

Minutes of the Corporation Meeting held on 27 May 2021 online by MS Teams, starting at 5.00 pm

Present

- Barbara Hughes (Chair)
- Stan Baldwin
- John Callaghan (Principal)
- Tasleem Chaudary
- Carol Harvey-Barnes (Staff Governor) left at 6.15pm
- Lucy Lee
- Tony Lucas
- Geraldine Swanton
- Harrison Thompson (External Member)
- 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)
- Gita Chahan (Head of Finance)
- Theresa Lynch (Clerk)

- Louise Tweedie (Partner, RSM)

The meeting was recorded.

Sector Risk and Risk Appetite Presentation

Louise Tweedie, RSM provided a presentation regarding projected sector risk and assessment of risk appetite, as indicated through the Ney Review (July 2020). Although risk assessment had not yet been included in the 2021 Post 16 Audit Code of Practice, but it was anticipated that it would be for 2022. It was noted that identifying the College's risk appetite provided a framework for strategic decision-making. Clarity was provided regarding the difference between risk tolerance and risk appetite.

A range of emerging and on-going issues affecting the sector were noted. The importance of being aware of the local skills agenda had been highlighted in the recent White Paper. Cyber security and recruiting good IT staff were issues in the sector. Potential future risks were discussed including the economic climate following the pandemic, climate change, increased regulation, equality, diversity and inclusion, as well as, the implications of the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill.

Q. Clarity was sought regarding the tolerance/appetite definitions.

A. Appetite related more to consideration of a project or risk in relation to a defined level of appetite and to make decisions based on that agreed risk appetite, whilst tolerance related to a risk that was in place or unavoidable and the level at which the College was able to manage that risk and mitigate, as appropriate.

Q. How can the Audit Committee really play a part in developing appropriate recommendations to the Corporation?

A. It was confirmed that a meeting will take place of the Chair of the Corporation, Chair of the Audit Committee, RSM and College managers to explore how the risk appetite agenda can be taken forward.

Action. [*Post meeting – a development session is to be planned regarding Audit Committee matters – risk appetite will be part of the briefing*].

The Principal noted new developments and the assessment of risk had to be taken in context, as there often occasions when it was necessary to respond to a development, which would demonstrate response to local skills needs. It was important to be responsive and to be able to demonstrate this to external bodies

like the ESFA, OFS and Ofsted. However, assessment of risk was very important to determine our risk appetite and review potential projects within that framework, considering the wider agenda and context.

Q. How do you quantify risk appetite, other than in terms of a financial quantum, as not all risks will have a clearly identifiable financial value at the time of consideration?

A. Financial impact is the most used indicator, however, also diversion from educational character (eg beyond 25% of sub-contracting or increased HE provision) and reputational impact would be considered. The Principal stated that the indicators he used tended to be reputation, quality and finance, but also it was necessary to consider wider issues relating to health and safety, appropriate and safe delivery methods and impact on opinions of regulators and inspectors.

The Chair noted that it was a useful presentation and related well to the Corporation agenda for the evening, providing assurance that the College was addressing the appropriate issues and planning effectively for the future.

Thanks were expressed and Ms Tweedie left the meeting.

The Chair set out the agenda for the evening. Sympathy was expressed to the Director of Risk, Control and Compliance and the Vice Principal Finance who had sadly had recent family bereavements.

The Chair thanked Carol Harvey-Barnes for undertaking the role as Staff Governor and it was noted that she would be leaving the College and the Corporation on 7th June 2021.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Paul Assinder, Scott Beasley, Sarah Horton-Walsh, Lisa Jones, Neil Ladwa, Tony Worth (External Member of Audit Committee) and Sam Bromwich (Director of Risk, Control and Compliance).

2. Declarations of Interest in Relation to this Agenda

There were no new declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of previous Meetings, Actions and Matters Arising

The minutes of the meeting held on 31st March 2021 were **agreed** as a true and accurate record and signed with the Chair's e-signature.

The contents of the actions report were noted.

3.1 Matters Arising: Environmental and Sustainability Policy Update -

The Chair noted that the Environmental and Sustainability Policy was provided for information.

