



**CONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE  
BOARD OF GOVERNORS MEETING**

**HELD REMOTELY ON WEDNESDAY 15<sup>th</sup> JULY 2020**

**Present:** Anna Barnish, Lucy Barrow, Gary Doyle, Sue Higginson (Principal), Lorraine Jones, Tim Kelly (Chair), Joe McArdle, Phil McKeown), Paul Smith.

**In attendance:** Michael Norton, Deputy Principal  
Christine Carter, Vice Principal – Curriculum  
Philip Jones, Vice Principal – Quality  
Will Jerram, Assistant Principal – MIS  
Nikki Leising, Financial Controller  
Sarah Norris, Student Enrichment and Engagement Manager (min 333-338)  
Lesley Venables, Clerk to Governors  
Louise Scott-Kelly, Administrator to Governors

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

300. Apologies for absence were received from Richard Mawdsley (external governor), Michael Taylor (student governor), Jayne Winders (external governor) and Vix Wrigley (staff governor).

**DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

301. The following standing interests were declared:

- Lucy Barrow – on secondment to the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.
- Joe McArdle – any matters relating to the University of Chester and Business School. Also as a parent of a student who attends the College.
- Paul Smith – employed by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council and spouse employed at the College.

**PRINCIPAL'S UPDATE**

302. The Principal provided an update on the College's operations during the Covid-19 pandemic.

303. The College had been working with national awarding bodies to finalise projected student achievements, which had been submitted by the required deadline. There had only been one student appeal on the grading awarded so far and the College would continue to provide support to this individual when presenting their case to the relevant awarding body.

304. Small cohorts of 16-18 year olds had returned to the College to complete their "licence to practice" assessments in areas such as Construction and Engineering. All possible health

and safety measures had been implemented for these students and feedback on their experience had been positive.

305. The Principal reported that at the recent Quality & Standards Scrutiny Committee a decision had been taken in the absence of Government guidance for a small group of adult students to attend the College to sit their final assessments for the Level 4 Accountancy qualification. Since that time, guidance had been issued by the Department for Education, which validated the Committee's agreed course of action.

306. Staff were currently working on the closedown of the 2019/2020 academic data and on timetabling the new blended learning model for 2020/2021 (which would be aligned to the latest Government guidelines).

307. A governor enquired about the wellbeing of students and staff who were returning to work, against a background of constant changes. The Principal responded that the level of nervousness on the return to work varied according to individuals. The mandatory COVID-19 training programme had been well received by staff. The final part of the training comprised a Risk Assessment of each area undertaken jointly by the relevant manager and their team, to address any issues. Staff had commented that they recognised and appreciated the detailed training that had been devised and delivered, which provided a high level of reassurance on their return to work. In addition to the controls to mitigate the risk of COVID-19, significant work had been done to develop a suite of mental health and wellbeing resources as part of the Colleges 'wellbeing wheel'.

308. Members of the Senior Leadership Team had participated in a specialist session, from an external specialist, on well-being, which would now be rolled out to all line managers.

### **SHARING RECENT SUCCESSES**

309. The Board received the routine report on the College's recent successes and noted the range and level of positive College activities undertaken during the "lockdown" situation.

### **TERM 3 STRATEGIC UPDATE**

310. The Principal presented the update on performance against the College's Strategic Plan for Term 3.

### **INVESTORS IN PEOPLE**

311. Governors received for information the final report on the College's Investors in People assessment, which had been undertaken in February 2020.

312. The report was highly positive and it was noted that many of the recommendations had already been implemented. Governors conveyed their congratulations to staff for this excellent outcome.

## **BALANCED SCORECARD**

313. The Deputy Principal presented the Balanced Scorecard as at May 2020. It was noted that Out of Funding apprentices (OOFs) were graded as 'amber' and that 2 items on Apprenticeship Income and Work Experience were graded as 'red', due to reductions in income due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

314. Governors were advised of the key issues for the College during the pandemic, which would impact upon the key performance indicators.

315. The College was carefully managing the financial position, mindful of the unknown impact of COVID-19 and had accessed the Government's furlough scheme (mostly for non-teaching staff) during the "lockdown". However, this had impacted negatively on the pay to income and other financial ratios for the current year.

