

Minutes of the Corporation Meeting held on 10 December 2020 online by MS Teams, starting at 5.30 pm

Present

- Barbara Hughes (Chair)
- Paul Assinder
- Stan Baldwin
- Scott Beasley
- John Callaghan (Principal)
- Tasleem Chaudary
- Badri Gargeshnari
- Sarah Horton-Walsh
- Raees Iqbal (Student Governor) (left at 6.30)
- Lisa Jones
- Neil Ladwa (External Member)
- Lucy Lee
- Tony Lucas
- Stuart Lyons (Student Governor)
- 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)
- Theresa Lynch (Clerk)

The meeting was recorded.

The Chair welcomed new Governors Tasleem Chaudary, Neil Ladwa and Lisa Jones to their first meeting of the Corporation. She explained that the meeting focussed very much on quality, reviewing the Self-Assessment Report for 2019/20. It was noted that some questions had been received in advance, and that this process did facilitate online meetings. The Chair requested that Governors confirm approval of items, as required, on the chat.

The top 3 key risks were included with the agenda to highlight for Governors areas to consider when discussing the business for the meeting. Clarity was sought regarding the identified impact score (4 Major) of the College being unable to maintain 'Good' Financial Health as a result of the impact of COVID-19, as it was felt that this score was high, given that the College was likely to be able to continue to function with poor financial health, at least, for a period of time. The Vice Principal Finance explained that the initial scores were based on no controls being in place, but confirmed that the College was likely to be able to continue to function with a poor financial health grade.

1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Paul Large and Geraldine Swanton.

2. **Declarations of Interest in relation to this agenda**

There were no new declarations of interest.

3. **Minutes of the meetings of the Audit Committee and Corporation held on 30th November 2020**

The minutes of the meeting held on 30th November 2020 were **agreed** as a true and accurate record and signed with the Chair's e-signature. The Clerk noted that the Audit Committee section of the minutes was currently draft and some amendments had been suggested, that would be received by the next meeting of the Audit Committee.

A list of outstanding actions had been prepared for the current term and 2019/20. The Vice Principal HR and Student Services explained that he had reviewed the suggestion to implement blind interviewing and he confirmed that this would be fed back in due course. **Action.**

4. COVID-19 Update

The Principal provided a verbal update on the College's processes and response to the COVID-19 crisis. He described the complex, daily reporting requirements introduced by the DfE, starting on 19th October 2020. He noted, however, that the data submitted was not available on the DfE website, as it was for schools.

The Principal showed a graph demonstrating the number of positive cases for staff and students since 19th October 2020 and noted that numbers had maintained at relatively low levels, although there had been an increase following the half term break. The information had been shared with the senior management team and would be shared with staff. The data showed that arrangements put in place had been effective. Evidence suggested that the majority of contraction of the virus was community based, rather than within the College.

Teaching would be continuing to the end of term with some online lessons. Staff were being given laptops and planning was on-going to ensure contingency planning should there be a further lockdown. Exams took place in November 2020 with issues around breaking the bubbles created, but the College had to comply with DfE requirements to undertake the exams or risk loss of funding. It was noted that the Exams Manager had contracted COVID-19 and been away from College for most of the half term. She had now recovered and returned to College. Over 2000 students would be taking exams from 8th January 2021 and it was likely that this would create further issues regarding spread of the virus and disadvantage for some students should they show symptoms. Public Health England were working with the College to plan LFD testing for January 2021 for asymptomatic people to try to reduce further contraction of the virus. January would be difficult, but it was hoped that thereafter, it would be a more positive way forward with testing and vaccines rolling out. It was disappointing that teachers and front-line education staff were not on the priority list for vaccines.

Thanks were expressed that the 1% pay award had been agreed, as it had provided motivation for staff at an important and difficult time and this demonstrated how much they are appreciated.

