

Solihull College and University Centre

Minutes of the Corporation meeting held on 9th November 2022 in W119/120, Woodlands Campus

Present

Barbara Hughes (Chair)
Paul Assinder (Joint Vice-Chair)
Christine Abbott
Tasleem Chaudary
Rebecca Gater (Principal)
Vic Gwozdz (FE Student Governor)
Sarah Horton-Walsh
Lucy Lee
Tony Lucas (Joint Vice-Chair)
Donna Poole (Staff Governor)
Harrison Thompson
Amirun Nehar
Geraldine Swanton
Sally Tomlinson

Anita Suman (Shadow Governor)

In Attendance

Heather Evans (Deputy Principal)
Pete Haynes (Vice Principal HR and Student Services)
Lee Jamieson (Vice Principal, Curriculum and Quality) via Teams
Rosa Wells (Executive Director Employment & Skills and IoT)
Adam Thomas (Director of Student Services)
Dan Starkey (Director of Funding and Information Services)
Michael Burke (Greater Birmingham & Solihull IoT Manager)

Sam Bromwich (Director of Corporate Governance, Risk and Compliance)

Announcements

The Chair thanked John Duffy who provided a tour of Woodlands Campus which was excellent.

- 1. Apologies for Absence**
Apologies were received from Scott Beasley.
- 2. Declarations of Interest in Relation to this Agenda**
There were no new declarations of interest.
- 3. Minutes of the Corporation meeting held on 5th October 2022**

The minutes of the meeting held on 5th October 2022 were agreed as an accurate record with the addition of Amirun Nehar as attending and signed by the Chair.

3.1 Matters Arising and Actions

3.1.1 ESFA Subcontracting tender

Deputy Principal confirmed that at the last meeting the Subcontracting Plan was approved for the year which included £200k of subcontracting for the ESFA funding but we did not know what our final student numbers were and could not approve the tender. The student numbers are now available and as expected, as a result the tender for subcontracting can take place. The tender is attached to the board papers. If approved it will go through to the Chair, Principal and Chief Executive and Deputy Principal to sign. An open tender has to happen and will take place over the next few weeks.

Q: Do we think that there is sufficient interest in the market?

A: Deputy Principal confirmed that there may not be a lot of interest, but we would expect the organisation that we worked with last year to apply again.

3.1.2 Expenses Policy

Deputy Principal confirmed no further update at this time as we're still waiting on the HMRC.

3.1.3 Actions Report

Director of Corporate Governance, Risk and Control confirmed that that the actions report will continue to be actively monitored and not brought to Corporation as a report, unless requested.

3.1.4 Top Key risks

The Chair confirmed that the direction of travel has seen no significant change in the risks, which can be seen as a positive.

The confidential risks will remain as confidential due to them involving people and personnel issues.

There is a new risk which came out of Audit Committee regarding meeting our KPI's. in light of a number of factors (financial, political uncertainty, student numbers, cost of living, energy costs etc;)

The Deputy Principal confirmed this will be brought to the Financial Oversight committee at the end of the month.

Q: Is this a KPI risk, not a cashflow risk?

A: The Deputy Principal confirmed that if you look at KPI's as a whole (e.g. pay percentage) the cash in the bank doesn't help with that, it's about looking at the whole picture. Not worried about going concern due to cash balances but there may be some KPI's that we struggle with next year depending on how things look.

The Chair confirmed that having attended the Chairs Association of College Network, this is common practice at the moment.

4. Institute of Technology report

The Executive Director Employment and Skills & IOT presented her report and confirmed that the Hub handover was expected to be 11th November 2022. With her departure, the IoT board have considered the structure needed within the IoT to maintain the continuity and have approved a regrade of the Greater Birmingham & Solihull IoT Manager role to Operations Director. We will be recruiting an Operations Manager to support this role.

The Greater Birmingham & Solihull IoT Manager covered the main priorities which includes:

- The DfE license to be an Institute of Technology is due to expire in 2024. We have joined the DfE consultation group which will hopefully allow a greater opportunity to influence how that relicensing goes. There is a meeting in a couple of weeks.
- Looking to create an Operational Plan for the next 5 years and will bring this back to Corporation when it's available.
- Utilisation of the room. Training on the rig is required. In the New Year we're getting a rig timetable together, using the Masters students from BCU and Aston to be future demonstrators and also using the train the trainer model so they can train those undergraduates following behind them.

The Chair, on behalf of the Governors, presented flowers to Executive Director Employment and Skills & IOT and wished her a successful future with her new employer and looking forward to potential collaboration in the future.