316. Staff were engaging in the mandatory COVID-19 training and there had been a high level of compliance with the identification of individual risk assessments and application of the College's Method Statements. Governors agreed that staff and student behaviours would be imperative to the overall effectiveness of these measures.

317. Apprenticeships continued to be a concern with low recruitment and a number of apprentices on 'breaks in learning' due to the COVID-19 pandemic and a decision by their employer. A review of the delivery and financial aspects of this area was planned, led by the Principal, and any resulting proposals would be presented to the Board at a future meeting.

318. The Deputy Principal reported that the target for work experience could not be achieved under the current COVID-19 restrictions. Management felt that all work experience would continue to be placed 'on hold' until definitive guidance was issued by the Government to enable employers to undertake risk assessments for this cohort of learners

## **BALANCED SCORECARD OUTLINE FOR 2020/2021**

319. The Principal presented the proposed Balanced Scorecard Profile for 2020/2021. Governors were advised that the proposed template was consistent with that used for 2019/2020, however, there were a number of additional key performance indicators (KPIs) relating to the College's arrangements for dealing with the impact of COVID-19, such as monitoring online attendance, in addition to attendance on-site.

320. The Board agreed that the additional KPIs would enable it to monitor the effectiveness of the significant, unplanned investment the College had made in its resources and infrastructure. Given the uncertainty of the future situation, it was agreed that the KPIs would be kept under review and amended if required.

321. A governor suggested that there should be an explicit KPI for Traineeships. The Principal explained the implications of COVID-19 on the ability of learners to undertake work experience, together with English and maths. For those with learning difficulties or disabilities a period of 12, rather than 6 months, was felt to be more appropriate to enable individuals to gain the necessary skills.

322. It was agreed that Traineeships would continue to be monitored in detail by the QSS Committee.

## **MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS**

323. The Deputy Principal presented the Management Accounts for May 2020.

324. The latest return to the ESFA had graded the College's financial health ratio at the lowest threshold within the boundary of 'Outstanding' and at £714K, the end of year operating surplus was higher than that planned. However, the Deputy Principal advised that the College should take a prudent approach to include the contingencies for COVID-19 expenses that would not be reimbursed by the ESFA and the under-performance in apprenticeships during the "lockdown".

325. The financial situation would be supported by the Government's "furlough" scheme to support those non-teaching staff who could not undertake their roles during the pandemic.

326. Governors' attention was drawn to the College's pension liability, the value of which had impacted negatively by the COVID-19 pandemic. The extent of the variation was difficult to assess in the long-term due to the uncertain external environment.

## **FINANCIAL REGULATIONS REVIEW**

327. The Board received an updated draft of the College's Financial Regulations, Financial Policies & Procedures and Standing Orders.

328. A governor queried the reference to internal audits in the Policies & Procedures Manual, as the Board had previously agreed to postpone non-essential internal audits. The Deputy Principal explained that this reference referred to non statutory departmental financial audits. Furthermore, although the Board had agreed to suspend the 2019/2020 Internal Audit Plan, this decision could be reconsidered for 2020/2021 if the Government eased the current restrictions on opening the College's buildings.

329. **Resolved** That the Financial Regulations, the Financial Policies & Procedures for 2020/2021 and Standing Orders be approved.

## **FINANCIAL COMMENTARY**

330. Governors were reminded that in previous years the Board had approved the End of Year Return and Three Year Financial Forecast prior to their submission to the ESFA. However, for 2019/2020 the process had been modified and now only required authorisation from the Principal. The Clerk advised and the Principal agreed that that the approval of the budget was one of the Board's fundamental responsibilities and should not, therefore, be delegated to the Principal, despite ESFA guidance.

331. The College's finances continued to be strong, with growth in learner numbers in each academic year, successful achievement of its Adult Education Budget and additional funding from one-off grants, such as the Teaching and Learning Pilots.

332. The Deputy Principal highlighted the ongoing risks on apprenticeships and the impact of COVID-19 on resources, particularly staffing costs.

