



**CONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE
BOARD OF GOVERNORS MEETING
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 1st MAY 2019**

Present: Anna Barnish, Joanne Finnerty, Sue Higginson (Principal), Tim Kelly, Richard Mawdsley, Joe McArdle, Phil McKeown, Paul Smith, Paul Smyth (Chair), Vix Wrigley

In attendance: Michael Norton, Deputy Principal
Maura Cummins, Vice Principal – Curriculum & Quality
Pooja Furniss, Director of People & Organisational Development
Will Jerram, Assistant Principal – MIS
Andy King, Head of Finance
Sarah Norris, Student Enrichment Manager (minutes 219 to 224)
Lesley Venables, Clerk to the Governors
Louise Scott-Kelly, Administrator to Governors

INTRODUCTIONS

199. The Chair welcomed the recently-appointed Director of People & Organisational Development (Pooja Furniss) and Paul Smith (External Governor), to their first Board of Governors meeting.

APOLOGIES

200. Apologies for absence were received from Macen Byatt, Gary Doyle, Sandra Johnson, Lorraine Jones, Richard Mawdsley and Jayne Winders.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

201. Joanne Finnerty declared an interest in any matters relating to JM Education.

PRINCIPAL'S UPDATE

202. The Principal updated the Board on the restructure of the Employer Services Department. The consultation period with the Trade Unions had now been completed. As a result, there were four new posts which would be advertised externally. The Principal gave an assurance that in the cases of redundancies, the College would support the staff concerned through due process. The restructure was on track to be implemented before the start of the new academic year.

203. The Board was reminded that the current Vice Principal – Curriculum & Quality would be leaving the College in September 2019 to take up a new post with Ofsted as a Lead HM Inspector. Subsequently, the College was in the process of recruiting a new Vice Principal – Curriculum & Quality. In line with the Articles of Government, the selection panel comprised

the Chair, the Vice-Chair, the Principal and one further external governor. As this was a Senior Post Holder position the panel's recommendation would require full Board approval. Therefore, a Special Board meeting had been scheduled for 16th May to review and approve the recommendation.

204. In the meantime, the Vice Principal – Curriculum & Quality would continue to drive the closedown of 2018/19, including the forthcoming examinations, attendance and the retention of existing students. The Vice Principal – Curriculum & Quality anticipated a further improvement on 2017/18 results.

205. The Principal reported on the latest position with the ESFA. The Board was reminded that, although the College's subcontractor, JM Education, had exceeded their non-Levy target for apprenticeships, a recent inspection by Ofsted had assessed one criteria as 'not making sufficient progress'. Consequently, their recruitment of apprentices had been frozen since January 2019 until after a further inspection could be undertaken. The Principal had since taken the matter up with the ESFA as the delay in non-levy starts would affect the College's responsiveness to employers, quality of progression opportunities and financial position linked to the freeze in any provision. A response was expected by mid-May and the Board would be updated accordingly.

STUDENT SUCCESSES

206. The Vice Principal – Curriculum & Quality presented a report that detailed student successes from February to April 2019. The Board was advised of a Wirral Borough of Culture project in partnership with Finsa, a European manufacturer of MDF, involving level 2 Bench Joinery students. 'The Cube' sculpture was scheduled to be launched on 9th May. Furthermore, 2000 MDF leaves had also been created for staff and students to paint in various shades of green to support 'Mental Health Week' (week commencing 13th May). There were plans for the sculpture to eventually be moved to Birkenhead Park.

207. The Board commended the College on the breadth and variety of enrichment opportunities available for students.

PLANNING EVENT AGENDA

208. The Principal presented the draft agenda for the Governors' Strategic Seminar on 5th June for consideration. The agenda included a presentation from the College's ESFA lead and time allocated for governors' questions.

STRATEGIC UPDATE

209. Governors received an update of the top-level strategic overview of term 2 activities. The Chair referred to the governor engagement and representation section and the Principal confirmed that, following the resignation of an external governor due to work commitments, the Board needed to recruit an accountant. As a result, a governor vacancy advert had been uploaded on to the College's various social media platforms such as LinkedIn and Twitter.