Q. Does the Policy correspond with the draft AOC Code of Good Governance?

A. The Chair confirmed that the Policy did correspond to the Code that the Search and Governance Committee had reviewed on 25th May 2021. It was noted that it referenced the roadmap that the Sustainability Officer had reported on at a previous meeting.

Q. Do we have a baseline and have we agreed quantified annual targets for this? What should the College view as success in 5 years' time?

A. The Vice Principal Finance confirmed that there was an action plan that went along with the Policy to identify and monitor progress. An update would be provided to the Corporation at a future meeting. In March 2021 data was published on the website for the first time. Testing was being done to identify a baseline to create targets against. Data from other colleges would also be reviewed. This would allow targets to be set for carbon usage going forward.

Q. How much of the information gathered will be shared, in relation to energy usage, for example?

A. The information will definitely be shared internally, but the College is working with a range of organisations and it would be anticipated that information will be shared quite readily. A project with SMBC is taking place regarding the heat exchange, for example, so collaborative working is important.

4. Strategic Planning

4.1 Draft Strategic Plan 2021-4 and Annual Priorities 2021/22

The Chair noted that this was part of the annual strategic development process. The Plan had been produced collaboratively and was based on the Governors' Strategy session held in February 2021.

The Principal presented the draft Strategic Plan for 2021-24 and Annual Priorities for 2021/22 and noted that following confirmation at the Governors' Strategy morning the mission and vision remained unchanged. He noted that there was a new context section. He confirmed that senior managers and the Chair of the Corporation had been involved in the draft version.

Q. The Vice Chair noted that it had been very helpful to have been involved in the development of the strategy from the beginning and that the Forward was particularly strong. He asked the Principal to provide a little more information about collaboration with other colleges and organisations, as this seemed to be a priority in the White Paper.

A. The Principal confirmed that the College actively collaborated with the 21 West Midlands colleges, covered the Black Country, Coventry and Warwickshire and Birmingham and Solihull. He noted that the Group was set up to provide respond collectively to the combined authorities devolved agenda. It has been very successful. As stated, the White Paper advocates collaboration rather than competition and the College is well placed as it has a range of partners in the HE sector, private providers and college partners. He noted that in response to WMCA Strategic Development Fund and development of a local skills plan in response the Group had identified 3 distinct geographical blocks that would work together to produce 3 bids.

Q. The College, in common with every other educational institution across the globe, has been impacted significantly by COVID-19. The experiences of 2020/21 will fundamentally shape the future in terms of the demands of employers, our students' aspirations and our teaching modalities. My impression is that we haven't truly considered the potential mid to long term impacts of these factors in this plan. Whilst by definition this is difficult, I wonder if the associated uncertainties and opportunities are adequately covered?

A. The Principal noted that the Plan had been written to incorporate post-COVID-19 recovery. He added that the College had performed well financially during the pandemic, although apprenticeships and HE had been there were prudent contingencies assumed in the budget forecasts. Learner survey outcomes and attendance has been maintained and improved, but students had missed the coming into college. It is hoped that September will prove to be a buoyant year for the College. The over-whelming theme has been that students missed coming into College.

The Chair noted that Governors had recently been undertaking the third round of student focus groups and feedback, so far had been positive, with students reporting improvement in teaching and support from the first lockdown and shows strength of tutorial support from vocational and support tutors. Students were very keen to be back in College to complete activities and have access to staff and colleagues to enjoy their learning experience more. Discussion took place regarding the ability to add further information about the impact of the pandemic and it was suggested that it may relate to potential students, as their experiences in school will have been affected markedly, however, the consequences of this were not yet known. It was noted that students felt that in many cases the remote working had actually improved communication with their tutors. It was suggested that this may be a positive impact if were possible to maintain this improvement. The Principal noted that where there were examples of positive learning and impacts, this would be incorporated and adopted.

Q. How will the potential changes regarding the LEPs impact on the strategy?

A. Difficult to judge at the moment as the recent bid for capital funding was sent directly to the Government bypassing the LEPs and WMCA.. Furthermore, a new organisation has been identified namely the Chambers of Commerce who will likely have some say on future capital funding, so the landscape is constantly changing.

