



Wirral Met College has a vision to be an inclusive, outstanding college

**CONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE
BOARD OF GOVERNORS MEETING
HELD REMOTELY ON TUESDAY 14TH DECEMBER 2021**

Present: Lucky Ali, Lucy Barrow, Sue Higginson (Principal), Tim Kelly (Chair), Joe McArdle, Phil McKeown, Ian Parkinson, Gill Roberts, Paul Smith, Jayne Winders, Vix Wrigley

In attendance: Ste Bailey, Executive Assistant Principal – Student Services
Christine Carter, Vice Principal – Curriculum
Phillip Jones, Vice Principal – Quality
Nikki Leising, Financial Controller
Rory McCall, Wylie & Bissett (External Auditors) – minutes 123 to 129
Michael Norton, Deputy Principal
Lesley Venables, Clerk to the Governors

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

68. Apologies for absence were received from Anna Barnish (external governor), Gary Doyle (external governor), Richard Mawdsley (external governor) and Lisa Buxton (student governor).

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

69. The following standing interests were declared:
- Lucy Barrow - on secondment from Wirral Council to the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.
 - Tim Kelly - any matters relating to the Merseyside Pension Fund.
 - Joe McArdle - employed by the University of Chester and parent of a student at the College.
 - Paul Smith - employed by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council and wife is a member of staff at the College.

BOARD MINUTES

70. **Resolved** That the minutes of the meetings held on 20th October 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

71. Governors received a progress report on the actions identified at the previous meeting and noted that the majority of these had been completed or were featured on the agenda. Under minute 16 the Principal reported that the College had a robust risk assessment framework for the COVID-19 pandemic and it was agreed that reports to future meetings would be on a 'by exception' basis since Covid management was now a routine aspect of managing risk.

72. The Principal advised that the College had now received its full allocation for adult bursary funding from the ESFA, despite the original allocation being £149K less than required for 2020/2021. A governor asked whether there had been any appeals against the College's bursary application process and the Deputy Principal reported that none of the complaints received in 2020/2021 related to bursary appeals but that students who had requested a bursary had complained that the monies had not been made available. Now that this had been addressed and the ESFA had corrected the allocation, students would be supported in line with the bursary regulations. The Principal had been pressing for this from August, students had involved the MP more recently and the Principal had been liaising with them in relation to the issue. It had finally been approved in the last few days.

PRINCIPAL'S UPDATE

73. The Principal gave a verbal update on recent College activities. Recruitment for 2021/2022 had so far been successful in terms of both 16-18s and adults, with effective schools liaison, parent and employer-focused events taking place. A further marketing campaign was planned for January, which would be targeted at adult and higher education students.

74. Three students had reached the finals of the UK World Skills competition. The first group of staff had now been trained and would be cascading their knowledge to peers.

75. All recent regulations and guidance on COVID-19 had been implemented quickly. Trade union representatives and members of the Students' Union were actively promoting safety issues and encouraging students and staff to be vaccinated. The College had a positive working relationship with the local Public Health England team, whose guidance and support had been invaluable.

76. College buildings would be closing on 17th December and the staff training events would take place online during the following week. This would build on the high levels of engagement and positivity reported by staff during the first term.

77. Infection rates of the COVID-19 Delta variant were very high in the Borough and it was not yet clear how this would be impacted by the new Omicron strain of the virus. Building closure, whilst staff development could flip to online, would provide a circuit break in relation to infection and since this was out of term time, it would not impact upon teaching and learning.

78. There had been a significant increase in behavioural issues amongst students (which was replicated nationally), resulting in much more challenging behaviour leading to more student disciplinary cases in 2021/2022. The volume and complexity of referrals through our safeguarding system, especially relating to mental health, continued to be a challenge and the College had channelled greater resources in this area to include the appointment of an additional Deputy Safeguarding Manager, so the Safeguarding Manager now has two deputies. Additional resource was also made available within the pastoral support team.

