

Solihull College and University Centre

Minutes of the Corporation Meeting held on 30 September 2020 online by MS Teams, starting at 6.00 pm

Present

Barbara Hughes (Chair)
Paul Assinder
Stan Baldwin
Scott Beasley
John Callaghan (Principal)
Badri Gargeshnari
Carol Harvey-Barnes (Staff Governor)
Sarah Horton-Walsh
Raees Iqbal (Student Governor) (*intermittent access*)
Paul Large
Tony Lucas
Stuart Lyons (Student Governor)
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)
Theresa Lynch (Clerk)

Rosa Wells (Executive Director Employment & Skills and IoT) *Item 5*
Adam Thomas (Director of Student Services) *Item 8 only*

The meeting was recorded.

The Chair welcomed all and especially welcomed the new governors to their first meeting: Carol Harvey-Barnes (Staff Governor), Scott Beasley and Sarah Horton-Walsh. She noted that the focus for the evening was on an early indication of how the academic year had started in with regard to recruitment and induction and current issues relating to the on-going challenges posed by COVID-19.

1. Apologies for Absence

There were apologies for absence from Lucy Lee.

2. Declarations of Interest

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

3. Minutes of Previous Meetings and Matters Arising

The minutes of the meetings held on 8th July 2020 were **agreed** as a true and accurate record and signed with the Chair's e-signature. The notes of the inquorate meeting, held in light of COVID-19 and the arrangements for full re-opening of the College, on 26th August 2020 were received for information.

The Chair's Action to approve the updated Full Re-opening Plan was ratified.

The Chair noted that whenever an item required approval Governors were asked to provide their approval via the Chat function for each item.

3.1 TGH Overage Payments

Q. Overage payments from MACC Group appears to be important for the College's financial position going forward. Is it possible to have assurance that there are no financial issues relating to the MACC Group, given the difficulties being experienced across the care sector at the moment?

A. Full due diligence was completed when the MACC Group bought the site and project. The second payment is higher than anticipated initially. Planning permissions had recently been obtained, so the project was progressing well. There was regular contact between MACC Group and EMT.

It was noted that the original overage payment following planning permission had been £2.3m, but this had increased by £1.4m, as MACC Group had increased the size of the development.

3.2 Enrolment Update

Q. It was noted that the notes from the previous meeting had indicated online enrolment numbers of 2,200, which seemed to be half of the required numbers. Was there an update?

A. The Principal explained that at the same time in 2019 there had been 1,687 enrolments, so this year was in line and these numbers at that of the enrolment period was very positive.

4. September Full Re-Opening Plan Update

The Principal provided an update on full College re-opening in September 2020 and provided early indications relating to recruitment, finance and quality.

It was noted that after 4 weeks on-site there was still a lot of face to face delivery taking place, with some remote learning and hybrid arrangements. Anxiety levels were increasing as the infection rate was rising, but generally staff and students were working well.

4.1 Recruitment

The Principal noted that 16-18 year old numbers were up 300 on target. The data was being purged to remove any anomalies to authenticate the numbers as quickly as possible. A case was being submitted to the ESFA to request in-year funding for the increased numbers. It was noted that the adult enrolments would be more challenging, as they seemed more reticent to attend.

It was noted that the WMCA were concerned about the impact of the pandemic and lockdown on the West Midlands region, particularly in relation to the automotive industry.

The Principal noted that apprenticeships were down by about 30% on starts, but that it would equate to that level in terms of income. Tenders were being submitted to local councils and some large contracts would have a positive impact throughout the year. Apprenticeships were challenging nationally with visits to workplaces being difficult and some professional companies deciding not to recruit at all this year, in an endeavour to protect their current workforce.

HE too had been challenging due to COVID-19 and the impact on HEIs who had lost international income and had made additional offers to home students. This had had an impact on some College applicants.

The Principal confirmed that income targets in the budget, approved in July 2020 had been reduced in anticipation of COVID-19 implications.

4.2 Finance

The Principal noted that it was very early in the year and the current activity was to validate the student numbers data as much as possible. This would underpin assessment of the 2020/21 financial position that would be shared with Governors in detail at the Finance Special Interest

Group due to take place on 23rd October 2020. It was noted that there had been additional costs for IT and PPE and it was anticipated that this was likely to be in the region of £1m over the year. There were also likely to be additional costs for security and cleaning, whilst income for catering was very low.

Additional income (not contained within the budget) for the year was noted relating to TGH overage payments, Stratford car park and the CWLEP grant, as well as, catch up funding and capital funding that would be available.

Q. Governors' Dashboard – are the figures still 2019/20?

A. Normally the current year is set up at the end of October 2020 when the genuine picture in relation to student numbers and finance is clearer.

