

Minutes of the Corporation meeting held on 5th October 2022 in the Damson Suite, Blossomfield Campus

Present

Christine Abbott
Paul Assinder – Joint Vice-Chair of Governors
Scott Beasley
Tasleem Chaudary – *arrangements approved to join remotely*
Rebecca Gater – Principal & Chief Executive
Vic Gwozdz – FE Student Governor
Sarah Horton-Walsh
Barbara Hughes – Chair of Governors
Tony Lucas
Amirun Nehar
Donna Poole
Harrison Thompson
Sally Tomlinson

In Attendance

Heather Evans (Deputy Principal)
Pete Haynes (Vice Principal HR and Student Services)
Lee Jamieson (Vice Principal Quality & Curriculum)
Sam Bromwich (Director of Corporate Governance, Risk & Compliance)
Adam Thomas (Director of Student Services)
Dan Starkey (Director of Funding and Information Services)
Anita Suman – Shadow Governor

Announcements

The Chair welcomed Anita Suman from Aston University, as part of the WMCA Shadow Governor scheme, who is joining us for 6 months. Also welcomed Dan Starkey and Amirun Nehar to their first meeting.

The Chair highlighted the new reporting style, including a one-page summary report, responding to feedback on the volume of papers. Any feedback from this approach is welcome.

1 Top Key Risks and New Risk

The Chair advised that there are 2 separate documents, however these will merge in the future.

Q: Re: Change in personnel risks, are we putting a timeframe on these?

A: Chair confirmed this was linked to probation periods of the role, so 12 months.

New Risk

The new risk ONS review was discussed, and it was suggested that if the decision has been made by 5th November 2022, this could be discussed in more detail at the Governor Development Day.

2 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Lucy Lee and Geraldine Swanton.

3 Declarations of Interest in Relation to this Agenda

There were no new declarations of interest.

Post-meeting amendments to the date of the previous Corporation meeting and Minutes

4 Minutes of the Corporation Meeting Held on 5th July 2022 [correct date was 06 July 2022]

4.1 Minutes of 5th July [correct date 06 July 2022], Matters Arising and Actions

The minutes of the meeting held on 5th July 2022 [correct date 06 July 2022] were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

4.2 Matters Arising and Actions

Director of Corporate Governance, Risk and Control confirmed that that the actions report will be actively monitored and not brought to Corporation as a report. BoardEffect is to be used as more of a resource base for Governance as a platform. Documents when uploaded will then be signposted to you via Anne Carey through a link.

4.2.1 The Vice Principal HR & Student Services has provided the Gender Pay Gap Analysis report, and this has been uploaded to BoardEffect and Anne Carey will signpost via a link. ACTION to be uploaded to BoardEffect

4.2.2 It was previously proposed for a Governor visit to the IOT. The Corporation meeting on 1st February 2023 will be held at the IoT, preceded by a tour for Governors.

4.2.3 The Strategy SiG in July did not take place as it was replaced with the Ofsted SiG. The Government Development Day will focus on strategy.

5 Principal's Introduction and Update Report

The Principal and Chief Executive Officer presented her report, which will now be uploaded on to BoardEffect. This will feed into the Strategy Day on 5th November 2022.

Q: Excellent presentation in preparation for Strategy session. It was noted that 16-18 numbers are down which is disappointing.

A: RG responded that there is increased competition, especially as Solihull 6th form have started joining the T Levels market and doing vocational courses and UCB have now entered into the Engineering market. Most of our students are from the Birmingham area so if Birmingham Colleges are offering new opportunities, we are therefore competing for the same market share. To sustain our market share is to grow market share, so we can keep improving and this will be our priority moving forward.

Q: What's been the biggest high and the biggest challenge so far for you?

A: Stratford redevelopment has been a real challenge, with the work disruptions and timelines which has been difficult for the staff involved to keep students motivated. In terms of highs, it's been great to see campus back full and thriving post COVID.

The Chair confirmed that the presentation provided Governors with a good understanding of the current issues and sets the scene well for the future.

5.1 Structure Update Including VP Post IoT Developments

The Principal and Chief Executive noted the following;

- The IoT board have agreed for Micky Burke to be redesignated to Director of Operations and lead the IoT through the implementation phase. Micky will attend next Corporation with Rosa for Governors to meet him
- SLT- two posts being interviewed next week. Executive Director Quality, and Vice Principal Funding and Skills. The latter is a senior post holder and so Governors are involved in the selection of that post

Sarah Horton-Walsh joined the meeting at this point.