79. The College's financial position remained on plan and it was anticipated that the targets in the Strategic Plan would be met. The Principal reported that the reports on equality, diversity and inclusion, particularly analysis of improvement to gaps linked to vulnerable

groups, as detailed in the Self-Assessment Report, evidenced that the College was delivering its vision to provide an inclusive curriculum and was supporting the most vulnerable groups in the community.

CHAIR'S UPDATE

80. The Board received for information a report on the Chair's activities since the October 2021 meeting. These included meeting with representatives of the Student Union Executive and governors noted the high levels of engagement and enthusiasm for the campaigns in which students were involved.

SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT 2020/2021 AND QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2021/2022

81. The Principal presented the Self-Assessment Report (SAR) for 2020/2021 and the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) for 2021/2022, the format of which aligned to Ofsted's Education Inspection Framework.

82. Governors were advised that progress against the areas for improvement would be monitored throughout the academic year by the Quality & Standards Scrutiny Committee. The SAR identified a range of key strengths and also highlighted areas that were targeted for focused improvement. Evidence to underpin both strengths and areas for improvement had been identified at all levels within the organisation and the Principal emphasised that every department had carried out a SAR for their area. The top level, College SAR, was a summary of the whole organisation.

83. The College had used Ofsted's Education Inspection Framework Handbook, to review its own performance and the 'Quality of Education' had been graded as 'Good', with the exception of High Needs provision which had been graded as 'Outstanding'. The College was the largest provider of post 16 Special Education Needs provision in the Borough and it was felt that the extensive range of individualised support provided was instrumental in supporting young people to overcome challenges to learning.

84. In response to a question about provision for Looked After Children post-18 the Executive Assistant Principal – Student Services reported that this depended on the needs assessment for each individual student. Funding was available for those aged 16-24 who had an Education Health & Care Plan (EHCP) to be supported at the College. However, there were also adults who were classed as vulnerable but with no EHCP, whose needs would be determined and matched to any available funding sources. This work was undertaken in close partnership with the local authority.

85. The SAR had been framed after detailed analysis of the impact and outcomes of learning and support and this was available as appendix 1 to the SAR, which detailed the 2020/2021 Student Outcomes data. This had been reviewed by the QSS Committee at its meeting on 14th October 2021 and this underpinning data evidenced support for each of the grades awarded. The Board noted that evidence gathered as part of the SAR process indicated that students set very high expectations of themselves.

86. A governor questioned the difference in performance levels in Business Administration, Finance & Law between 16-18s and adults. The Principal explained that as a result of the pandemic, some students had not been able to take their final examinations and would be re-sitting these qualifications in 2021/2022, a year later than originally intended. This was one of the curriculum areas that was currently in 'intervention' and contained a relatively small number of students (18), hence looking at the percentages, without the numbers as context, could be misleading.

87. The Principal advised that the final version of the report would be uploaded to the Ofsted portal, when any inspection was confirmed and would form the basis of any future inspection process. The Principal would be personally presenting the final College level SAR to managers in January, who would then cascade that to their teams. Every area for improvement would be regularly reviewed as part of the QIP and, in addition, we would ensure that any supporting evidence for the strengths identified in the report was also available.

88. Governors commented that the new format was easier to navigate. The Principal had confirmed that the Assistant Principal Quality had researched different formats and recommended the one used. The Board thanked the Assistant Principal – Quality for her work on this.

89. A Governor reported that during a recent inspection of the local Special Education Needs (SEND) provision offered by Wirral Borough Council and the College, Ofsted had been highly complementary about the provision they had reviewed at the College and a number of strengths had been identified in relation to the College's provision, including: inclusivity, enabling young people to meet their needs, progression to employment opportunities and internships.

90. **Resolved** That the SAR for 2020/2021 and the QIP for 2021/2022 be approved.