Q. Staff were concerned in the survey in the summer about returning to College – how are they feeling now, particularly with regard to cleanliness?

A. All groups remain in one classroom, so there is limited movement around the College. Cleaning is a continual challenge, but there is on-going work to make it better. Each member of staff had received a bag with sanitizer and related items which they were using to clean work areas.

Q. Good to see the initial financial indications, but do we know what the impact is on cashflow?

A. It is currently a little early to be accurate, but with a payment of £1.6m from the ESFA cashflow is currently good. Further information will be available at the Finance Special Interest Group meeting on 23rd October 2020. **Action.**

Q. It is positive that in such a volatile period the College's core strength business, 16-18 is doing well.

A. Yes, 16-18 is over 50% of the College's income (65% of grant income). The core business is strong.

Q. Were the 2 COVID-19 positive staff student-facing?

A. The Principal confirmed that one had not been student-facing and one was a technician.

The Student Governors confirmed that arrangements that had been put in place to address COVID-19 issues had been very impressive and staff had been very professional in ensuring safety, whilst maintaining a full curriculum offer, as far as possible.

Q. Has the College been involved in COVID-19 testing or would it be considered?

A. The College has had some testing kits that have been used by staff. Solihull MBC did ask if the College site could be used for COVID-19 testing, but had to be careful not to discourage students and staff coming on site. The Council found another site. The College is very happy to help Solihull MBC in any way that is possible and do work very closely with them on responses to COVID-19 related issues.

4.3 Quality and Initial Ofsted Feedback

The Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality explained that there had been a 2-day Ofsted visit early in September 2020. The feedback was positive and the hard work in the College to support students had been acknowledged. The visit provided assurance that the College was making every effort to provide support and learning for learners. The Ofsted feedback letter was currently awaited and would be discussed at the Governors' Development Day. **Action.**

5. Curriculum Intent – Apprenticeships

The Executive Director Employment & Skills and IoT provided an overview of the curriculum intent for apprenticeships. She noted that curriculum development was informed by sector growth/decline, employer feedback and providing progression routes up to level 7.

She confirmed that the Business Elevator ESF funded programme with South and City College and BMet had been extended. It aimed to grow SME/Microbusiness engagement. A new project with Birmingham City University called STEM-Up had started. It aimed to provide mentoring for

those in work and those seeking work to support them to progress into apprenticeships. Tenders were also being submitted for a range of apprenticeship opportunities.

It was noted that employers were encouraged by the collaborative nature of the partnerships in the locality between the local colleges and universities. The curriculum development for the Institute of Technology was noted.

Q. A useful presentation and demonstrates how apprenticeships fit in with the curriculum areas. Whilst we appreciate that the reduction in numbers in Engineering reflects the national picture, is the decline likely to impact on the IoT and in what way?

A. There will be some impact on the IoT in 2020/21. As the DfE allowed the College to use 2019/20 numbers for Year 1, that is a good indication of what the partners can achieve and allows the IoT to contextualise 2020/21 based on the issues that have affected all institutions. It is anticipated that achievement will be about 50% of the targets, but numbers were still being collated from the partners and, further, employers are contacting the partners all the time with new contracts.

Apprenticeships is a dynamic area, which is very much based on market demand, rather than as indicated in other presentations where the College can plan the curriculum development on a longer-term intent. There was, however, a great need for the College to be very responsive to a continually changing market for apprenticeships.

The Executive Director Employment & Skills and IoT was thanked.

6. Performance Against Target

6.1 Update on Performance against Target for 2019/20 and Set Targets for 2020/21

The Deputy Principal explained that the targets for 2020/21 were still being developed and would be presented at the next meeting. Actual outcomes for 2019/20 were generally in line with targets set. It was noted that the target for 2020/21 for attendance would remain at 90%, even though the challenges presented by COVID-19 in terms of students not always being able to attend may impact on being able to achieve this target.

6.2 Interim Achievement Report 2019/20 to date

The Deputy Principal presented the report and noted that the outcomes were based on Centre Assessed Grades (CAGs). Setting targets would be difficult if CAGs were to be produced again. Generally, outcomes were good for 2019/20, but it was a developing picture as some results were still being added.

Q. Encouraging to see the development in English and maths, particularly English, but note that maths remains an area for improvement.

A. Yes, that is correct. There won't be any national averages this year, due to all centres entering CAGs.

7. Quality Update

7.1 Quality Improvement Plan Update

The Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality presented the report and noted that areas for improvement that were being addressed in the first part of 2019/20 are being followed through into 2020/21, due to the 6-month lockdown, that in some areas did impede the extent of improvement that was anticipated and the demonstration of impact. As confidence builds throughout the year those areas that improve markedly can be removed from the QIP as appropriate.

