be very complex and there doesn't seem to be clarity regarding current arrangements, but it is likely that new staff will be taken on.

Q. There could be opportunities for the College, however, will the EOI [expression of interest] be submitted based on the understanding that the College will walk away if there are risks or doubts?

A. Yes, that will be case if there are large risks or doubts, but as long as there is little or no debt, there is already agreement that the College will invest in the IoT Hub at Aston, with the Executive Director Employment & Skills and IoT managing it. It would mean the IoT can get up and running a lot quicker, the costs are already known and the IoT could be in a prestigious building under the current circumstances previously agreed by the Corporation. The Principal confirmed that if there was any additional risk or liabilities then the proposal would be re-visited.

The Chair summarised that the current proposal was that the EOI be submitted based on no further financial commitment by the College and that the current IoT investment would be used to take the merger forward, but that this was a positive project for the region and resolved the issues regarding the NCATI. If there was to be any further investment or any additional risk the proposal will be considered further by the Corporation.

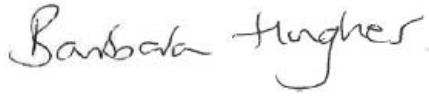
RESOLVED to approve the National College for Advanced Transport & Infrastructure (NCATI) SPA (Structure and Prospects Appraisal) and that the Expression of Interest be submitted by 6th July 2020.



5. Date of the next meeting

The date of the next meeting will be Wednesday 8th July 2020 start time to be confirmed.

The meeting finished at 7.20pm.



Signed: _____

08 July 2020

Date: _____

Chair's electronic signature applied during Covid-19 College closure, with approval