Q. Is there any reason why staff engagement and development is not included in the Strategic Plan?
A. The Vice Principal HR and Student Services confirmed that this was an element to be reviewed in terms of management and leadership and this would be considered in the final version. **Action.**

The Principal confirmed that the final version of the Strategic Plan would be presented at the July Corporation meeting for ratification.

4.2 Financial Comparison Data with Local Colleges

The Principal presented the financial comparison data with local colleges and noted it showed local college performance in comparison to 2 years of College data. He described the different funding streams for comparable colleges and explained that some of the larger colleges were contracting. Sandwell College and Solihull College had the largest 16-18 provision income. He confirmed that it was possible to compare financial indicators too. He noted that the College would continue to reduce debt. A number of colleges had not paid a pay award for some time. The excel spreadsheet was available to Governors upon request, as it was easier to interrogate than the pdf. **Action.**

Q. The data seems have shown some sharp changes in income levels year on year, for some colleges and, to a lesser extent, costs. What can we learn from this?

A. For some colleges there have been big changes and there can be a variety of reasons, for example one issue, raised by the FE Commissioner is over reliance on a single employer, Over-reliance on high-risk funding stream such as apprenticeships, international and commercial income can be an issue as well as acquisition of other providers can have a detrimental effect if you then need to sell them off. A clear lesson is to have a very clear rationale and long-term strategy for any merger or acquisition.

4.3 Financial Planning – Budget Assumptions

The Vice Principal Finance explained that the ESFA dashboard had been received and further benchmarking information would be released. She asked Governors to confirm what elements of the detailed benchmarking themes they would like her to report on for the next meeting, in terms of comparison with colleges both locally and nationally. **Action.** The Chair requested information on depreciation.

The Vice Principal Finance presented the indicative budget and explained that it was now relatively final in terms of planning for 2021/22. She explained that there was a new ESFA financial return and that elements of the return would be shared with the Financial Oversight Group in June 2021. Minor changes had been made to the way that the ESFA measure financial health in relation to the scoring for the loans and this had reduced the scoring for the College as borrowing is relatively low. The current financial return would include both measures for financial health but going forward it would be the new measure.

The Vice Principal Finance described the measures required for the College to fit into the mid-point of the Good range for financial health, as set out in the report, and explained that further discussion would take place at the Financial Oversight Group. The Chair reminded Governors that all members of the Corporation were welcome to attend the Group if they wished to discuss this in more detail. She also noted that she had been attending ETF Masterclass sessions and that the presentations were on BoardEffects for Governors to review.

It was noted that it was important to confirm the budget assumptions and financial objectives in advance of presenting and finalising the final Budget and Financial Plan in July 2021.

Q. Clarity was sought regarding the projection of setting deficit budgets in the coming years?

A. The Vice Principal Finance explained that the College had an annual non-cash adjustment to account for the pension liability and this inevitably had an impact on the bottom-line position. Further, she explained that the College's cash balances had provided security for the College during the COVID-19 crisis but that overall the operating position was in line with other FE colleges. A further discussion would take place at the Financial Oversight Group regarding the planned deficit position.

The Principal noted that there had been a strategic discussion (Annual Strategic Conversation) involving the Chair and college senior managers with key ESFA and FE commissioner staff last week. The College's financial health scores remain positive and the investment plans for Stratford had been discussed at length. The important comment was that as long as the College had a strategy/rationale in place for planned investment or financial positions then this was acceptable. The danger arises when as with many colleges is reducing income, rising costs, higher debt with no strategy or explanation as to why. It was noted that the Stratford capital redevelopment had been agreed but that assurances were in place that investment could be stopped when approving each phase, as appropriate, if Governors placed emphasis on maintaining a surplus.

Detailed discussion took place about the consequences of deficit/surplus budgets, the implications of maintaining high cash balances and the messages this sent to the sector, including the potential affect on funding decisions and bids if compared to other colleges in terms of project affordability, e.g. the investment in Stratford upon Avon Campus, for example. The Vice Principal Finance pointed out the ESFA dashboard in relation to the line showing adjusted operating surplus/deficit and confirmed that she anticipated it moving into the Outstanding range for 2020/21, when being benchmarked against other colleges.

