

Solihull College and University Centre

Minutes of the meeting of the Search and Governance Committee held on Tuesday 16 November 2021 at 3.00 pm by MS Teams

Present Barbara Hughes (Chair)
Joan Smith
Geraldine Swanton
Lindsey Stewart (Acting Principal)

In Attendance Theresa Lynch

1 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Tony Lucas.

2 **Declarations of Interest in relation to this Agenda**

No declarations of interest were received

3 **Minutes of the Meeting held on 15 September 2021 and Matters Arising**

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 September 2021 were **agreed** as a correct record and signed by the Chair. A recap was given of the previous discussions and approach to Corporation 'attendance', following which it had been agreed that 100% attendance would be the aim, but that any concerns with low attendance would be picked up by the Chair and managed through discussion or agreed "leave of absence".

4 **Membership Report**

4.1 **Membership Report for 2021-2022**

Sukhy Nijjar recently resigned as a Governor due to increased work commitments. The Chair noted her long service and contribution to Corporation.

A brief discussion took place in terms of improving the Board's representation. It was noted that governance could evidence much previous discussion on ways to address any imbalance and on actions taken, in providing better baseline data through the extended E&D questionnaires, all of which had resulted in an improvement on recent years. The annual ESFA, Chair and Principal conversation had flagged that Corporation as a board was seen to have fairly positive representation in terms of the West Midlands. Age and gender representation was felt to be good currently – although it was noted that work was always ongoing to improve representation across the widest range of characteristics, including disability.

4.2 **Governor vacancy – Christine Abbott**

In terms of meeting a skills gap, especially in HE, the appointment of Christine Abbott, one of two candidates recently interviewed by the Chair and Acting Principal, was being recommended to Corporation. Eligibility checks had been undertaken and an excellent reference obtained for her.

5 **Staff Governor Election Update – verbal update**

Two nominations were received on which electronic voting took place from 01-10 November 2021, with the result that staff member, Donna Poole, was elected. Provided her eligibility checks were clear,

Donna's election will be confirmed at the 30 November meeting of Corporation, but the election result would be confirmed beforehand to all staff via a Principal's Office email. **Action.**

6 Student Governor Appointment Process – verbal update

Four applications were received by the deadline of 02 November 2021 and arrangements currently being made for interviews. Two candidates were Blossomfield based and two at Woodlands. The Clerk reported that the HE Student Governor role was likely to be filled by the student who had recently taken on the paid role with the Student Enrichment Team and would become the HE Student Governor by default. She noted that a second HE appointment might result if the single HE candidate scored higher than the three FE student candidates.

It was confirmed that a mentoring approach would be in place to help the new Student Governor[s] in their induction period and throughout their service on the Board.

7 Search & Governance Annual Assurance Report

This report was an agreed outcome of discussions at the Risk, Compliance, Value-for-Money Special Interest Group, looking at the appropriate focus of committees within the governance structure.

The Clerk listed some objectives for 2022:

- Appointment of a Principal
- Amending the Code of Governance – ensuring a fit with the Vision, Values, Strategic Goals and Annual Objectives
- Continue refining the level and volume of information provided to Governors
- Ofsted preparation
- Supporting Governors' use of the Dashboard

The summary was consistent with the discussions arising from the recent self-assessment exercise, the current focus of Governors, terms-of-reference generally and the self-evaluative approach of Corporation in trying to improve its governance.

8 Equality Report – for information

The Chair reported that 2021 was the first year that E&D information had been requested from all Governors on an extended basis with the aim of generating reports to fulfill a number of aims. Firstly, so that an equality profile for Governors could be included in College's Annual E&D Report, to be consistent with existing ones for staff and with the separate student profile. Secondly, ESFA now requires a data return on equality characteristics for Governors, although the destination of such a return was unclear, with the suggestion that it goes to the Cabinet Office, rather than to DfE.

It was suggested that good practice would be to review the efficacy of approaches to improving diversity in achieving desired outcomes.

9 Register of Interest for Governors and EMT – for information

The interesting and positive range of engagement and networking was reflected in the Register of Interests for Members and EMT. It was noted that some updating was needed. **Action.**

10 Review of Governance Structure

The review was in compliance with governance procedures and followed discussions at the Risk, Compliance, VfM Special Interest Group – both of which indicated that any change in a senior role would initiate a brief review / check on the governance structure so that decisions could be made on any mitigating actions required.

The Chair summarised any such approach to major changes – identifying any risk to the organisation, a plan to manage that risk, or any different approaches needed in the event of the change of Chair, Principal or senior staff. In the extraordinary circumstances since the beginning of September 2021, EMT had agreed to Corporation's request to appoint Lindsey Stewart as Acting Principal rather than attempt the recruitment of a new Principal in the immediate aftermath of the ex-Principal's untimely passing, allowing at least one term's adjustment period – with agreement to starting the recruitment process in January 2022.

Thanks were again expressed to the Acting Principal for her willingness to take on the role at a critical time, and to other EMT members for agreeing to manage throughout, a fortunate position which led the Chair to feel that the Board had been very responsive to such significant circumstances and had acted appropriately in the best interests of the College. The Chair welcomed thoughts and any concerns about that approach. Members felt that the action taken was correct and marked the high level of confidence placed in the EMT and in recognition of their strong working relationship with the ex-Principal, making it a true team.

It was **agreed** that there was no need to review the governance structure given that the Executive Team is the same one that has been in place for considerable time, and that no review was currently needed. Planning would take place for the necessary induction into the structure for the new Principal in September 2022. Careful consideration would be given to Solihull's specific induction, taking account of any new Principal's views on governance or experience of different governance structures.

The Acting Principal expressed her own thanks and those of EMT colleagues for ensuring there was the appropriate period of adjustment and stabilisation.

11 AoC Code of Governance update

The main updates covered a greater emphasis on the inclusion agenda for governance and also on sustainability. A timely review of the range of codes within the document was suggested in terms of Corporation's relative compliance with many of them. It was confirmed that a statement on engagement with the various codes in the AoC's Code of Good Governance [CoGG] is made in the annual Members' Report. From 2023 adoption of a code of good governance by all colleges will be a requirement. The College currently adhered to the AoC's Code of Good Governance. This would be reviewed in light of the revised version recently published. **Action.**

12 Self-assessment Report for Governors

The report contributes to the College-wide SAR but it is also part of the Terms of Reference of the Committee to reflect and evaluate the past year in governance. The self-assessment meetings that took place for each Governor with the Chair during 2021 were positive about many aspects of Solihull's governance. As a Board, Governors felt they were effective and that they challenged appropriately. Common themes emerging from self-assessment were summarised in the report and were consistent with the current focus and forward-planning. Some suggestions included more conversations with staff, building on the Staff Survey, the staff-led presentations to Corporation as well as opportunities to speak directly to staff during Learning Visits. Members were happy with the report and the detail presented, which would go to Corporation once finalised. **Action.**

13 FE Workforce 2021 Governor Data Collection Supporting Document 2020-2021

The document provided additional reference information to that presented at Item 8 the Equality Report.

14 Date of the next meeting

The Chair noted that Governors would be kept informed about the recruitment process for the new Principal and on the approach taken to promoting the role and the College.

The meeting ended at 3.45pm.

Signed



Date **14 March 2022**