6 September 2022 Update

The Director of Funding and Information Services presented the report for Governors to note the 16-18 recruitment trends. Applications confirmed at 95% target. Drop in percentage of students from Birmingham. Appendix 3 shows marked increase from acceptance to enrolment. Progression in L3 from year 1 to year 2 has dropped.

6.1 Recruitment Initial Indicators

Q: How can we improve conversion and mitigate the issue by having fewer leavers and what are we doing about it?

A: There are less applications, but more applications will be turned into enrolments. In 21/22 it was 57% conversion rate, now it's at 71.2%. The Vice Principal HR & Student Services confirmed the importance of keeping in touch with students and Purlos has had a positive impact in keeping them informed of next steps. Sways have been positive. The Vice Principal Curriculum & Quality advised that this is the first time that we've been able to speak to students who think they've made a mistake and chosen the wrong course, who would previously would have left. Can now have a targeted powerful conversation with them.

Q: Are we reducing entry standards in any way to increase conversion rates?

A: RG Definitely not. Used the 'swap not drop campaign' through Purlos, moving students onto the right program. The Vice Principal HR & Student Services advised e.g., Hair and Beauty female student moved to motor vehicle and is feeling very positive. First week 'How are you feeling' survey has 90% feeling great. The Principal and Chief Executive confirmed that Appendix 1 is a snapshot in time and numbers are moving daily.

Q: Appendix 2 shows significant changes, how much is down to an alteration in course offering.

A: The Principal and Chief Executive advised that we've not significantly changed our course offerings, but other Colleges have. e.g., Solihull 6th Form have introduced T Levels. We will ensure the dashboard link is opened which will help Governors to see the live situation. Dashboard live link to be opened and sent to Governors. **Action**

Q: Can we capture any students from schools that traditionally feed into places like 6th Form College? Does the same apply to applications?

A: 6th Form College have operated differently this year with regards to their use of waiting lists and they may have changed their entry requirements. There is definitely work to be done on this. Re: applications, we can do analysis to see if there is a correlation. Working with those schools who have dropped number of students sent to us so we can see what differences are there and send the analysis to Governors. **Action**

Q: How far do you need to go to protect your student applications?

A: The Principal and Chief Executive confirmed that we're working through an external company called J2 Research who will give us useful analysis.

Q: Are you comfortable financially with lower 16-18 recruitment numbers?

A: The Deputy Principal confirmed that the way funding works, it will impact next year. Therefore, we are going through a rigorous process.

Q: Do we have an active plan for our links to feeder schools?

A: The Vice Principal HR & Student Services confirmed that we will do some analysis with feeder schools as the number hasn't changed. The marketing team are out regularly in many schools.

Q: From personal experience, do we need to address what happens after initial contact from Solihull College to schools as there can be a drop off in communication after the initial contact.

A: The Vice Principal HR & Student Services confirmed this was a very valid point. Huge spike in applications last year. We're above where we were pre-COVID.

Q: The Chair asked about Appendix 3 and progression. What are your thoughts on why progression numbers are down?

A: The Vice Principal HR & Student Services advised that our students last year were affected by teacher assessed grades as many had over inflated grades. Government created extra funding to assist with this cohort. Definitely impacted on achievement of learners and their appetite for continuing to learn in a 2-year programme. There was a clear mental health impact from the pandemic which was difficult for many students and therefore impacted on progression. Many have returned but some have been side-lined into other courses and qualifications.

Q When will you get national data to compare?

A: The Vice Principal HR & Student Services confirmed not until January 2023.

The Chair reiterated about Governor's dashboard. The current year will be open for Governors in the next week. **Action**

6.2 Performance Against Target, Achievement. Interim, Presentation

Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality highlighted the salient points. Grade inflation from the previous 2 years. Measured achievement against 18-19(the last pre-Covid cohort). The most reliable measure is an Ofsted inspection which said the quality of education is very good. We feel we are getting students into the right program and in a place to achieve.

Q: The 6-week extra support program is coming to an end. Is it long enough?

A: The 'At Risk' process has been increased from termly to monthly so we can put the right interventions in place. The Principal and Chief Executive confirmed that the tuition catch-up fund from DfE is still available after 6 weeks to put in extra work where the support is needed.

Q: As a student I might feel let down by the recent experience and the system. If we could maintain for the next 2 terms, we could help mitigate feeling of being hard done by, by the education system. Can we do any extra?