The Vice Principal Finance confirmed that modelling could be done to demonstrate deficit/surplus decisions for the Financial Oversight Group. She noted that the ESFA annual letter to confirm financial health and provide dashboard data was provided in the BoardEffect pack.

The Chair noted that the meeting that had taken place with the ESFA and FE Commissioner had been the first annual strategic discussion with the Chair and EMT and was an opportunity for 2-way conversation about College performance and to feedback about any issues that had arisen during the year. The conversation had been very positive and the ESFA had provided assurance for Governors relating to the College's performance.

Q. With a loss of £50k AEB funding for full time adult learners what is the contribution impact of this reduced level of learners? Is this loss of FT adults (presumably COVID-19-related) typical of the sector? What are our long-term plans to recover this position?

A. It was noted that £50K related to 5% of the College's ESFA allocation and only 1% of the overall AEB budgets including WMCA. Recruitment of adult learners particularly PT adults had been impacted by COVID-19 and this was sector-wide. There have also been corresponding reductions in expenditure. For the WMCA allocation this has been offset by increased recruitment with RMF for Construction and so clawback of funding is not anticipated. Overall, the AEB budgets have not been impacted as much as other colleges. Recruitment is expected to return to pre COVID-19 levels in 2021/22 and, if not, there is scope for further delivery with RMF.

The Principal noted that this reduction in students referred to the ESFA AEB provision. The College had been instructed to close to adults from January 2021 and the ESFA then introduced a 90% threshold (67% last year). This has caused a great degree of consternation in the sector. The ESFA have however confirmed in their allocation that the budget for next year will not be cut. The WMCA are in dialogue with their colleges and have not imposed a cut to AEB so no clawback is expected.

4.4 Sub-contracting Strategy and Plan for 2021/22

This item was deemed confidential.

4.5 Draft Strategic Risks, based on current Draft Strategic Plan

The Vice Principal Finance presented the draft strategic risks and noted that these related to the draft Strategic Plan discussed earlier in the meeting. She noted the 8 high level strategic risks and clarified the top 3 current priority risks that had been considered by EMT and were being presented for Governors to discuss. The risks were:

- Financial risk of reduced HE and apprenticeship recruitment;
- Cyber attack;
- Ensuring the SAR assessed Grade 3 schools are at least Good for Ofsted.

Clarity was sought to confirm whether these risks would be the ones considered at each Corporation meeting and it was noted that these would replace the previous ones as the current highest priority risks. They would be reviewed regularly as the key risks changed.

The 8 strategic risks and highest priority 3 current risks were confirmed in relation to the Strategic Plan, as presented. The detail would now be added to the Strategic Risk Register and be presented to the Audit Committee in June 2021.

4.6 Independent Assurance Requirements

The Vice Principal Finance explained that this provided an opportunity for Corporation to discuss assurance requirements in light of the Strategic Plan presented, the key and strategic risks and in relation to the proposed internal audit plan provided. The Internal Audit Plan would be reviewed with RSM and discussed at Audit Committee in June 2021.

The Chair clarified whether the 3 top risks were identified within the current proposed internal audit plan, for example, would RSM review the Grade 3 schools. The Vice Principal Finance noted that whilst independent assurance may be required, RSM may not necessarily be the most appropriate external reviewers of this area.

5 Targets 2020/21 Update

The Deputy Principal provided an update on the targets for 2020/21 and noted that the report pulled together data from a range of other reports and the dashboard to provide an overall picture for all targets.

6 Quality, Curriculum and Teaching and Learning

6.1 Careers and Guidance Report

The Vice Principal HR and Student Services presented the report to set out the service that careers provide and progress against the Gatsby benchmarks (appendix 1). Generally, progress was good and there was some external assurance from the Solihull and Warwickshire Careers Hubs. It was noted that careers included a small team of 4, but also took place in the curriculum areas as there tended to be vocational experts in the areas that could provide careers support too. The College had been recognised for its outstanding careers work and had been awarded the gold level in the National Quality in Careers Standard, awarded under licence by Prospects.

The Vice Principal HR and Student Services noted that attendance at careers interviews had increased markedly during the pandemic as remote meetings seemed to work better for students and this would continue.