The most up-to-date QIP would be added to the Governors' Dashboard following some further outcomes being added. **Action.**

7.2 Quality Strategy and Cycle 2020/21

The Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality presented the report and explained that there would be an increased focus on quality of remote synchronous (lessons in real time) and asynchronous learning in deep dives. She noted that the Evaluating Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy would be presented at a future meeting. Work was underway with Unions to ensure the Policy is robust and meets the College's needs. It will explain the rationale for new processes including QIP meetings with each Head of School and verification sampling reviews that will ensure all awarding body expectations are met. The Quality Cycle for 2020/21 was explained, with changes relating to whole College development day activities and the timing relating to the start of quality processes from October 2020.

Q. Are there any issues from the Unions with recording teaching sessions for remote learning (UCU have raised this issue in HEIs)? The quality of remote learning will be key to deter complaints, particularly for HE.

A. Unions have been engaged with the development of remote learning throughout the period and they have been involved in the development Evaluating Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy. There is due to be a meeting, so there may be an update in relation to this then.

Q. Governor engagement – is it the intention that Governors attend the Focus Groups?

A. Yes, these are to replace the learning walk-throughs so that Governors have an opportunity to talk to students about their experience this half-term. It was noted that the information would be circulated to Governors in due course as details of the process were still be developed. **Action.**

7.3 Governor Engagement

It was noted that there had been a lot of activity involving governors including learning walk-throughs and regular reporting, but that that too had been impeded by the lockdown. Activities would be scheduled, in line with COVID-19 regulations, to ensure that governors continue to engage with staff and students to see teaching and learning, engage with online SAR validation and consider feedback from students through Student Focus Groups.

8. Safeguarding Annual Report and Policy Update

The Chair noted that there would be a safeguarding and PREVENT briefing at the Governors' Development session on 10th October 2020.

The Director of Student Services noted that the guidance for Keeping Children Safe in Education had been updated for September 2020, although further changes were anticipated later in the year. The current changes incorporated the increased need for staff to recognise that mental health could become a safeguarding concern. Guidance on sex violence and harassment had been included. Recognition of young people with social workers as a vulnerable group was highlighted. Changes to the Safeguarding Policy had been made to reflect the changes, as required.

Data relating to referrals and safeguarding cases was discussed and changes from the previous year, including potential reasons for these changes, were noted. Information was considered regarding arrangements and data during lockdown. Staff supervision was disrupted during lockdown, but was resumed online from September 2020.

Q. There had been a significant drop in Stratford upon Avon since 2017/18, particularly in relation to bullying and cyber-bullying – is it due to them becoming more consistent with the College recording system?

A. Stratford upon Avon College had a different way of recording and defining 'live' cases, so processes have changed to ensure consistency and comparability of data.

Q. Is there any increase in students being involved in extremist right-wing activities?

A. The majority of the PREVENT referrals nationally now relate to far-right extremist issues, rather than Islamic as was the case initially, but there doesn't seem to be any increase at the College currently.

Q. The College is very proactive in providing and development mental health support for students and there has been good investment in this area. How do we track the benefit of this investment?

A. It is difficult to quantify. The Caring Services Team manage referrals and escalate issues as appropriate. They are able to ensure early intervention support, which is likely to negate the need to escalate and the number of more serious safeguarding and mental health issues. A further way of ascertaining some benefit is to review retention data of those students that use the services. This resource is vital in supporting students to manage their issues and to keep them on track in terms of their learning and achievement.

Q. If there is a spike in referrals are there resources in place to respond to this?

A. It was expected that as students returned to the College there would be an increase in issues and that has been the case with numbers higher than the previous year. Students are demonstrating anxiety and OCD and mental health concerns, some of which are attributed to lockdown. The Service has been able to cope with the numbers and address issues and are able to refer to external services effectively, as appropriately.

The contents of the E-Communication Policy and Guidelines for Students and the Prevent Position Statement were noted for information.

The Director of Student Services was thanked for his presentation and the Chair noted his obvious commitment to protecting the welfare of vulnerable students. He left the meeting.

Resolved to approve:

- Safeguarding Young People and Vulnerable Adults Policy & Procedures;
- Prevent Policy.

9. **Learner Voice – Strategy and Activities for 2020/21**

The Vice Principal HR and Student Services presented the report and noted that activities for 2020/21. It was noted that there was a link to the Student Hub Enrichment section which would be interesting for governors to review, particularly in relation to agendas like Black Lives Matter and how activities will be conducted.