Q. Are the numbers in line with the local area in terms of spikes of COVID-19 positive cases?

A. Although the data has not been compared directly, it is believed that the numbers at the College are very low compared to the community data. Further, it is difficult to know which communities to compare with, as students come from Birmingham wards, as well as Solihull and infection rate data for each ward is very different.

Q. What is planned for students who cannot attend for exams due to showing symptoms? What will happen if a student does have COVID-19 and cannot do their exam?

A. Guidance is awaited, as the current guidance simply states that students will sit their exams. Guidance for A Levels and GCSEs had been provided, which set out how the curriculum and exams would be adapted to reflect the issues presented by COVID-19, however, no further guidance had yet been provided for BTEC. The College would continue to plan for the exams to take place from 8th January 2021 and adapt as required as guidance was made available.

Q. Regarding HE provision and guidance for students to return to campus – does this affect the College?

A. Most of the guidance seems to have been about the accommodation and residential elements, which does not apply to the College as students live at home. The College is monitoring and reviewing the guidance continually. It has been easier for HE and adult students to move to online provision and it is working well, although feedback from students is that they do want to come into College and are missing the social element and College-buzz.

The Chair expressed, on behalf of the Corporation, thanks to the Principal, his Managers and all staff for their commitment to the students in trying to maintain a positive experience, quality teaching and learning throughout a very difficult time and in relation to the many challenges

posed by the COVID-19 crisis. The Principal noted that in setting the character of the College, the Governors had been instrumental in maintaining and facilitating the work of managers and staff in continuing to ensure a humane and caring environment that provided the best possible experience for students in the current circumstances.

5. **Self-Assessment Report 2019/20 and Quality Improvement Plan 2020/21**

The Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality presented the Self-Assessment Report (SAR) for 2019/20 and it was noted that the final version, which included an update on Apprenticeship achievement, would be sent to Governors following the meeting. **Action.** The Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) provided an update on progress to Dec 2020.

The Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality explained that the SAR was based on the new Ofsted Education Inspection Framework and noted that judgements had been changed to reflect this. Areas for Improvement are clearly cross referenced with the QIP.

Q. How can we address the objective to close the age and gender apprenticeship achievement gaps?

A. A new dashboard for apprenticeships is being created which will replicate the processes and information provided for FE students. It will be possible to report on the protected characteristics and this will allow staff to monitor progress of these groups. In terms of closing the gap, it is difficult to identify real gaps, because sometimes the numbers can be very small. However, in terms of age it is clear that adults don't tend to achieve as well as younger students, so this is an area where additional funding could be used more to support students with a range of challenges and barriers to study. Size of cohorts is one reason, however, there can be other issues where there are genuine gaps that need to be addressed to identify and respond to individual needs. It is necessary to address individual issues to remove barriers and challenges.

Q. What will be the approach to improving attendance levels in the light of the impact of the pandemic?

A. Students can now link remotely into lessons on Teams and a new register mark has been created to reflect this type of attendance, so this will help with attendance rates.

Q. Do we know why male apprenticeships achievement data is worse than for female?

A. The Principal explained that the length of course can be very different based on subject area, with some courses being up to 4 years. These provide a challenge in being able to keep track of students who are moving with their career and for the student to continue for the full years and achieve the qualifications. It was also noted that the College was only one element in the direction for apprentices, with the impact of employers and national issues being seen during the pandemic, with many students being furloughed or made redundant, which will necessarily impact on College data.

Q. The balance of synchronous and asynchronous learning, teaching and assessment will have changed dramatically in response to the pandemic. From what we are learning, might this lead to a more permanent use of some asynchronous processes in the future?

A. It was confirmed that this would be the case and through the Business Planning process curriculum delivery with an asynchronous element would continue to be developed.

Q. It may be useful for new Governors to understand how Ofsted will use the SAR?

A. The Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality explained that, once approved, the SAR would be uploaded to the Ofsted portal and they would review it, alongside other documentation and data, to identify any lines of enquiries for inspection.