210. The College continued to build strategic partnerships to develop opportunities and progression routes for students. For instance, there would be a Wirral Borough of Culture event in May, involving international artist and College alumni, Christian Furr. The event was to relaunch the BA Fine Art course and was supported by both the Lady Lever Art Gallery and Williamson Art Gallery.

211. The Williamson Art Gallery was holding an exhibition linked to royal involvement and the Principal had presented a variety of College artefacts that could be enjoyed by the whole community and would be looked after in the Museum's collection. The Board acknowledged the upcoming development opportunities.

BALANCED SCORECARD

212. The Deputy Principal presented the Balanced Scorecard. There were 6 items categorised as 'red'; Apprenticeship Income, HE Income, FE Fee Income, Income to Plan, Number of Out of Funding Apprentices (OOFs) and Sickness Absence, with a detailed routine exception report for each.

213. The Director of People and Organisational Development provided an addendum the Sickness Absence exception report detailing recommendations for a People Strategy that would support staff pre and post recruitment.

214. The new Director of People and Organisational Development was developing an approach to wellbeing that would support staff health and wellbeing whilst ensuring inclusivity measures. Subsequently, the Director of People and Organisational Development was currently reviewing the occupational health provider contract.

215. A Governor enquired about Mental Health First Aid. The Staff Governor responded that staff in her area had received Mental Health First Aid training as part of their role. The Vice Principal – Curriculum & Quality added that Mental Health First Aid training was scheduled as part of the Staff Development programme in July. The Director of People and Organisational Development also confirmed that it was on the agenda to maintain this focus within the overall development plan.

216. The Board acknowledged the importance of staff wellbeing and requested a comprehensive strategy be presented at the July Board of Governors meeting.

217. The Chair enquired about the FE Fee Income, which was currently running £202k under its expected level. The Deputy Principal explained that, previously, eligibility for free Level 2 courses was based upon a personal income threshold of less than £15,735.50. However, funding rules for 2018-19 had revised this to an income level of less than £16,009. The impact was that students who previously had to pay, were now eligible for free funding, thus reducing fee income. The Liverpool City Region Combined Authority has subsequently announced that it will increase the threshold further to £17,550 for the next academic year.

218. There were two Quality reports included in the Balanced Scorecard, which had already been reviewed by QSS Committee on 18th April 2019. The Chair of QSS Committee assured the Board that the reports had been robustly reviewed at the meeting.

STUDENT FEEDBACK

219. The Student Enrichment Manager presented a report on the methods used to gain student feedback during term 2 such as Learning Talks, Surveys and Students' Union, Course Representatives and Student Council Meetings. Any actions that had arisen from the meetings had already been forwarded to managers and implemented, such as providing Photoshop software on Study Zone computers.

220. Governors were informed that 405 students had participated in Learning Talks across all curriculum areas. Students answered 10 questions that covered topics such as course enjoyment, written feedback, spelling and grammar, British Values, Extremism, Radicalisation and keeping safe. All of the results had shown an improvement compared to 2017/18, most notably awareness of Extremism, which had been a post inspection action and this had increased by 22%. The Student Enrichment Manager added that the safety e-learning resources had been well utilised and had proven to be effective.

221. The Board was pleased with the outcomes, particularly as issues were raised at the last Ofsted inspection about students' awareness of Extremism and the Prevent agenda.

222. To increase awareness on dietary requirements and allergies, catering and hospitality students had also been working with the College's catering provider, Aramark.

223. The Board thanked the Student Enrichment Manager for her contribution in engaging students in a broad scope of enrichment opportunities.

224. The Chair also reminded Governors about the Student Choice Star Awards taking place on 23rd May at 14:00 in The Birches Restaurant, Conway Park. The celebration provided students with the opportunity to nominate an outstanding or inspiring member of staff.

ESFA VALIDATION OF 2017/18 FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

225. The Principal presented a letter of validation from the ESFA confirming that the College had been judged as maintaining a 'Good' level of financial health. The level of performance within the continuum that denotes 'good' had been improved from the previous year and, as a result, the College was no longer in the pre-intervention stage.

