

Solihull College and University Centre

Minutes of the Corporation meeting held on 08 November 2021 at Woodlands Campus, starting at 5.30 pm

Present

Barbara Hughes (Chair)
Paul Assinder
Stan Baldwin
Tasleem Chaudary
Neil Ladwa
Lucy Lee
Harrison Thompson (External Member)
Lindsey Stewart (Acting Principal)
Geraldine Swanton.
Sally Tomlinson

In Attendance

Heather Evans (Vice Principal Finance)
Rebecca Gater (Vice Principal Quality and Curriculum)
Pete Haynes (Vice Principal HR and Student Services)
Theresa Lynch (Clerk)

Mary Younan (Dean of HE and Research)
Rosa Wells (Executive Director Employment and Skills and IoT)

Introduction

The Chair welcomed all members and thanked those that had attended the Governors' Development Day on Saturday 6th November. The tour for Governors prior to the meeting had been very interesting and a useful update on the IoT and Engineering.

The Chair noted that Sukhy Nijjar had resigned from the Corporation. She had served one term of office of 4 years, but her personal and professional commitments had increased, so she had found it difficult to make the full commitment to the Corporation. The Chair thanked Her for her very good contribution and support to the College. It was noted that Scott Beasley had applied for a leave of absence due to family commitments.

The top key risks were noted. The last column shows the direction of travel for each risk. It was noted that it was really helpful to have the key risks available when reviewing the agenda and reports for each meeting. It was suggested that risks identified as 5 for both impact and likelihood in relation to the inherent score should be reviewed in relation to the assumed likelihood score. **Action.**

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Scott Beasley, Sarah Horton-Walsh and Tony Lucas.

2. Declarations of Interest in Relation to this Agenda

There were no new declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of previous Meeting and Matters Arising

The minutes of the meeting held on 29th September 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.

Progress in relation to the action points was noted.

4. Institute of Technology Update

The Executive Director Employment and Skills and IoT presented the report and noted recent changes including the appointment of Rebecca Gater as Director and to confirm that Lindsey Stewart now attended meetings. It was anticipated that students would begin at the Hub at Aston University in September 2022. Funding was being obtained for a range of developments and support for staff. It was noted that the IoT was now fully funded.

Q. Will the short course provision be temporary? Will the short courses continue into the future?

A. The WM Combined Authority has confirmed that South and City College can run a further round of short courses and further rounds are being negotiated.

Q. Will there be a replacement of the employer partner director?

A. The director of the IoT from Salts Healthcare, Lee Cattermole had left the company, so it was hoped that his replacement or an alternative member of staff would join the IoT as a Director, but further information was awaited from Salts Healthcare. If this was not the case, then a director would be appointed by another employer partner.

Q. Are there any early indicators regarding learner numbers, prior to the planned report in Jan?

A. Data would be analysed for the Autumn term in, so the planned report in January 2022 was the earliest the information would be available.

The Executive Director Employment and Skills and IoT explained that IoT membership fees were currently being reviewed (currently £100k). It was noted that there were likely to be an increase, based on increased costs, although it was not anticipated that it would be a significant amount.

The Chair noted that it had been extremely helpful to see the IoT workshop at the Woodlands campus during the tour. She noted that it demonstrated the use of IoT funds. It was good for students currently doing level 2 to see the facilities that are available for on-going progression.

5. Apprenticeships Report

The Executive Director Employment and Skills and IoT presented the report and noted that a key task was keeping abreast of the ever-changing and complex funding rules. She noted that student numbers had been low for 2 years, particularly in relation to young learners. The quality update and feedback from employers was included.

The Executive Director Employment and Skills and IoT explained that she had requested more detailed feedback from the government regarding responses in the Employer Feedback, as the information provided was at a high level and did not provide adequate detail to target actions and improvement.

Feedback had been given to AOC to obtain more detail underpinning the feedback. They were planning a dashboard style for reporting in the future.

Q. Two areas for improvement are identified and remained the same between July and October 2021 – what is being done to improve communication with employers?