Q. Does every student have access to a laptop at home? Is there any data regarding access levels and contingencies that maybe required should there be a further lock-down.

A. The Principal noted that not all students had access to a laptop at home. With 9,000 students and laptops currently costing about £600, it was not possible for the College to fund laptops for all students. There is, however, a bursary that can provide support. He noted that the free DfE laptops provided during the pandemic had been for schools and no provision had been made for colleges. It was also noted even families who had adequate provision of devices were often struggling with

adequate wi-fi connection, so the issue of access to IT affected quite a large number of students. The College was working to support remote access for students.

The Principal explained that it was anticipated that colleges would only be closed as a last resort, so it was expected that face to face teaching and learning would continue. Further, students seemed to prefer to come into College if possible and the College would aim to offer an open College as much as possible. Data regarding the Learning from Home Survey was provided on the chat:

1285 responses 4 themes:

1. Access to devices - laptops more prevalent than home desktops. 97% have access to smart phone (12% smart phone is their only access). Over 80% of students can access appropriate device.
2. Connectivity - majority have internet connection with good levels of connectivity (video streaming etc.). Over 75% students have apple device.
3. Digital skills - most confident using email, software. least confident in mapping software, changing software to meet individual needs.
4. Environment for learning - positive generally. 37% have some concerns about ability to complete task at home.

Resolved to approve the Self-Assessment Report (SAR) for 2019/20 and Quality Improvement Plan for 2020/21 and confirmed that the Chair should sign the final version of the SAR.

6. In-Year Student Progress Report 2020/21

The Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality presented the report and highlighted the key points. It was noted that there had been a shift to Level 3 RQF qualifications. This meant that there was no coursework during the Autumn term, as students were preparing for exams in January. This would impact on progress data for some subject areas, like Health and Social Care and Engineering. Results would be available in March 2021.

The Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality explained that there had been a period of adjustment for many students as many had missed a period of education in the summer term 2020 and were moving to a higher level of study. This meant that there were some curriculum areas with 'red' indicators and this generally meant that students had received 'referral' grades. They would then receive feedback and repeat assessments to ensure improvement and demonstrate progress.

In terms of apprenticeships there had been a delay to end point assessments. This was a result of the pandemic and could be due to exam boards delaying assessment, apprentices being furloughed and due to employers, like hairdressers, having to close for substantial periods of time over the last 9 months. Assessments were, therefore, unlikely to be timely, but the College was working closely with students and employers to ensure they were able to get back on track.

Q. How and by when will students and apprentices make the necessary improvements to achieve and exceed their target grade? Some areas are showing students 1-3 grades away from their targets plus those who have deferred. How achievable is this compared to last year's 'in-year progress' at this time?

A. The stage of the year is important to note, as mentioned above, and the difficulties and challenges for students during 2020. However, the data compared to 2019 has improved with Level 2 increasing from 46% to 54% and Level 3 improving from 28% to 45%. So, it seems that students are working hard and progressing well compared to 2019 data at the same stage of the year.

Q. How should we interpret the numbers shown in the graphs, particularly for Travel & Tourism and Motor Vehicle? (Page 137 / 138)

A. The Vice Principal confirmed that the graphs identified required further data to be added. She explained that she would provide the updated graphs for circulation. **Action.**

7. Deep Dives Autumn 2020

The Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality presented the report and confirmed that deep dives had started in October 2020 and each school was being visited in an order of priority, based on the QIP. Three and six month follow-up visits have been planned to review and monitor progress throughout the year. This is alongside the normal quality cycle processes. Actions and structures in place to support improvement were explained. Best practice was being shared across campuses, where provision was across the College, to ensure equally high levels of quality.