A: The Principal and Chief Executive advised that support from Student Services is wide and holistic. We always ask if we are doing enough for students, listening to them, and getting their feedback.

Q: The Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality asked if you were looking for assurance?

A: Yes

He confirmed that it won't stop after 6 weeks as we continue to monitor these interventions.

Q: Those students who have switched courses or Colleges could miss some of the initial 6 weeks, how do we manage this?

A: They fall into late start programs which is really focused and provides intensive care support for those students. They still benefit from the 6 weeks program and process. The Principal and

Chief Executive advised that we invest a lot of resource into services to support students, above and beyond what is required. We are able to invest a lot more than most Colleges due to our financial stability.

The Staff Governor confirmed that the At-Risk meetings are very good, and student seem more settled than in previous years.

Dan Starkey left the meeting after item 6.

7 Quality, Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality presented the report, highlighting what we're doing to keep staff ready for future Ofsted inspections and Learning Walks/Teaching Triangles.

7.1 Quality Improvement Strategy and Cycle 22/23.

Q: Slightly concerned that a Teaching Triangle could be a way of presenting mediocrity. Could this lead to more of the same?

A: The Coach is still an integral part. The Coach, who has gone through the internal training process, will be sat at the centre of the triangle and still lead on development plans.

The Principal and Chief Executive confirmed that we want to make our teaching as good as it can be. To mitigate against this, we agreed to the coach being involved in the triangle as well. It's a good compromise.

Q: How do we know that all this activity has led to improvement?

A: Tracked throughout the year. QIP is updated regularly, and progress is RAG rated as a whole College.

The Principal and Chief Executive advised that on a school level, there are MOT's where we look at KPI's and through that process we can measure whether the previous interventions have led to improvement and then there's intensive care.

Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality confirmed that intensive care courses identified are provided with additional support through the intensive care process. You also have Faculty Health Checks (soon to become School Performance Boards)

Q: At what point are there hard targets such as attendance and attainment and progression levels to see if there has been any improvement?

A: That's the MOT that happens over the year.

Q: Do Governors get this?

A: The Chair confirmed we do and a key point to note for Governors are the self-assessments in the area feeds into the whole College self-assessment which Ofsted read. Governors can access all the data from the dashboard. There are published figures and student satisfaction. All the data from Safeguarding team, including how are they, how are the mental health referrals, all aspects of support that have an impact of the quality of the learner experience show all the evidence which Governors can draw on which are the Colleges evidence which is compared nationally like enrolment figures to previous years.

The Principal and Chief Executive confirmed that MOT 1 is the early indicator in November.

Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality advised that how we measure progress is way beyond what many other Colleges generally do. It's a live indication of how students are progressing against the Markbook.

Quality Improvement Strategy was approved by Governors.

7.2 Curriculum Plan 22/23

Curriculum Plan was presented, and Governors were asked to note the contents.

7.3 Government Involvement in Curriculum Activities

Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality highlighted that the school SAR validation panels start next week. Learning Visits and focus groups provides an external assurance for Governors.

The Chair thanks to those who put themselves forward to attend. If anyone is available to fill in any of the gaps, please liaise with Anne who has the list. You'll get calendar invites. Tasleem may be able to fill some gaps on her return. **Action**

The Chair confirmed that the Governor feedback from the learning visits is now available on BoardEffect in Appendix 2. Please check if you've had the appropriate answers to your questions from the relevant Focus Groups and if there's anything that you wish to follow up on, please speak to BH/SB.

7.4 Evaluation of Teaching and Learning policy

The Evaluation of Teaching and Learning policy was approved

The Chair requested that any future changes to policies are highlighted in green, so they can be identified easily. Please ensure that this is done on all future policies. **Action**

8 Safeguarding Annual Report and Policy Approval (including Ofsted update)

The Director of Student Services provided an overview of the changes to the policy. The changes to the Keeping Children Safe are reflected in the policy, highlighted in green.

Governors will be required to read and confirmed they have read Keeping Children Safe. They should also understand the role of the DSL in Annex 3 where there is a model job description. The Director of Corporate Governance, Risk and Compliance confirmed there will be a poll sent out on BoardEffect for all Governors to complete. Action

Q: Where reference is made to Governor training, it says to be updated at regular intervals, can you clarify how often this needs to be. The Vice Principal HR & Student Services agreed and will update this. **Action**

The Chair confirmed that 80% of Governors had completed all 3 aspects of the mandatory training. Governors asked to ensure they were up to date with their training. **Action**

It was noted that the external support for supervision of support teams on Safeguarding has now ceased and will be done internally by the Vice Principal HR & Student Services and the Director of Student Services. In response to the Ofsted action plan, the Ofsted SiG should be looking at progress. Have you considered the complete objectivity of support that previously Hilary would have provided?