333. The Board thanked the Finance Team for its work during this difficult period.

**Sarah Norris (Student Enrichment & Engagement Manager) joined the meeting at this point.**

### **STUDENTS' UNION BUDGET AND REPORT**

334. The Student Enrichment and Engagement Manager presented a report on Students' Union Activity in 2019/2020 and the proposed Business Plan for 2020/2021.

335. Governors were informed that, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Students' Union intended to engage with learners through a variety of virtual events with links to and input from external speakers on topics such as knife crime awareness with Cheshire & Merseyside Police. A governor asked whether opportunities for sponsorship of events such as the Fresher's Fair would be considered and was advised that it was felt that this was not appropriate in the current economic climate.

336. Initially it had been anticipated that a slightly increased budget would be required to support the programme of external activities. However, as these could no longer take place, it had been decided to seek the same level of budget as for 2019/2020 (£8.5k).

337. Wellbeing awareness would be an even higher priority in 2020/2021 and the Student Union planned to support the learner voice strategy through a variety of resources and online activities to keep the student community active.

338. Governors commended the efforts of the Students' Union to build strong relationships and to engage with students remotely during the pandemic.

339. **Resolved** That the budget of £8.5K for the Students' Union for 2020/2021 be approved.

**Sarah Norris left the meeting.**

### **SUPPLY CHAIN FEES AND CHARGES POLICY 2020/2021**

340. The Assistant Principal – MIS presented the Supply Chain Fees and Charges Policy. Governors were advised that the ESFA required colleges to review this policy on an annual basis and publish the approved version on their website.

341. There had been no changes to the Policy compared to the previous year and governors were reminded that the College undertook only a small amount of subcontracting, only dealing with those providers that strengthened the quality of its curriculum offer. Robust due diligence checks were carried out for all sub-contractors, both prior to any work taking place and during the period of the contract.

342. **Resolved** That the Supply Chain Fees and Charges Policy for 2020/2021 be approved.

## **HEALTH & SAFETY**

343. The Principal presented the Covid-19 Strategy, which had been updated since the Board's last meeting (17<sup>th</sup> June) and would continue to be reviewed to comply with the latest Government guidance.

344. Both recognised trade unions were working proactively to support the College's COVID-19 plans and had welcomed the extensive consultation with management.

345. Three elements of mandatory online staff training had been developed by the College. It was suggested that, to strengthen further the overall assurance and compliance levels, governors should complete Part 2, which outlined the controls in place.

## **BOARD MINUTES – 6<sup>th</sup> May & 17<sup>th</sup> June 2020**

346. **Resolved** That the minutes of the meetings held on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2020 and 17<sup>th</sup> June 2020 (special meeting) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

347. Governors received a progress report on the actions identified at the previous meeting and noted that all identified actions had been addressed or completed.

## **AUDIT COMMITTEE**

348. The Board received for information the draft minutes from the Audit Committee meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

349. The Chair of the Audit Committee reported that the Committee had reviewed the External Audit Planning Memorandum for the 2019/2020 Financial Statements and recommended its approval by the Board.

350. The Committee had also reviewed the draft Risk Management Policy for 2020/2021. There had been no significant change made to the policy, other than some amendments relating to COVID-19 and a statement on the deferral of the Internal Audit Plan.

351. **Resolved** 1 That the External Audit Planning Memorandum for 2019/2020 Financial Statements be approved.

2 That the Risk Management Policy 2020/2021 be approved.

## **QSS COMMITTEE**

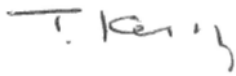
352. The Board received for information the draft minutes from the Quality and Standards Scrutiny (QSS) Committee meeting held on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020.

353. The Chair of the QSS Committee reported that 16-18 achievement levels (including English and Maths) were predicted to be higher for 2019/2020 than for 2018/2019. The Committee had been assured that a rigorous process had been used to provide supporting evidence for all achievements.

354. Achievement on higher education programmes was also predicted to exceed the previous year, but, as reported earlier, Apprenticeships continued to be a cause for concern and would be monitored in detail in 2020/2021.

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING – Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> October 2020**

Signed:



Date: 28<sup>th</sup> October 2020

Chair