226. The Principal recognised that continuing transparency with Trade Unions had been fundamental and acknowledged staff's perseverance and commitment during a period of pay freeze. The Principal thanked the entire team for their efforts and in particular thanked the Deputy Principal for his financial stewardship throughout.

227. Whilst the Principal and Board were pleased with the validation of financial health, they recognised that there was still more work to be completed to improve efficiency in the future.

MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS

228. The Head of Finance presented the Management Accounts to 31st March 2019. The College continued to perform to plan, against the year-end forecast for a surplus of £150k. The Management Accounts indicated that the College was in a good position as a result of the accelerated invoicing and had started to receive an allocation for 2019/20 that recognised the growth on 16-18s which had a 2 year, lagged funding.

229. Curriculum planning continued with the potential to gradually expand provision in the future. However, the Principal said that the pay to income ratio must remain at the forefront of any financial decisions made because, although this ratio had reduced, it was unlikely that the College would meet the end of year target.

230. The Vice Principal added that pay to income ratio continued to be a priority for the Senior Leadership Team and managers constantly reviewed staff utilisation.

231. The Chair also enquired about the future of the Merseyside Pension Fund. The Deputy Principal answered that there was a meeting scheduled in June and would update the Board on the outcome.

RISK MANAGEMENT

232. The Deputy Principal provided an update on Risk Management. Following an Internal Audit, concerns had been raised on the controls in place for subcontracting and funding compliance for students. Work had been carried out on both of these areas and it was anticipated that the subsequent internal audit would recognise the level of progress made.

233. Although the Employer Services department was in the process of a management restructure, process improvements had already been made. The risk associated with Employer Services remained high until the restructure has been fully implemented.

FEES POLICY

234. The Deputy Principal presented a draft policy on Further and Higher Education Fees for 2019/20.

235. Governors were advised of the funding changes to the level 2 free provision eligibility threshold (as mentioned in minute 219). Furthermore, the College had historically charged lower fees for courses than its competitors, but had gradually started to increase fees to align with the sector.

236. A Governor queried why the College charged lower fees than other institutions. The Assistant Principal – MIS explained that the College had taken into consideration the demographic of wards of high deprivation and student perception of debt. However, to ensure financial viability the College has gradually increased the fees/loan value in accordance to the value of the qualification.

237. A Governor enquired about HE fees. The Principal responded that the HE fees were reviewed annually and would be reviewed again when the Post 18 HE Review (Auger) had concluded so that the outcomes could be taken into consideration.

238. Consequently, the Board was asked to approve the Fees Policy 2019/20 and authorise the Deputy Principal to approve any further changes required once the final release of information was received from the ESFA and Combined Authority.

239. **Resolved** that the Fees Policy 2019/20 be approved and that the Deputy Principal be authorised to make any minor changes required during the year.

HEALTH & SAFETY

240. The Deputy Principal presented the term 2 Health & Safety update. The Board was informed that the Internal Auditors had conducted a review of Health & Safety and had made a recommendation to maintain a central record of all random spot checks undertaken. The implementation had proven effective and raised awareness with staff and students.

241. The Board recognised the rigour of health and safety checks and the significant improvements made and thanked the Health & Safety Manager for his ongoing work.

BOARD AND COMMITTEE MINUTES

BOARD MINUTES – 27th FEBRUARY 2019

242. **Resolved** That the minutes of the meeting held on 27th February 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

243. Governors received a progress report on the actions identified at the previous meeting and noted that the actions were either completed or scheduled to feature on the next agenda.

AUDIT COMMITTEE – 20th MARCH 2019

244. The Board received for information the minutes from the Audit Committee meeting held on 20th March 2019.

245. The Committee had discussed the performance of the Internal and External Auditors, based on a formal assessment. It had been recommended that both firms should be reappointed.

246. **Resolved** That the reappointment of the Internal and External Auditors for a further year be approved

GOVERNANCE & SEARCH COMMITTEE – 27th FEBRUARY 2019

247. Governors received for information the minutes of the Governance & Search Committee meeting that took place on 27th February 2019.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING – Wednesday 17th July 2019