The Director of Student Services responded that when Hilary helped when he first took on this role, but this was no longer needed. We feel our decision making and judgements in dealing with cases are sound. The Ofsted feedback was in relation to record keeping not judgement. Spoken with different establishments and the model we had with Hilary was unique compared with other colleges.

Vice Principal HR & Student Services confirmed that if we can find the right person to do the same role and provide that level of external assurance, we will do.

The Director of Student Services confirmed that the Safeguarding board (SLT) meetings, provide extra level of assurance

The Principal and Chief Executive advised that this is a new structure of SLT meetings which are much more focused in terms of their remit on specific areas, such as Safeguarding and Quality and Standards.

Q: Have you thought of looking outside of the FE sector, maybe the charity sectors who already have strong Safeguarding policies and structures in place?

A: It's something we could look into. To look outside of the FE sector for possible external support. **Action**

The Chair will pick up on the link with the action plan in the Ofsted SiG, planned for November (after Ian Smith's visit) and will be chaired by Tasleem.

The Vice Principal HR & Student Services stated that in terms of the development, this will form a large part of the agenda in the November Corporation meeting.

Q: Re: online teaching, are we looking to do much online teaching now?

A: No. We have to reference it in the policy should we need to refer to remote teaching and make sure online safety is within the Safeguarding remit.

The policy was **approved**.

Director of Student Services left the meeting after item 8.

9 Property Update

The Deputy Principal presented the property update for information.

Post-meeting amendments

9.1 Property Report

The Deputy Principal presented the Property Report

9.2 Update from the Property Special Interest Group held on 09 September 2022

The notes of the Property SiG were presented to the meeting for discussion.

9.3 Stratford Residencies *[previously shown as Item 9.1]*

The Chair confirmed this item was important to discuss. A detailed discussion took place regarding the decision needed.

The Deputy Principal confirmed that several meetings have taken place regarding this decision and risk appetite had been taken into account in order to inform the decision. The recommendation from Management team is to sell the property to Nantes Properties as the benefits to students are significant. There's a £4 million initial cash receipt and cost savings through not demolishing the buildings. On balance the risk is worth taking for the benefit of students in future years. Work has been done with the legal team to provide as much protection as possible, but we can't mitigate all risks completely.

Q: What will the students look out onto at Stratford and how will they feel? Research on the ground at Stratford is that the perception is a) People felt we didn't care enough about the

students, and they were not getting the same experience as the Solihull students b) We must be short of money as were selling the building. Both are inaccurate but important that we recognise this perception.

A: The Deputy Principal confirmed the option of keeping just one building would probably not be a viable commercial option.

The other counter ethical argument that Lindsey brought to the table of demolishing buildings that could be converted into accommodation would be quite wasteful and there is a lot of Stratford community opposition to that and that's offsetting what's actually happening on campus.

Q: If you decide to knock them down, it doesn't mean that you won't ever do anything different with that site. The land could be developed in the future.

A: Yes, that is true. However, we would probably not get as much financial return doing this.

Q: How are you managing stakeholder views?

A: Regular meetings with staff and the unions. Contact through the Herald who regularly want an update. District Council are involved. RG They were more concerned over us knocking it down. We're managing those stakeholders.

Q: Stakeholder management is key. First loyalty is to the students who currently attending and will be attending in the future and £6m is not to be sniffed at. What's the detriment of releasing that £6m to invest in services and I don't see any detriment to those who work/attend at Stratford, it might be nice to have a landscape but the ultimate benefit to the students is too great to pass up. Were in danger of re-treading paths we've already been down.

A: Absolutely agree.

Q: Could we say that we're going to allocate x of £6m to X and x to Y etc; and make a huge PR exercise of it?

A: The Principal and Chief Executive confirmed with the redevelopments going on now, we've almost spent the money in advance. The facilities are going to be amazing when done. It will be easy to show what we've done.

The Chair said the decision will have long term repercussions and can clearly see benefit of some changes with the investment. Governors need to take into account the impact of students on site and student behaviour. We need to make the right decision for the College and students, for now and for the future.

Q: Has anyone held discussions with the students about it?