It was confirmed that everyone will have an opportunity to visit the IoT on 28th March 2023, when Corporation will be held at the Hub with a pre-meeting tour.

5. Recruitment Update

The Director of Funding and Information Services provided an overview of the new Governor Dashboard which links to live data containing the latest PMR.

The Chair confirmed that the dashboard was through the College website under Governors Private Access and this is the preferred route for access. It will require Governors to login (College username and password) before accessing the information.

If there are any difficulties accessing the site, please request access through the site and the Director of Funding and Information Services will ensure that the access is granted. **Action**

The Chair highlighted the importance of seeing accurate daily data on enrolments to see shifting patterns on numbers. Governors can also see the Financials, the QIP, student survey results, teaching and learning observation results through the dashboard. The user guide will be updated with the new screen shots in due course. **Action**

Q: As a rough guide and indication only, what would the cost of the -422 student numbers be?

A: The Deputy Principal estimated this to be just over £2 million in 2023-24.

Q: It was mentioned previously that we would expect to make up some of the shortfall through the year. What progress has been made?

A: Principal and Chief Executive confirmed that we can make up the shortfall, not with 16-18's but with adult provision and apprenticeships. The Head of Schools and Assistant Principals are working on a plan to increase in year, through either apprenticeships or additional adult courses. This will be presented in a couple of weeks to EMT.

Q: Will this help get back the 16-18 budget next year or will it be another source of income?

A: It was confirmed this would be another source of income due to different funding.

The Chair started that core numbers are down to various factors including competition in the area and the strategy to improve conversion rates is now complete (work in conjunction with Purlos).

Q: What has the extra work since the last Corporation achieved in terms of numbers?

A: The Principal and Chief Executive confirmed this won't be seen until next Friday but we will update at the next Corporation. Our conversion rate has improved significantly from last year. The numbers were in the last Corporation minutes.

A: The Deputy Principal confirmed most work since the Summer has been based on early withdrawals and that we didn't lose many students as estimated.

Q: Will there be an opportunity to discuss whether the new lower intake number is going to continue or whether there are tactics to return to last year.

A: The Director of Funding and Information Services confirmed that January is when the market share information appears on Vector. The Principal and Chief Executive confirmed that we need to actively increase our market share and this is part of our strategy and should come back to Governors in the Spring.

Q: Why are the apprentices in Construction and Engineering withdrawal figures low?

A: Deputy Principal confirmed that some of this is due to new starters failing to meet the standards. The Principal and Chief Executive confirmed that there is evidence nationally that retention of students in longer term programmes (4 to 5 years) is low. Governmental data analysis confirms 47% do not complete their programme. A new Head of School has been appointed and we are looking to forge those relationships with employers to increase apprenticeships and to ensure the quality of provision meets their needs.

6. Safeguarding Governors Development

The Chair reminded Governors of the importance of being up to date with the mandatory online training. Each Governor to check their personal record and complete the survey on BoardEffect to confirm they have read Keeping Children Safe in Education. **Action**

The Vice Principal HR & Student Services and the Director of Student Services held a development session on safeguarding, The Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) explained and confirmed Governors' responsibilities for Safeguarding. Governors followed an assurance activity to look at incident records, which was one of the key concerns that came out of the Ofsted inspection.

The Governing body have a collective responsibility for Safeguarding within the statutory guidance 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' and to ensure that the College policies and procedures comply with the law and statutory guidance. Governors should receive training throughout their tenure as Governors, starting from their induction. Ultimately to ensure Safeguarding permeates everything that the College does and to ensure that proper records are kept. Governors must be assured that the College has a designated Safeguarding Lead at a senior level of authority, that appropriate resources are allocated to Safeguarding and that it is a regular item on the agenda.

The Vice Principal HR & Student Services confirmed that the intention is to provide a termly update. **Action**

Governors should also be cognisant of the Equality Act, Human Rights Act and the Public Sector Equality Duty and it may be worth holding a training session refresher **Action**

Q: I understand the need for Governors to ensure that Safeguarding practices are up to speed. Is the onus on us to delve down or the College to report up?

A: The Governor Safeguarding Lead confirmed it is the responsibility of the College to report up. It includes highlighting any deficiencies in the policies.

The Vice Principal HR & Student Services highlighted Ian Smith's visit who referred to the 'Inquisitive Governor' and their role around safeguarding.

An activity took place around record keeping in safeguarding logs record and the Vice Principal HR & Student Services and The Director of Student Services referred to the risk assessment process within safeguarding. Feedback from the activity was provided by Governors.

Q: How are notes categorised by the Safeguarding Officer?