A. The Executive Director Employment and Skills and IoT explained that a dashboard was being developed, primarily for Assessors to be able to track and monitor student progress. It will, however, also be shared with employers and can be sorted by partner to underpin discussions with employers about their students. The Dashboard will be in line with Smart Assessor and therefore enhance information available for students and employers.

Discussion took place regarding the employers' survey, and it was noted that without more detailed information it was difficult to obtain accurate messages and apply actions, as appropriate. Often whilst one employer would identify a specific weakness, another might identify the same aspect as a strength. There had not been a survey in 2020 and the AOC had not announced when a further survey would be conducted.

It was noted that the results from the College's internal apprenticeship survey would be available for the December Corporation meeting for discussion.

6. Higher Education Report

The Dean of HE and Research presented the report and confirmed that outcomes for 2020/21 had been very good. She explained that due to student numbers of responses only 5 courses had been reported by NSS (more than 10 students had to respond). She described the issues that had arisen regarding the FdSc Veterinary Nursing and discussion took place. It was noted that some of the issues related to the awarding body, RCVS, and that the college had decided not to recruit to the programme in future. Apprenticeships in this area would continue.

The Chair requested information regarding the quality of teaching for HE courses. The Dean of HE and Research explained that the NSS data represented a small element of HE student satisfaction overall. She confirmed that quality processes in place were robustly monitored through programme quality boards, attended by staff from partner Universities. She noted that feedback would be given to students and clarity about actions that would take place in response to their comments and concerns. Focus groups would also take place prior to NSS to highlight and address any issue in advance. For HE staff there is specialist CPD and designated coaches. HE courses are also included in the college's MOT monitoring process and there are HE audits.

The Acting Principal explained that the decision had been made to close some programmes that recruited low numbers, as this had a negative impact on the student experience. Numbers in HE were therefore down in 2021, however, there would be further recruitment in January 2022 for part time courses. It was confirmed that financial contingencies had been put in place to address lower recruitment.

Q. The main strength of the college is the 16-18 provision and there seems to be a lot of strong competition regarding HE – is HE still viable?

A. Yes, HE is still viable, particularly in relating to HE apprentices, which is an increasing focus for the college. There are also specific subjects that recruit well and the college will continue to focus on new qualifications at HE level being driven forward by the Government. The Acting Principal explained that it was necessary to carefully manage the on-going HE provision and that was likely to focus on the areas that appeal to adults and to continue to grow higher level apprenticeships.

The Dean of HE and Research provided an update regarding the OfS consultation on quality and standards. She explained that once consultation had taken place quality standards would be published, identifying a baseline for quality expectations for all institutions delivering HE programmes.

Resolved to approve the Student Protection Plan.

7. Recruitment Update 2021/22

The Acting Principal presented the report and noted that students were settling down well. Where any issues had arisen staff were working with learners to support them, particularly in light of the difficult 2 years they had had in education. There had been growth in Construction, Business and Health and Care, however, there had been decline in Hair and Beauty and level 2 starts. She noted that the conversion rate had fallen by 10% compared to previous years. Some of this may be due to grade inflation at GCSE, as students could increasingly access A levels at school and enter level 3 programmes, where they may not have been able to in previous years.

The Acting Principal confirmed that recruitment data would now be used to undertake financial analysis against the budget.

Q. Where students have come in with higher grades, it seems they are progressing to level 3, rather than level 2, as they may have done previously – will this potentially have an impact on withdrawals and transition to other courses?

A. Yes, students are able to progress at a higher level than they may have been able to in previous years. This added to young peoples' education being so disrupted for the past 2 years had shown that they are a little less mature, so they may need more support. The same initial assessments are being carried out and the catch-up fund is being used to support gaps in learning.

Q. With growth at Woodlands, in particular, of 25% is there a sense that the college is doing better than expected?

A. Yes, the growth at Woodlands is excellent and it seems anecdotally that the college is doing well compared to other colleges, many of whom are struggling with recruitment levels.

Q. Progression within the college is down by about 7% - why is this?

A. Many students are leaving to take up jobs and the Vice Principal Quality and Curriculum noted that some universities were offering unconditional university places, so some pupils were leaving to go to university.