Q. How much confidence do you have that those areas that need to improve will do so before the end of the year?

A I have high levels of confidence as we have a number of interventions which are in place to support areas to improve. This academic year, we have also added a 3 month and a 6 month follow up of deep dives including the lead and head of school, to review the impact of the post deep dive action plan (which is incorporated in the school QIP). We target CPD where required either to the whole team or to individuals, and can also add programmes we deem to be at risk into the Intensive Care process.

Q How are the deep dives viewed by the staff involved?

A One School had fed back that it was a more in-depth process than they had anticipated, but that they did enjoy showing their School, enjoyed being scrutinised and receiving the feedback from students and stakeholders as appropriate. For many Schools this is the second year of deep dives and many felt that it is good preparation for Ofsted.

Q Regarding the 4-year courses are they risk-rated highly for deep dives?

A Deep dives relate to whole School scrutiny, rather than programme-specific reviews. Where a programme is highlighted as an area for improvement, this will be monitored and reviewed through the Intensive Care quality process. This will be monitored at course level and will review student progress throughout the year. The Deep Dive process is informed by the SAR, with Schools highlighted as areas for concern. These Schools are visited first during the academic year.

8. Evaluation of Teaching and Learning Policy 2020/21

The Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality presented the report and explained that the changes reflected changed terminology to incorporate online learning. She noted that this included asynchronous lessons being quality assured in the same way as synchronous lessons, with learning visits and drop-ins (walk-throughs). The Policy had been shared with staff, assessors and unions and feedback had been received and incorporated. Clarity was provided regarding announced and unannounced visits and it was noted that staff were being asked for their preference and this would inform the section on announced and unannounced visits.

Q It is good to see the Policy has been adapted to reflect COVID-19 and consultation with staff. when will Governors be able to carry out drop-ins in 2021?

A It was noted that visits were scheduled for w/c 2nd February 2021. It was likely that these would become online Focus Groups again, but that as soon as COVID-19 guidance allowed Governors would be very welcome to come into College to conduct drop-in visits.

Q The learning cycle visits are 15 mins long - is this long enough?

A It is a short time, but alongside other measures it builds a picture from a range of activities, so is only part of the quality processes to build an overall picture of a member of staff's practice. The learning visits are developmental and don't include a grade or pass/fail. They are separate from appraisal and disciplinary processes.

Q How well do managers/Heads of School know their teachers and assessors in terms of their practice/delivery?

A Very well. They visit staff and students regularly. Currently there are zoned areas, so managers and Heads of School visit lessons often. The Open-Door Policy accommodates this further.

It was noted that discussion was underway to invite some Heads of School to attend Corporation meetings to present on implementation and impact and follow-up on the Intent presentations.

Resolved to approve the Teaching and Learning Policy, subject to the update on announced/unannounced visits section. **Action.**

9. **Complaints Report and Concerns and Complaints Policy Review**

The Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality presented the report and noted that there was minimal change. She noted that there were fewer complaints compared with 2019.

Q Could you tell us about the typical learning points for staff and the College that result from the complaints? For example, what improvements if any have been made to enrolment and interview?

A The Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality explained that complaints received regarding the new enrolment and interview processes in 2020 were being evaluated to ensure that they are improved for 2021. The Deputy Principal explained that staff needed additional development in guiding students through the process, as this was new to all. It was noted that the number of complaints were relatively low considering the high number of students that were enrolled and many were very positive about the process. The Principal noted that there was a need to address the HE student enrolment as it tended to be a more complex process. He noted the enrolment had been very positive through a growth in numbers and it seemed that many had been retained during the Autumn Term.

Resolved to approve the Concerns and Complaints Policy.

10. **Code of Ethics and Conduct for Staff and Governors**

The Vice Principal HR and Student Services presented the report and explained that it was part of the normal review process. The changes identified related to cross-reference, with regard to staff interests, with the Financial Regulations. Further, clarity regarding breaches of the code were included. It was noted, however, that the section relating to the Principal's role, should disciplinary action be required, be removed as this was covered within the disciplinary procedures.