A: The Chair took part in some focus groups last year and students were focused on the facilities specifically for their course. They only tend to see what's happening now. The Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality advised that he has seen both sides when previously working at Stratford College before the residents' buildings were there and doesn't feel the students were particularly affected when they were being built. Only difference is that they were residencies for HE students. Therefore, likely to be less disruption and risky this time.

The Vice Principal HR & Student Services confirmed that when we developed Woodlands Campus which backed on to housing, there were concerns and in the main the concerns haven't manifested into reality and it's a good community location.

The Chair asked the Governors to vote on this decision based on the plans laid out in the paper. All Governors agreed to go ahead with scheme at Stratford subject to the appropriate terms.

10 Subcontracting Update

The Executive Director Employment and Skills & IOT presented her reported, highlighting some minor changes to the policy, from feedback from the auditors, that we needed to be a bit clearer that in the event of clawback there is no additional charge, and the College retains the fees.

In term of funding and numbers. In a good position.

There has been a discussion with RMF to go back to a contract of £1.2m with an option to increase by 200k. Gives us a bit more assurance when making a decision later in the year.

The Subcontracting Strategy and Policy was **approved**. This will be uploaded to the website by the end of October. **Action**

11 Bids and Projects Update

The Deputy Principal confirmed this item was confidential for commercial reasons only. An extension has been submitted for the STEM Up project.

12 Minutes of the meeting of the Search and Governance Committee held on 26th September 22

Annually, the Governors register of interest is sent out individually. Please update if there are any changes and sign to confirm that the register is up to date. The register of interest to be sent out in next few weeks. **Action**

Following the self-assessment meetings in the Summer, The Chair thanked those involved and summarised that the general consensus was that Governors highly value their role of supporting and challenging the College. They strongly agree that the conduct quality and impact of Governance is very good. There were a number of helpful suggestions on the way we work, how we can improve the way we work and the impact this has had which will be incorporated into the action plan for 22/23.

12.1 Membership Report

The Chair asked Governors to ratify that Tony Lucas will Chair the Remuneration Committee and this was **agreed**.

The election of the HE Student Governor is currently in progress. The Enrichment Team follow a process to elect the HE Learner Voice Officer who is then offered the opportunity to take on this role.

12.2 Search and Governance Annual Assurance Report

Deputy Principal reported that she and Director of IT had met with Badri to look at how the IT paper can be simplified so it's more of a table format. She reported that the contract for the Manage Threat Response had been approved on an 8-month trial.

It was noted that Badri had played an important role in the report. A note of thanks to him as he's stepping down as a Governor but remaining as an advisor.

To simplify the format of the next IT paper in November. **Action**

13 Policies

13.1 Disciplinary Procedure

The Vice Principal HR & Student Services presented the Disciplinary Procedure which was approved by Governors.

13.2 Tuition Fee Policies

The Deputy Principal presented the Tuition Fee Policy. Shakespeare Martineau have completed a full review which was really useful. It was agreed that the policies would be reviewed every three years and only come back sooner for approval if there are fundamental changes.

Q: The Chair asked when the fee changes that comes back to Corporation?

A: No. Principal agrees fees, given to Governors for information. Governors approve policy.

The policies were **approved**.

14 Draft Agenda for GDD on 5th November 2022

14.1 Strategy Briefing

The Chair confirmed the focus for the day would be around strategy and what will become updated Strategic Plan for the College.

The Director for Corporate Governance, Risk and Compliance confirmed we're looking at inviting a guest speaker to give a bit of a challenge about what's going on in the sector and provide an external view.

Q: Is the change of Principal likely to trigger interest from Ofsted?

A: The Principal and Chief Executive confirmed yes, it usually would do, but it's unlikely to be immediate due to my involvement with inspections.

Post-meeting amendments

The following items were received for information

15 Items for Information

15.1 PMR June 2022

15.2 Use of the College Seal and Chair's e-signature

15.3 Student Voice Activities 2022-2023

15.4 ESFA Letter

15.5 Tender Update Report

15.6 Corporate Gifts & Hospitality Report

16 Any other Business

The Chair confirmed that the ETF training modules were now available to access and all Governors should have had an email from Future Learn to register their college email address. If not had it, please let Anne know as she will be able to follow up with the coordinator.

Post-meeting amendments

Date of the next meeting

The next Corporation meeting was scheduled for 09 November 2022 at the Woodlands Campus.

The meeting closed at 8pm.

Signed *Barbara Hughes*

Date 09 November 2022