A: Work is ongoing and the Risk Assessment has been introduced to the Safeguarding Officers and guidance provided about how they should complete these. Categories are being introduced to assist effective notes. The challenge is to ensure consistency across 10 Safeguarding Officers.

Q: At a glance, how do you identify the most important risk?

A: The Vice Principal HR & Student Services confirmed they work with thresholds and a scoring mechanism is a tool to help make the decision.

Q: Are the thresholds on the risk assessment?

A: It's on the record itself on MyConcern but will look at adding the current threshold to the form.

Action

Q: You've identified the risk and mitigated against it. How often do you return to this and check that the mitigation has continued and is this ever recorded?

A: The Director of Student Services confirmed that it would depend on the individual case. In the example case given in the exercise that would sit with the support tutor who made the original referral. Safeguarding Officers will follow up with checks, where deemed necessary.

The Chair re-stated the importance of completing the poll on BoardEffect to confirm that Governors have read Keeping Children Safe. **Action**

7. HR report including Equality and Diversity discussion and strategy

Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality presented the annual report. Sickness absence has returned to pre-pandemic levels. Staff turnover is slightly higher but there is a challenge in appointing some management posts.

Q: Looking for gender pay information?

A: We report in the annual report and in BoardEffect.

Q: How does the absence figure benchmark against other Colleges?

A: AoC gather information occasionally. Feel it's fairly typical of Colleges and Public Sectors.

Q: Vacancies? How long on average does it take to fill them?

A: Depends on the specialism. STEM is a concern but this is typical of the current climate.

Q: In light of recruitment problems in FE, Governors asked for this information at the next meeting of where the shortages are and impact.

A: Will do and include time taken to fill vacancies **Action**.

The Principal and Chief Executive Officer and Vice Principal HR & Student Services presented the research report which will be uploaded to BoardEffect. The Chair felt it was really positive to have done the research.

From a Regional overview, the Principal and Chief Executive confirmed we were part of the College West Midlands Steering Group for Racial Equality. All 8 Colleges provided staff and student data. Some of the key findings include the staff profile being 78% white and this increases in Management positions. There's a dominance of white students in apprenticeship programs and in adult programs, retention is lowest in BAME groups. In terms of achievements, Asian students outperform others but our data slightly bucks the national trend.

In terms of our position, there is a positive increase in staff percentage and our establishment teaching staff is also heading in the right direction. Governor profile is similar to the management profile.

The Principal and Chief Executive confirmed our membership of the Black Leadership Group. We will be completing the 10-point plan toolkit with external training commencing on 16th January. It's a whole day session and Governor representation will be invited.

Action

Q: Could we see the Terms of Reference for the College West Midlands Steering Group for Racial Equality group?

A: Yes. **Action**

The Principal and Chief Executive asked if a special interest group to oversee completion of the 10-point toolkit and future initiatives would be beneficial in the New Year? **Action**

Q: The Chair asked if there was interest in having a Special Interest group.

A: Supportive of having one as it allows further discussion without interfering with Corporation agendas.

Governors debated whether a specific objective around EDI was needed. It will be added to the reporting sheet.

Q: Really positive step forward. Is the 10-point plan race specific or is it broader EDI as the data presented shows gender and disability as well. EDI is about that broad spectrum.

A: The 10-point plan is designed as the affiliation with the Black leadership group and very much focused on that but nothing to stop us asking the same questions for other characteristics.

The Chair confirmed we have a Governor representative who joins the E+D group as a student voice. Special Interest Groups can be very useful as have discreet terms and conditions and assures Governors that terms of reference and reviewed.

Q: We used to get an analysis on grievances and disciplinary procedures against people with different characteristics? That's a really useful tool.

A: Not included in the data in the annual report anymore but it should be. **Action**

It was agreed that a Special Interest Group would be a good idea and set up in the New Year.

Action

The Chair asked what the Governors would consider as success.

It's very clear from reading the report that success would be seen in terms of increasing representation.

The Principal and Chief Executive confirmed that senior posts will be advertised with either FE Associates or Peridot Partners recruitment organisation due to their affiliation but also include the BAME Network through the recruitment process.

The Chair asked if colleagues were happy with the term 'fully inclusive'?

A: As a long as it's broadened to include all categories.

The Chair asked if there were any comments around the action plan?

Q: On the actions, in terms of tracking them. How will we meet the deadlines, as December is a very busy month.

A: The Principal and Chief Executive confirmed that it is about having plans in place rather than a completion date

Q: We should alter that heading

A: Yes **Action**

Q: Are we just scratching the surface? Can the action plan be more specific?