BALANCED SCORECARD 2021/2022

91. The Vice Principal – Quality presented the Balanced Scorecard for 2021/2022 as at 31st October 2021.

92. Attendance levels for English and maths continued to be challenging within the first term of 2021/2022. Analysis showed that many of the 16-18 year old students who were required to attend English and maths with low levels of functioning ability, had achieved higher attainment levels through school, teacher assessed grades and, before COVID-19, based on their functioning ability would have been attending Entry and Level 1 functional skills rather than GCSE and Level 2 functional skills. The impact of Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGs) and Government funding requirements for study programmes had resulted in students being entered for higher qualification levels than their attainment levels would imply. This had meant that some students' attendance at English and maths sessions was poor and staff had introduced a number of strategies to address this issue including catch up support.

93. A further area that had been graded as 'amber' was the 32 apprentices (out of a total of 59 completed) for whom their original target end date had expired. This was a direct result of the pandemic, as many of these individuals had been unable to undergo their end-point

assessment, and staff were working to ensure that these students completed their courses as quickly as possible. For some, they had been redeployed into front line support for Covid, particularly linked to NHS employees.

94. There had been a significant increase in behavioural issues amongst a small number of students, with poor engagement on some courses, particularly at lower levels in Construction, Motor Vehicle and Hair & Beauty. It was felt that this was a consequence of the impact of the pandemic and was a national pattern. Governors were assured that attendance was monitored daily and would continue to be scrutinised by management and the Quality and Standards Scrutiny (QSS) Committee.

95. A governor asked about the likely shortfall of £160K against the target for higher education income and whether a plan had been devised to address this. The Vice-Principal – Quality reported that it was unlikely that this amount would be recovered in year although the College would be relaunching its HNC/HND offer in January, with a particular focus on adults who wished to retrain. It was noted that some areas of adult recruitment had been extremely successful but that degree apprenticeships offered an attractive alternative to more traditional courses, particularly since employers could use their levy to cover costs, which was not available for HNC/HND.

96. In response to a further question on performance levels in 2020/2021, the Vice-Principal advised that, due to the pandemic, a proportion of students had opted to defer their HE courses this year and we would keep in touch with them to enable them to start in the next academic year, as appropriate. The substantial increase in mental health issues and additional support requirements had prompted the College to appoint a support and welfare worker dedicated to HE students. In addition to personal challenges, HE students often had children and home schooling and other pressures of managing in a pandemic, where nursery and schools would not allow children to attend, with symptoms until PCR tested, even where they were not necessarily Covid, added to the issues.

97. The Principal was asked whether the number of qualified first aiders had been maintained for 2021/2022. The Board was informed that the College had more than required and security posts now included this into their job description and they had been updated to include Covid infection training. College's COVID-19 response formed only part of the Health and Safety update and the Risk Assessment was posted to the website. The exception report submitted to governors at this meeting included feedback from the Health & Safety Manager and it was important that dealing with COVID-19 was now integral to the College's operational processes.

98. Governors also received information on recent student successes and engagement. A total of 519 students had completed the Induction Survey carried out in September 2021, with 97% reporting that they were enjoying their programme of study. Any students who had detailed an issue were contacted by the relevant curriculum manager, with issues centring around gaps in timetables, resource requirements and individual support needs and these had all been addressed individually. Strengths highlighted by students included the amount and quality of practical lessons, new skills learnt in a short space of time and being able to attend College in person rather than online.

99. The Learning Talk 1 survey was due to close at the end of the first term, with a detailed analysis to be presented to the QSS Committee in January 2022. An updated survey for apprentices had been developed and introduced to capture views at regular points during the programme. Initial results indicated high levels of positive feedback from apprentices.

100. The model for COVID-19 testing had now moved to one of home testing. Self-test kits continued to be available to staff and students at each Campus and both groups were requested to test twice each week. Guidance from the Department for Education stated that there would be no requirement for the College to arrange for 'on-site' testing for students returning after the Christmas holiday.

101. Mask wearing was required when moving around campus, in corridors and communal areas. Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) monitors had been provided by the DfE to assist in assessing ventilation levels and were deployed in key locations across the College.