Q. Would it be possible to have a briefing for Governors on the work of the Careers Team?

A. Yes, a briefing will be scheduled during 2021/22. **Action.**

Q. How has provision at Stratford been incorporated into a one College service? To what extent are local schools collaborating as the Government requires schools to provide comprehensive careers advice, including information on opportunities available at FE Colleges?

A. We have expanded the Careers team to recruit a fully qualified (level 6 qualification in Careers Guidance) careers advisor. The service provided at Stratford mirrors exactly the provision at our other sites and is managed by the Careers Service Manager, who visits both Woodlands and Stratford campuses regularly. Under the Gatsby careers strategy, schools are required to put contact details for the person in the school who can be contacted to arrange visits and other activities. As you would imagine there is a mixed response in terms of accessibility. We encourage schools to come to our events careers events (eg Alderbrook and other local school students have attended our careers fairs). Overall, however, access, or lack of, to schools tends to be more of a marketing issue.

Q. What is the size of the careers team and how is their work integrated into day to day activities within the college?

A. There is a Careers Services Manager and three members of staff, altogether totalling 3.05 FTE. The calendar of events (Appendix 2) provides our standard offer and is intended to fit in with the 'life cycle' of the student in College, eg activities will tie in with the timings for the various stages of UCAS applications (HE research, writing personal statements, managing finance etc). The activities will generally fit in with the students' tutorial planner ('My Career Plan') in which there are key careers related themes throughout the year (eg October – Introduction to work experience; January – Employability skills/job search). Students are also encouraged to book one to one guidance and it could be the case that a tutor will request a member of the careers team to visit the class or undertake mock interviews with a group.

6.2 Student Satisfaction Survey Spring Term

The Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality presented the student satisfaction report and noted that the number of responses had been one of the highest for some time. It was noted that from September each of the Teaching and Learning Coaches would have a specialist area, one of these for example, would be assessment and they would be able to drive development and support in those areas.

The Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality confirmed that student satisfaction had been good in a number of areas during lockdown and online learning. They had confirmed that they had received helpful feedback, that they could communicate effectively with their teachers and a high proportion confirmed that they had continued to develop knowledge and skills. This was particularly pleasing as so many of the Colleges programmes are vocational and practical. Students expressed their preference to be in College, rather than having online lessons.

The Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality noted that there were some gaps identified in student satisfaction in relation to Apprenticeships and these were being addressed.

Q. Is the 11% of students not satisfied with feedback within 3 weeks spread across the college or localised within certain disciplines?

A. Satisfaction on timeliness of feedback is particularly low in the following schools, which is having an impact on the overall college satisfaction rate:

Built Environment – 70%

Engineering – 80%

Care and Education – 83%

She noted that work was taking place to improve feedback in these curriculum areas to ensure feedback was more timely.

Q. The Woodlands campus serves one of our more social/economically deprived communities. It is impressive to read that 97% of students felt that tutors ensured students behave appropriately. Can you say something about how this is achieved?

A. There are a couple of major factors which have supported positive behaviour at Woodlands. Firstly, we have noticed a significant improvement in behaviour, and a reduction of behavioural incidents across campuses as a result of the condensed 'COVID-19' timetables, and the closure of the large social spaces. Students are currently on campus for fewer, more condensed days, and eat lunch / take breaks in their base rooms rather than in the link or other large spaces. We believe this has significantly impacted on behaviour this year. Secondly, at Woodlands specifically, the heads of school and the Campus Manager are very visible; they support security guards with door duty each morning, and regularly patrol the campus. There is a very coordinated approach between the campus management and security, and students respond accordingly by demonstrating positive behaviour and attitudes.

7 Finance and Resources

7.1 Value for Money – Mock Report

The Vice Principal Finance presented the mock value for money report and it was noted that this would be finalised and presented at the November 2021 meeting.

7.2 Property Update

The Vice Principal Finance presented the report and noted that there had not been an outcome regarding the College's capital bid to the DfE for the Stratford campus. Macc had made a first payment in April 2021 and a second payment would be made on 2nd August 2021.

The update regarding Sanctuary Housing was deemed confidential.