A: The Principal and Chief Executive confirmed it is very much work in progress and the January session will help with best practice.

Q: Do we have the resource that this needs and should we have a strategic leader?

A: We are in discussion about this.

8. Projected financial outturn position 2021/22 (inc July PMR)

The Deputy Principal presented the report and advised that it would be discussed at the next Financial Oversight Group and 29th November Corporation meeting.

Q: Can you remind us of the items that are taken out of the deficit figure when it comes to the operating position?

A: In Septembers PMR these are listed, but we're adjusting for pension costs, one off expenditure for Stratford, any one-off incomes for projects and any overreach payments from Tudor Grange House.

9. Treasury Management Update

The Deputy Principal confirmed there were 2 items for approval. Interest rates have gone up and we have break costs for the Natwest loan.

Governors approved to pay off the Natwest loan in full.

Approximately every 5 years we review our bankers and we recommend that we stay with Lloyds for 3 years with an option to extend a further 2 years.

Governors approved.

10. Minutes from Audit Committee on 18th October 2022

The Acting Chair of the Audit Committee presented the minutes.

The Deputy Principal confirmed that for information the Annual Health and Safety report was presented for consideration.

The Health and Safety Policy was recommended to be approved, from Audit Committee.

Governors approved.

Q: Are there any RIDDOR updates?

A: Deputy Principal confirmed a report goes to Audit Committee and a report then comes to Corporation which details RIDDOR incidents. Last year there was only one case.

11. Feedback from GDD on 5th November (Verbal)

The Chair thanked everyone for their contribution and the notes have been collected and are with the Principal and Chief Executive. It was helpful and feedback has been very positive. The Principal and Chief Executive confirmed there was lots of positive and useful contributions that we can refine in the strategic plan

12. Membership report: Committee membership update

12.1 Membership report

The Director of Corporate Governance, Risk and Compliance reviewed the updates as follows:

Remuneration Committee

- Amirun Nehar's appointment as a member of the Remuneration Committee
- Tony Lucas Chair of the Remuneration Committee – Corporation ratified Tony's appointment as Chair at its meeting on 05 October 2022.

Audit Committee

- Amirun Nehar's appointment as Vice-Chair of the Audit Committee
- There is still one External vacancy on Audit Committee which is part of the Government recruitment

Search & Governance Committee

- Christine Abbott's appointment as a member of the Search & Governance Committee

The student Governor update is that we are working with The Vice Principal HR & Student Services and the Director of Student Services and this is work in progress.

The Chair confirmed there were 5 applications to be a Governor and dates for interviews for 4 of them.

Q: Geraldine is listed as a member of Audit Committee but she isn't

A: Director of Governance, Risk and Compliance to update the list. **Action.**

Governors approved the changes.

The Chair requested that if any personal details need updating to please inform Anne and to double check profiles and if there are any changes required, please let us know. **Action.**

13. Pay Strategy and update on Senior Post interviews

Confidential

14. For information

post-meeting amendment

14.1 Bids and Projects – *the report was received for information.*

14.2 IT Update report

Deputy Principal confirmed a new format of report, which the Chair confirmed seemed to be better and appreciated the new style and shorter format.

14.3 Property Update

The Deputy Principal provided a verbal update on Student residencies following a call with Nantes Properties. They are still very keen but they are wanting to take more time on the planning application and they are looking at the market conditions and wish to let things to settle before investing in the properties. Although they are happy to exchange contracts before Christmas, they not looking to put in planning application for up to 6 months and there'll be a further 12-week determination to complete when planning has been approved.

Is it acceptable that we add the demolition of C Block to the heads of terms, so we can do all the demolition together next Summer. If they buy the property, they will then refund us and we will have exchanged contracts and the only reason they wouldn't buy is if we pulled out or planning permission was declined. The Principal and Chief Executive confirmed that we want to demolish anyway, so this way we can do it in a timely way. The Deputy Principal confirmed that we have a demolition contractor on site already and it's better that it's the same one

Q: Are there any red flags?

A: They appear genuine and open and honest. There was a frank discussion with them and he still wishes to exchange this calendar year. We should know this side of Christmas.

Q: Is there any variation in the price?

A: No

post-meeting amendment

14.4 Procurement Update – *the report was received for information.*

14.5 Governors register of interest

The Chair asked Governors to double check please. **Action.**

14.6 Use of College seal and the Chairs e-signature

Date of the next Meeting

The date of the next meeting, the Annual Audit Committee / Corporation Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday 29 November 2022 at the Blossomfield Campus.

The meeting closed at 8.30pm.

Signed



Date 29 November 2022