

Minutes of the Corporation meeting held on Tuesday 7th December 2021

Present: Martin Wyn Griffith (Chair)
Peter Boucher, Simon Cove, John Dernie, Emma Jarman, Carole Kitching, Monica Lawson, Kathy Newman, David Panes, Jim Webster

With: Richard Bott, Audit Partner, Mazars (minutes 145-146 only)
Fiona Carthy, Carthy Communications (Minutes 145 - 147 only)
Stephen Horrobin, Deputy Principal Finance and Resources
Lynne Plested, Vice Principal Higher Education
Mary Prince, Interim Vice Principal Business Development & Employer Engagement
Julian Tucker, Interim Finance Team (minutes 145 -146 only)
Tracy Scaife, Head of Governance

145. Audit Completion Report and Letter of Representation – confidential minutes refer.

146. Annual Report and Financial Statements year ended 31st July 2021 – confidential minutes refer.

147. Marketing review – confidential minutes refer.

148. Apologies for absence – received from John Arnott, Pradeep Bhardwaj, Tim Thurston, Rob Wheeler and Jean Inker.

The Chair advised that Keeran Vetriko has approached him and requested to stand down as a governor of the college. The recruitment of new governors is underway and one person of interest has met with the Head of Governance.

149. Disclosures of Interest – received from Kathy N Newman with regard to her employment with Nationwide Building Society. The college has a bank account with them and also has a connection through apprenticeships.

150. Minutes of last meeting – agreed as a correct record. There were no matters arising.

151. Student Voice report – received and noted.

The meeting noted that student governors, due to various reasons, have not yet been appointed but will be in post for the March 2022 meeting.

151. Principal's report (including Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)) – received and noted.

The Principal advised that she will talk to item 21 on the agenda under this item.

The Principal gave an update on the staff focus groups that have recently been held in response to the staff survey. The groups were particularly to look at communications and to ensure that the executive team is focussing energies in the right place. Twelve focus groups were held overall and have fed back some interim findings. The objective was to get views from a random sample of staff and to take a solutions focussed approach on how to take the college forward.

With regard to questions regarding communication in the focus groups it was noted that they were fairly simple i.e. say about a time when communication was good, what was good about it, where was that communication on a scale of 1 to 10, what would need to be happen for you for communication to move up the scale by one point, what needs to change in your department.

A general observation was that take up by academic staff with regard to taking part in the focus groups was lower than anticipated. Every effort was made to accommodate timetables etc. However everyone who did attend the focus groups wanted to be there and was positive about moving forward.

Other issues raised through the focus groups were more regular updates, less untimely deadlines, more open door and more visible and approachable Principalship, more clarity, more meetings and involvement, clearer roles and responsibilities and clearer decision making, a sense of one college, sharing of goals. Culture and style came out through a large number of discussions. The college should make use of people's expertise. Pleasing there is an overwhelming sense that people want to be involved and want to help move the college forward.

Marjory Mair, consultant is meeting with the Principalship team the following day and further work will be carried out to develop an action plan. A number of actions have already been implemented following the results of the survey. It was noted that the actions being taken by the Principal in response to the staff survey need to be linked to the marketing review. It is important that curriculum staff are fully engaged and that a clear action focussed plan is put in place in all areas.

Concerns were raised at the amount of actions/projects that are planned and it was questioned if everything should be done at the same time as it appears that the same people are involved in all of the areas. The Principal advised that it is vital that the decline in student recruitment is reversed. Current staff morale and engagement also has to be addressed together with some curriculum and quality matters to ensure that the college has a product worthy of offering. These three areas are interlinked and all are vital for the future success of the college. If the college gets these areas right the finances will follow.

There was a decline in achievement rates last year for 16-18 year olds and this is a concern on many fronts – risk of Ofsted inspection, reputation etc. A drop might have been expected for last year and this year as this is quite common following a merger. It was already known that achievement rates previously at the former Swindon College were extremely low in some areas. There have been no formal exams for the past two years which has meant that there is no national data to use for benchmarking. The quality focus needs to be narrowed with particular focus on attendance, student retention, motivation of students with an emphasis on teaching and learning. The quality cycle also needs to be looked at to ensure that there is support for students, particularly those at risk and a review of the impact of improvement plans. Getting these two areas sorted would make a huge impact. It should be noted that other areas requiring attention will not be forgotten and work around these will still take place.