Q. October is Black History Month – in light of Black Lives Matter what is the College doing in response to that agenda?

A. The Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality confirmed that the Black Lives Matter agenda had been embedded with the College tutorial programme for all learners and including a range of good quality resources to underpin discussion and learning.

It was suggested that an example of the resources be shared with Governors. **Action.**

Q. Learner Voice – how is the College going to make sure there is effective learner voice under the current conditions?

A. There is a lot of work online and Student Executive is working hard to keep links. The Student Hub is important and students are still in College, although there are no internal group activities. The physical student Hub also offers an opportunity for interaction.

Q. There are a tremendous number of events nationally indicated – is there something for all of those listed?

A. Yes, the Student Exec and the Enrichment Team are excellent at ensuring all national agendas are addressed in a variety of different way to ensure activity continues.

The Chair noted that the dates identified for the Student Voice/Equality and Diversity Steering Group meeting dates had been made available in the report and any Governor was welcome to attend.

10. **Young Carers Policy**

The Vice Principal HR and Student Services presented the report and it was noted that a link Governor identified. It is suggested that the link Governor be identified as the Safeguarding Governor in future. He noted that there were currently 113 young carers identified in the College, but it was likely that there were more that were unknown.

The Chair suggested that it would be useful for the Corporation to hear from a young carer if a student was willing to do so at a future meeting. **Action.**

Resolved to approve the Policy and that it be reviewed every 3 years in future and that the Safeguarding Governor be the link Governor.

11. **HR Policy: Bullying and Harassment Policy**

The Vice Principal HR and Student Services presented the revised Policy and noted that it had been reviewed by the Joint Union Negotiating Committee and agreement had been obtained for the minor changes suggested. The unions would still take the Policy to their members, but it was not anticipated that any issues would be raised.

Q. How significant is bullying and harassment at the Policy?

A. It is not a significant issue at the College, but any claim is taken extremely seriously and therefore it is important to have a robust Policy to ensure an issue is investigated thoroughly.

Q. The Policy is very responsive to a member of staff's perception of harassment, but it is important to ensure that reasonableness and an objectivity is also incorporated. It was suggested that this should be included to comply with the intention of the law, which is not to protect the hyper-sensitive. **Action.** The Vice Principal HR and Student Services noted that it was anticipated that the investigation would provide fact and objectivity, but he would re-visit the Policy on this element.

Q. How do employees see the Policy and is the College aware of this?

A. All policies are on the Staff Hub and staff are made aware of policies during induction. The HR policies recently approved will be notified to all staff by All Staff Email.

Resolved to approve Bullying and Harassment Policy, subject to the review of perception of harassment.

12. **Sub-contracting Policy**

The Deputy Principal presented the report and noted that there were no changes to the Policy or the funding requirements, but it did need to be approved annually.

Resolved to approve Sub-contracting Policy.

13. **Bids and Projects Report**

The Vice Principal Finance presented the report and explained that approval was required for 2 projects.

Clarity was sought regarding the CWLEP and it was noted that it was for the updating of equipment in the TV studio, catering and hospitality re-location and equipment and a construction building that will allow the College to offer construction.

Q. As teaching and learning has had to move online, this is factored into the investment in the onsite TV studio?

A. Yes, it has been factored in, but it is anticipated that the facility will be more widely available for local use and to re-skill the workforce.

Resolved to approve the following projects:

- **GBSLEP – IoT Digital Infrastructure - B202** - the project will invest in digital infrastructure for each IoT partner to maximise the effectiveness of the capital investment from the DfE. The value of this project was £1.68m with 1/6th allocated to the Woodlands Campus.
- **Coventry and Warwickshire LEP (CWLEP) – Stratford Upon Avon College Assets – B229** - total project costs are £1,320,000 of which half will be matched by the project costs which are part of the Stratford Campus Redevelopment Project.

14. Governors' Development Day Agenda and Arrangements: 10th October 2020

The Chair noted that the session would take place on 10th October 2020. It would be online and the timing had been reduced to 9.30-11.30am. There would be further feedback on the Ofsted visit in September and the future anticipated Ofsted visit would be considered. There would also be a safeguarding briefing and input by the Principal about the current state of the sector and strategic issues. It was also anticipated that there would be a short session for independent Governors to discuss some aspects without staff and students present. This request had come through the individual self-assessment meetings that had been taking place with Governors.

15. Regular Update Reports

15.1 Use of the College Seal and Chair's Signature

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

15.2 Tender Update Report – commercially confidential

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

15.3 Property Update

The contents of the Property Update were received for information.

15.4 PMR June 2020

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

16. Date of the Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday 4th November 2020 at 5.30pm.

The meeting finished at 7.47pm.



Signed:

Date: 4th November 2020