8. Final Achievement Report 2021/22

The Acting Principal presented the report and confirmed that it was in line with anticipated progression. Outcomes were positive, but national comparison benchmarks would not be published this year. It wasn't clear how Ofsted would use the data, but it was noted that both maths and English outcomes had been very positive.

Detailed analysis of the achievement would be included in the College SAR for the December 2021 Corporation. There would also be confirmation regarding the impact of recruitment on financial targets.

9. Human Resources Annual Report 2020/21

The Vice Principal HR and Student Services presented the report and noted that through the business planning process there had been a planned decrease in FTE posts.

Sickness absence levels – it was noted that sickness absence levels were down, as people were working from home. The importance of agile working was acknowledged, but that having a policy that covered all areas was difficult. Managers were therefore being given the freedom to consult and work collaboratively with their teams to agree how agile working might work. This was being trialled over the Autumn term.

The Chair noted that the staff survey and the tribute book for John Callaghan had included a lot of positive comments from staff about how the pandemic was handled.

There were no major issues relating to recruitment, however, in line with the national picture turnover had increased. It was noted that the target in relation to BAME staff had been exceeded at 17%, with lecturing staff at 18.94%.

Q. Is there any pressure for a high level of pay award?

A. The joint unions often put in ambitious pay award requests, however, the college unions have been very supportive over the last 2 years given the issues with COVID-19.

Q. Long term sickness – is the list of absence reasons a standard list?

A. There is a list of reasons for consistency and these tend to be categorised by what information is on the doctors' note. For example, there is the distinction between mental illness/depression and stress.

Discussion took place regarding the use of the term BAME and it was noted that a lot of organisations are moving away from it. It was confirmed that the college would also cease to use it in future

9.1 Update on Black FE Leadership Initiative

The Vice Principal HR and Student Services presented the report and reflected that the Principal had commented on the Group and their work at a previous meeting. He had identified the 10 Point Plan, which highlights 4 C's: curriculum, culture, climate and communication to address underrepresentation of black leadership in FE. Whilst this project was largely FE based, the Plan does lend itself to a wider range of organisations.

It was noted that the staff individualised record (SIR) return to government would be mandatory from next year and this will ensure consistent and comprehensive data. The annual E&D report captures data for staff and students. The college has captured recruitment profiling for some time. The ethnicity pay gap will be included in the annual report in 2022.

The Vice Principal HR and Student Services described the next steps, including a re-vamp of the college's job vacancy page with some really positive videos of employees, activities for middle managers to support them to encourage staff progress and on-going support of the Aspiring Leaders Programme, that currently has 46% BAME representation.

Q. The work done is very encouraging – would it be possible for governors to go on the unconscious bias training?

A. Yes, it was a very thought-provoking session, but delivered by an external trainer. We will consider how we can best deliver this.

9.2 Staff Survey

The Vice Principal HR and Student Services presented the survey outcomes and confirmed that the results had been positive, particularly in a very difficult year. The Health and Safety Committee had requested that specific questions relating to COVID-19 be included and they had been extremely happy with the positive results in relation to those questions.

The Corporation requested that thanks were passed on to the Team.

10. Projected Financial Position 2020/21

The Vice Principal Finance explained that the Financial Oversight Group would take place on 15th November 2021. She noted that income for 2020/21 had been above budgeted levels. With TGH income being included in 2020/21 all KPIs were achieved and the College would therefore be judged outstanding based on ESFA criteria.

Q. How extraordinary is it to have this level of cash – should it be that level?

A. The Vice Principal Finance explained that there would be a proposal to repay an element of the current loans and funds would be required for the Stratford re-development. She noted that it was unusual for FE colleges to have this level of cash.

11. Pay Award

This item was deemed confidential.

12. Children Looked After Policy

The Vice Principal HR and Student Services presented the report and policy and noted that existing practices and staff were in place to support Children Looked After.

Clarity was sought regarding achievement data relating to looked after students and it was noted that the information about this group will be included in achievement data.