The quality cycle has been looked at together with improvement plans and the impact of these. Getting these two areas right will make a huge impact. There will still be work in other areas but these two will be the main focus.

The review of a new attendance strategy is not progressing as well as hoped. The process needs to involve programme leads as well as curriculum managers.

With regard to the IoT there are delays to the construction project and completion is now not expected until mid-May. Concerns were raised regarding the impact that this delay could have to the recruitment of students for September 2022. The Deputy Principal Finance and Resources advised that every effort is being made to get as much early access as possible to the buildings. The Chair of the IoT Sub Group stated that the subject of delays seems to be a recurring theme in meetings of the Sub Group. Unfortunately there is nothing that can be done to advance the completion date. The part of the project that the college is running with regard to the south tower of the Pegasus building is due to complete on time.



152. Curriculum and Quality committee –

(a) Minutes of meeting held on 23rd November 2021 – noted.

(b) Higher Education Report – report by Vice Principal Curriculum and HE received and noted.

Given context of pandemic, attendance was good and the pass rate increased. High grades stayed strong and held at the same level as the last 3 years whereas nationally levels have reduced. There is high satisfaction levels from learners. Good progress has been made with integration and the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). The average achievement rate was over 90%. There is a need to improve recruitment, retention and partnership data, folding partners into our quality processes. It was noted that the Chair and Vice Chair attended the recently held HE graduation ceremony. The Corporation congratulated the Vice Principal HE and Curriculum on the HE achievements.

(c) Self-Assessment Report (SAR) and Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) – the meeting noted that the SAR validation exercise would be held in the new year. This is running behind for a variety of reasons this year. The SAR will be written between now and the second week in January and members of the C&Q committee will be invited to take part in the validation exercise which will be held by the end of January.

153. Audit committee –

(a) Minutes of meeting held on 29th November 2021 – noted.

(b) Audit Committee Annual Report to Corporation – received and noted.

(c) Risk management update – report by Deputy Principal Finance and Resources received and noted.

(d) Risk Appetite Statement – report by Deputy Principal Finance and Resources received and noted.

It was noted that the committee is working towards a revised risk management policy in 2022.

RESOLUTION: that the Risk Appetite Statement be approved.

154. Resources, Integration and Change committee –

(a) Minutes of meeting held on 30th November 2021 – received and noted.

(b) Financial Regulations – received and noted.

The meeting noted that the Financial Regulations have now been separated into more manageable parts, resulting in a much clearer set of documents. The major changes to the document were outlined. It was further noted that the policies previously embedded in the Financial Regulations have now been removed. There is still some wording that needs tidying up with regard to the sign off of travel and subsistence claims made by the Principal.

RESOLUTION: that the Financial Regulations be agreed in principle but the Deputy Principal Finance and Resources to bring back a tracker version showing alterations to the next meeting.

155. Safeguarding –

(a) update – report by Director of Student Services received and noted.

(b) Safeguarding policy – received and noted.

It was noted that the safeguarding policy is entirely new and refers to Keeping Children Safe In Education) KCSIE. There is also now a very comprehensive procedure to go with the policy.

RESOLUTION: that the Safeguarding policy be approved and adopted.

156. Governor attendance – report by Head of Governance received and noted.

The meeting noted the individual attendances of governors for the 2020/21 academic year and the recommendation to approve an attendance target for governors of 80%.

RESOLUTION: that a target of 80% be set for overall governor attendance for the 2021/22 academic year.

157. Any other business – none

158. Date of next meeting – Tuesday 8th March 2022 at 4.00pm

159. Confidential minutes of committees to note – confidential minutes refer.

160. Confidential minutes of the Corporation meeting held on 19th October 2021 – confidential minutes refer.

161. Cleaning contract – confidential minutes refer.

162. Staff Survey update – considered under item 8 on the agenda. Confidential minutes refer.

163. Update on Principalship Team Recruitment Planning – confidential minutes refer.