102. A total of 40 accidents had been reported in Term 1 to date, one of which involved a member of staff and had been reported under the RIDDOR regulations (due to the injured staff member being off work for more than 7 consecutive days). There had been 3 near misses in the same period and 9 further incidents had been recorded.

103. The Internal Auditors had reviewed the level of compliance with statutory guidance on health and safety for students, staff and visitors. The overall findings had been positive with 4 'low priority' recommendations made.

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION (EDI)

104. The Executive Assistant Principal (Student Services) presented the closedown of the 2020/2021 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion action plan and provided the Standards and Actions for Implementation for 2021/2022. Both documents had been reviewed recently by the College's EDI Committee at which the Chair of the Board was the governor representative, which provided an additional layer of governor scrutiny.

105. A revised EDI Policy was submitted for implementation in 2021/2022.

106. Analysis of gaps in achievement between 16-18s from disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged areas were all detailed in appendix 1 of the SAR and the College had significantly improved the attainment gap at key stage 4, which was 17.1% in the borough with the College's 16-18s, linked to deprivation gap, closing to 5.1%. Many of the College's BAME students had been taught IT skills in order to prepare them for any future lockdown situations and the College had appointed Digital Champions to support training and ongoing coaching for staff and students.

107. As noted earlier, mental health issues amongst students had increased substantially. Staff were proactively contacting those students and those who had engaged with the College's support mechanisms were the highest we have ever experienced. A range of online materials and resources had also been developed, such as 24-hour mental health and well-being support. Governors asked whether students had experienced any barriers to taking up these initiatives and were advised that support was widely available through the counselling

service, mental health/well-being team across each campus, materials on the 'virtual campus' and signposting to external agencies.

108. For 19+ students the main concern centred on time commitment. Most of these individuals were studying part-time and found it difficult to attend appointments to discuss their support needs. This was an area for further development in 2021/2022. The Principal added that approximately 65% of the student cohort were from areas of very high deprivation and whilst most qualified for free school meals, they did not all take up this offer. However, it was difficult for the College to be able to target students to continue to receive this support, as there was no data sharing arrangement with the local authority. The Local Authority had been contacted to request this at KS4 transition and it was a priority to be addressed next term. The College had been working with the Local Authority and their nominated charity organisation to provide hampers for students and their families on low incomes and plans were underway to distribute hundreds of hampers in the run up to Christmas.

109. It was noted that the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students did not all progress to vocational courses once they had achieved their English and maths qualifications. The Executive Assistant Principal reported that, for adult students, this was probably because they already possessed a vocational qualification or employability skills. However, the College was keen to encourage students to achieve their full potential and for a greater number to progress to higher level programmes at the College.

110. Staff were aiming to improve students' own resilience to cope with unexpected issues, particularly during the Christmas period, and against the background of the pandemic.

111. **Resolved** 1 That the EDI Action Plan for 2020/2021 be approved

2 That the Equality & Diversity Policy for 2020/2021 be approved

MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS

112. The Deputy Principal presented the Management Accounts as at 31st October 2021. The College continued to be in a positive financial position and financial health remained at of 'Outstanding.'

113. Currently, a surplus of £1,035,000 was being forecast for 2021/2022, but this excluded any additional costs for national insurance contributions or minimum wage increases which would take effect from April 2022. It was not yet clear whether the DfE would be funding this increase, as was the case for schools and academies.

114. Governors were advised that the College had negotiated an increase to its income for 16-18 year olds. Although this target may not be fully achievable in 2021/2022, there had been indications from the ESFA that the number of fundable hours may be increased, which would offset any under-performance.

115. Apprenticeship income had increased in comparison to 2020/2021, but was not currently at a level sufficient to achieve the target and the forecast has been reduced accordingly.

Enrolments on higher education programmes had decreased, but there would be a further recruitment campaign in January to address any shortfall.

116. The cash position at the month end was £11.3 million against a planned position of £9.3 million. This was a result of the higher surplus for 2020/2021 and an increase in pension deficit associated with the College paying a reduced contribution into the scheme compared to the current in-year service costs.