It was confirmed that the Safeguarding Governor, Geraldine Swanton, would be the designated Children Looked After Governor.

Resolved to approve the Children Looked After Policy.

13. Minutes of the Audit Committee meeting that took place on 18th October 2021

The Minutes of the Audit Committee were received and confirmed that it was good to know that Governors welcomed the key risks being identified alongside the Corporation agenda.

It was noted that it was very important for Corporation to be involved in the discussion about risk appetite and tolerance. Time would be arranged to discuss this at Corporation on 30th November 2021 and more detailed consideration would be given to the college's approach at the Governors' Development Day in January 2022.

The Vice Principal Finance noted that she and the Director of Risk, Compliance and were currently developing proposals for the college's approach and invited any Governors will experience in this area to feed into the discussions.

13.1 Health and Safety Annual Report and Policy Update

The Chair of the Committee presented the annual report and policy update

Q. Do the educational visits include work experience? Where is that picked up?

A. The work experience co-ordinator carries out a risk assessment, but this is not covered in the software described. The Vice Principal Quality and Curriculum explained that it would be useful to consider reporting of health and safety elements for work experience

Q. In terms of accident type for 2019/20 – what was happening in relation to the increased numbers, particularly in relation to moving objects and slips/trips/falls?

A. The Vice Principal Finance confirmed that she would check the data for 2019/20 to identify any specific issues. However, the types of accidents in 2020/21 relate to the restrictions in place due to COVID-19, with areas like sports unable to function in the normal way.

Resolved to approve the Health and Safety Policy.

13.2 Data Protection Policies

The Chair of the Committee presented the Data Protection Policies and noted that they had been reviewed by Geraldine Swanton in detail.

Resolved to approve the Data Protection Policies:

- Data Protection Policy
- Data Retention Schedule
- Data Archiving and Retention Policy
- Privacy Statement – Governors
- Privacy Statement – College Staff
- Privacy Statement – College Students
- General Privacy Statement

13.3 Internal Audit Plan for 2021/22

The Chair of the Committee presented the updated internal audit plan for 2021/22

Q. Does the Plan place adequate importance on sustainability given the increased profile and future requirements?

A. The Vice Principal Finance explained that there is a national route map on sustainability and that the college was undertaking a lot of work to align with the national route map and identified requirements for organisations – an update would be provided at the December 2021 Corporation meeting.

Resolved to approve the update Internal Audit Plan for 2021/22.

14. Feedback from GDD on 6th November 2021

The Chair thanked Governors for feedback about the Governors' Development Day and it was noted that members felt more comfortable about Ofsted requirements. They noted that the Governors' Information sheet would be very useful once available. It was confirmed that it was reassuring and useful to have more insight into how the college supports and manages issues around sexual harassment.

It would, however, be useful to have an opportunity for a PREVENT update – it was noted that this would be picked up at a later meeting and Governors were very welcome to meet with the team for 1:1 updates, as appropriate. The Vice Principal HR and Student Services noted that activity had been much reduced in relation to PREVENT generally, but that he was confident that staff would pick up any issues if they arose.

15. Management Representation Report

The content of the Management Representation Report were received.

16. Sanctuary Update

This item was deemed confidential.

17. Regular Reports

17.1 Bids and Projects Report, including Termly KPIs Update

The Bids and Projects Report, including Termly KPIs was received for information.

17.2 IT Update

The IT Update was received for information.

17.3 Procurement Report

The contents of the Procurement report were received for information.

17.4 Tender Update (Confidential externally)

The contents of the tender update were received for information.

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

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

17.6 Gifts and Hospitality Report

The contents of the Gifts and Hospitality Report were received for information.

17.7 Governors' Register of Interest

The contents of the Governors' Register of Interest were noted.

18. Date of the Next Meeting

The next meeting was scheduled for Tuesday 30th November 2021, starting at 5pm at the Blossomfield Campus.

Signed



Date **30 November 2021**

The meeting ended at 7.30pm

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19. Pay Award

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Barbara Hughes left during consideration of this item.

16. Sanctuary Update