Resolved to approve the Code of Ethics and Conduct for Staff and Governors, subject to removal of the section relating to disciplinary action, as described.

11. **Governance Matters**

11.1 **Governance SAR**

The Chair presented the Governance SAR for 2020. She noted that it incorporated feedback from the individual self-assessment meetings and the self-assessment questionnaires. Feedback had been very positive, but where areas were identified for improvement, these were included in the report for action during 2021. It was noted that the suggestion to have an external review of governance was currently on-hold, as it was felt that it was not the right time for such a review and as the review was very expensive, was not felt to present value for money at the current time. There had been an internal audit that had provided an element of external assurance.

Resolved to approve Governance Self-Assessment Report.

11.2 **Governors' Handbook**

The Clerk presented the Governors' Handbook which had been reviewed by the Search and Governance Committee in October 2020. One element had been changed in relation to the Handbook since the Committee meeting relating to the requirement for Special Interest Groups to have terms of reference. It was noted that following the Internal Audit there were likely to be further amendments, but these would be incorporated following the final meeting of the Compliance, Risk and Value for Money SIG in the Spring Term.

It was confirmed that Governors would be asked to confirm that they had read the Governors' Handbook via BoardEffects early in 2021. **Action.**

Resolved to approve the Governors' Handbook.

12. Agenda for Governors' Strategic morning on 6th February 2021

The Chair presented the agenda for the Governors' Strategy session scheduled for 6th February 2021. It was likely that this session would be on Teams. She explained that the Strategic Plan had not been updated in 2020 due to the pandemic, as had been approved by the Corporation. It was now time to review and update the Plan.

The Principal explained that it was timely to start to consider the strategy for the College going forward, following a very difficult year, but also in terms of national proposals and guidance for the role of FE for the future. This included frameworks for working with other organisations based on available funding. A White Paper was anticipated and was important to inform the College's strategy. There were some key documents that it would be useful for Governors to read prior to the session to inform strategic direction.

Detailed discussion about the short, medium and long term strategy for the College was important and it seemed like an appropriate time to really re-address key opportunities and review the College's current position. A pre-meeting will take place to establish key questions for consideration and Governors will be asked to undertake pre-reading. Then the direction agreed will be developed into a draft Plan for consideration and approval later in the academic year. The Chair noted that the individual meetings with Governors had reflected this approach, in being fully involved in planning the strategic direction and Governors were invited to be involved in the pre-meeting. It was suggested that Education Training Foundation Questions (used in the recently published College of the Future report) be incorporated to drive the agenda forward.

13. Regular Reports

13.1 Use of the College Seal and Chair's E-Signature

The contents of the use of the College Seal and Chair's E-Signature were received for information.

13.2 Bids and Projects Report

The contents of the Bids and Projects Report were received for information.

13.3 Tender Update Report

The contents of the Tender Update Report were received for information.

13.4 PMR October 2020

The contents of the October 2020 PMR were received for information.

Q. Why has the forecast Pay – Admin & Central line increased by over 10% compared to the original budget? (Page 277)

A. In total the pay costs have not changed significantly. Savings have been made across all lines, so it more about how the information is presented, rather than an actual increase in costs.

14. Date of the next meeting

The date of the next meeting was Wednesday 27th January 2021 at 5.30pm on MS Teams. The Governors' Development Session was scheduled for Saturday 6th February 2021 9.30-1pm (tbc).

Governor Briefings and Special Interest Groups

- Thursday 21st January 2021 at 5pm – HE Briefing
- Monday 1st February 2021 at 5.15pm – Pension Briefing with WMPF Representative
- W/c 1st February 2021 – Student Focus Groups
- Thursday 11th February 2021 time to be confirmed – Audit Tender Services
- Compliance, Risk and Value for Money – date to be confirmed.

The meeting ended at 7.15pm.

Signed:



Date: 27 January 2021