117. At its recent meeting the Capital Projects Working Group had recommended expenditure of £200K on refurbishments of all campuses, in advance of any potential Ofsted inspection. A report on improvements to the IT infrastructure would be submitted to a future meeting of the CPWG. It was noted that recent bids to the ESFA's capital funding programme had been unsuccessful, which meant that any expansion of the Wirral Waters Campus was not yet possible.

118. Additionally, it was felt appropriate for the Board to consider maximising the use of its cash holdings and a paper would be prepared for a future Board to consider.

SUPPLY CHAIN FEES POLICY

119. The Deputy Principal presented a revised Supply Chain Fees Policy for 2021/2022. It was suggested that the Board should consider its future approach to sub-contracting for future years, as it formed a small part of the College's provision for hard to reach groups.

120. The Policy had been amended to reflect the fact that costs would be incurred in 2021/2022 but the associated income would not be received until 2022/2023.

121. **Resolved -** That the revised Supply Chain Fees Policy be approved

Rory McCall (External Auditor) joined the meeting for this item

AUDIT COMMITTEE – 9TH DECEMBER 2021

122. The Chair of the Audit Committee provided a verbal summary of the meeting held on 9th December 2021.

123. The External Auditor presented the Management Report on the Financial Statements for 2020/2021. Governors received the Financial Statements for 2020/2021 and the Letters of Representation, which had been previously reviewed by the Audit Committee.

124. The report summarised the College's financial activity and stated that the College had reported an overall operating surplus of £2,028k (compared to £883k surplus in 2019/2020). This excluded an actuarial pension gain of £4,267K (compared to a loss of £826K in 2019/2020) and had resulted in Total Comprehensive Income of £6,295K for the year. Once these items had been taken into account, the College had generated an operating surplus for the year of £3,109k (compared to a surplus of £2,031k in 2019/2020).

125. No new control recommendations had been made for the year ending 31st July 2021,

which was commendable given the challenging circumstances in which the College had operated during the pandemic. The External Auditor was satisfied with the Board of Governors' assessment that it was a going concern and that the College would remain operational for the foreseeable future.

126. A number of minor issues highlighted at the Audit Committee meeting had now been completed and unqualified opinions had been issued for both the Financial Statements and Regularity Audits, which enabled the Financial Statements to be approved by the Board and signed by the Chair and the Principal.

127. The Board also received for information the Audit Committee's Annual Report for 2020/2021, which summarised the work of the Committee and concluded that the Committee had discharged its responsibilities in accordance to the Terms of Reference.

128. **Resolved** That the Financial Statements and the Letters of Representation for both the Financial Statements Audit and the Regularity Audit for 2020/2021 be approved and signed by the Chair and the Principal and be forwarded to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

Rory McCall left the meeting at this point.

CAPITAL PROJECTS WORKING GROUP – 6TH DECEMBER 2021

129. The Chair of the Capital Projects Working Group provided a summary of the meeting held on 6th December 2021.

130. The Working Group had discussed and recommended proposals for the refurbishment of the Conway Park campus at a cost of £200K. Options to address the space issues at the Wirral Waters campus would be brought to the next meeting.

131. Revised terms of reference had been recommended for approval and these now aligned to the Working Group's wider remit of overseeing all aspects of the College's property strategy.

132. **Resolved -** That the updated Terms of Reference for the Capital Projects Working Group be approved

QUALITY & STANDARDS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 14TH OCTOBER 2021

133. The Committee Chair presented for information the draft minutes of the meeting held on 14th October 2021, a summary of which had been provided verbally at the October Board meeting.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

134. The Principal thanked Governors for the support they had provided for the Senior Leadership Team during the last term. A meal had been arranged for 20th January 2022 at the new Met@TheSquare dining venue, to which all Governors were invited.

135. On behalf of the Board the Chair thanked the all staff for their contributions to the College's success in the current academic year.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING – Wednesday 16th February 2022

Signed:  Date: 16th February 2022

Chair