7.3 Bids and Projects – Termly KPIs

The Vice Principal Finance presented the report and noted that the termly KPIs were also included. It was noted that there had been a number of bids for submission recently and the outcomes were awaited.

7.4 PMR March 2021

The March 2021 PMR was received for information and it was noted that it showed an improved financial position compared to the January PMR.

7.5 Chair's Action – Collaborative Bids with Birmingham Colleges 21st May 2021

The Chair's Action dated 21st May 2021 relating to Collaborative Bids with Birmingham Colleges was ratified.

Q. We are bidding for funds to develop our staff training for aspiring leaders and senior leadership. How might the additional funds be used, if the bid is successful?

A. A collaborative bid with BMET College and South & City College Birmingham has been submitted in order to evaluate and reflect on best practice in our own delivery of staff training for aspiring leaders and senior leadership over the past year and learn from the experiences of the other colleges who have been piloting training in courses such as Aspiring Black Leaders and Supporting the Third Sector to develop leadership skills within their organisations. The funding will support this collaborative discussion and then fund a pilot of further delivery along a theme which will support the college in its aims for staff development and inclusion.

8 Search and Governance Committee meeting minutes held on 25th May 2021

The minutes of the Search and Governance Committee held on 25th May 2021 were received.

8.1 Membership Report

The Clerk presented the membership report and noted that there had been 3 interviews with potential governors and that the Committee was recommending the appointment of 2 as external committee members.

It was also noted that the Staff Governor, Carol Harvey Barnes, had resigned from her post at the College and would therefore step down as Staff Governor with effect from 7th June 2021. A Staff Governor election would take place early in the Autumn Term.

The Clerk also noted that Lisa Jones had tendered her resignation as a Governor.

Resolved to appoint the following:

Amirun Nehar, as an external member of the Audit Committee, for one year in the first instance from 1st June 2021.

Anne Potter, as an external member of the Remuneration Committee, for one year in the first instance from 1st June 2021.

Resolved to approve the membership of the Financial Oversight Group.

8.2 Self-Assessment 2021

The Chair presented the draft self-assessment questionnaire and noted that the individual Governor meetings would take place in July and August 2021. She noted that feedback would also be invited from members of EMT. It was felt that the mature relationship between Governors and EMT meant that it would be a good exercise to obtain feedback. It was noted that there had been some suggestions to be added into the Governors questionnaire and this would be done prior to release for completion. **Action.**

8.3 Draft Code of Governance

The Clerk presented the draft Code of Governance and it was noted that a meeting would take place when the final version was published to consider adoption of the content of the Code. **Action.**

8.4 Election of Chair and Vice-Chair 2021/22

The Clerk presented the election of the Chair and Vice-chair for 2021/22 and noted that both Barbara Hughes as Chair and Stan Baldwin as Vice-Chair would be standing for election, but that if there were any other proposals these should be submitted to the Clerk prior to the next meeting.

9 Freedom of Information Report

The contents of the Freedom of Information Report for 2021/22 were received.

Q. What are the most common types of requests?

A. The Clerk noted that they often related to tendering and contracts relating to a range of services, often for IT equipment wi-fi provider. They also relate to staffing data, including agency spend, voluntary redundancy numbers and pay award information.

10 Draft Dates for 2021/22

The proposed dates for 2021/22 were confirmed.

11 Confidential Items

11.1 Curriculum Structure and Changes

This item was deemed confidential.

11.2 SCCB Cyber Attack

This item was deemed confidential.

12 For Information Items

12.1 Tender Update (Confidential externally)

The contents of the Tender Update were received for information.

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

The contents of the Use of the College Seal and Chair's E-Signature Report.

13 Draft Notes of the Governors' Dashboard Briefing Session 26th April 2021

The draft notes of the Governors' Dashboard Briefing session held on 26th April 2021 were received for information.

14. Date of the Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was Tuesday 6th July 2021 at 5.30pm on MS Teams.

The meeting ended at 7.40pm.

Signed  Date 06 July 2021

Solihull College & University Centre

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11.1 Curriculum Structure and Changes

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The Chair of the Corporation left the meeting for consideration of this item.

7.2 Sanctuary Housing