

Minutes of the Corporation meeting held on Tuesday 8th March 2022

Present: Jim Webster (in the Chair)
John Arnott, Pradeep Bhardwaj, Peter Boucher, Simon Cove, John Dernie,
Luke Hannigan, Emma Jarman, Carole Kitching, Monica Lawson, Kathy Newman,
David Panes, Shereen Sameresinghe, Tim Thurston, Danielis Tirunas, Rob Wheeler,
Martin Wyn Griffith

With: Stephen Horrobin, Deputy Principal Finance and Resources
Pat Denham, Interim Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality
Lynne Plested, Vice Principal Higher Education
Mary Prince, Interim Vice Principal Business Development & Employer Engagement
Tracy Scaife, Head of Governance

173. Chair of meeting – as the Chair of Corporation is joining the meeting via Teams it was agreed that the Vice-Chair of Corporation chair the meeting.

174. Apologies for absence and welcomes – there were no apologies for absence received.

The meeting welcomed Luke Hannigan and Danielis Tirunas - student governors, Shereen Sameresinghe – governor candidate and Pat Denham – Interim Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality to their first meeting of the Corporation.

175. Disclosure of interests – received from Kathy Newman and Rob Wheeler due to their employment with Nationwide Building Society who the college invests with.

176. Appointment of Governor – Shereen Sameresinghe – the Chair of Governors advised the meeting that members of the Nominations, Remuneration and Governance committee and the Head of Governance have all met with Shereen and the committee are pleased to recommend to the Corporation that she be appointed as a governor of the college. A copy of Shereen’s CV was received and noted.

RESOLUTION – that Shereen Sameresinghe be appointed as a governor of New College Swindon for a term of office of four years.

ACTION: *TS to complete appointment process for Shereen Sameresinghe and arrange necessary training and DBS checks*

177. Minutes of the last meeting held on 7th December 2021 – agreed as a correct record.

Matters arising raised as follows –

(a) 148 Apologies for absence – the meeting noted that Keeren Vetriko has resigned as a governor of the college.

(b) 154 Resources, Integration and Change committee (b) Financial Regulations – noted that the tracker version of the Financial Regulations was not currently available but would be presented to the next meeting of the Corporation in May 2022.

178. Minutes of committees: noted as follows -

(a) Resources, Integration and Change committee: 25th January 2022 – the Chair of the committee advised that the meeting discussed two new material risks relating to the decline in attendance rates and the increases in utility prices. Both could have significant impact on the budget over the next one to two years.

(b) Nominations, Remuneration and Governance committee: 8th February 2022

(c) Curriculum and Quality committee: 28th February 2022 – the Chair stated that the newly introduced Vice Principal’s report prepared by the Interim Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality and the Vice Principal HE and Curriculum had brought a great improvement to the information presented to the committee. It was noted that there has been a delay in the Self-Assessment Report (SAR) but the final report will be available at the next meeting. The annual equality and diversity report is in development and will be presented to the next meeting. The meeting scrutinised the Quality Improvement Plans (QIPs) and is recommending their approval to the Corporation.

ACTION: PD to present SAR and annual E&D report to next meeting of C&Q committee

179. Student Voice report – received and noted.

The meeting congratulated the student governors on the excellent report that they had produced. The student governors introduced themselves to the meeting giving details of their studies at the college and their reasons for wanting to take on the role.

The meeting asked how the matters raised in the report play back into the college marketing plan etc. The Principal advised that the report is a part of whole student feedback process and can be incorporated into the overall plan. Some of the matters raised can be responded to and can be fixed quite quickly but others will take more time. The meeting agreed that there is nobody better than students to talk to regarding the college, particularly with regard to the marketing review, enrolment processes etc. It is crucial that the Corporation and the senior team take notice of the comments from the students as they provide a great insight into the college and they need to be taken forward quite swiftly. It is important to know how students prioritise the wants etc. contained within their report and appreciate that it might not be possible to act on everything. The college needs to be organised towards meeting the needs of students and to view them as its customers and to be mindful of that when making any decisions.

The student governors referred to the quality of teaching. Overall the quality of individual teaching is quite good but there is a lack of uniformity amongst different classes within the same course making it difficult to swap classes if needed for timetabling.

The Chair of the meeting stated that in the Corporation meetings the student governors are equal partners and should not hesitate to make any points they wish. Student input is highly valued and must be made part of formal process.

ACTION: CK/Principalship to respond to concerns raised by student governors in student voice report

180. Principal’s report (inc. KPIs) – report by Principal received and noted.

The meeting noted that attendance has been an absolute priority for all staff and a whole range of actions have been taken with some improvement seen. Parents are being involved much sooner and

are being asked to support their young people to return to college. The Principal advised that she had attended an Ofsted group the previous week where it was confirmed seeing attendance problems across the sector. She added that she is confident that the college now has a firmer grip on this matter with more robust tracking and increased interventions. Attendance is now hovering at circa 80%, an increase on the 72% reported to the previous meeting.

The meeting noted that the college had held a number of events for Apprenticeships Week with a number of follow up events planned. The take up for apprenticeships is increasing.

With regard to the Institute of Technology (IoT) gaining Royal Charter status, Sir Robert Buckland MP is leading the charge and has gained cross-party support for this in Parliament earlier this afternoon.

A query was raised with regard to qualified staff and the meeting was advised that this relates to the number of staff who are fully qualified for their roles within the college. The college employs some staff who are professionally trained in their subject area who are undertaking teacher training. This is a model used widely across the sector and should not be of concern.

The meeting asked the Principal what she feels the 'new norm' will be for the college and what she expects the college to look like going forward – will it look like it was thought it would two years ago. The Principal advised that she does not think it will look the same as was envisaged two years ago. In that time, caused mainly by the pandemic, the use of technology has moved faster than predicted. The pandemic has also thrown up some unexpected matters such as a high turnover of staff and this is one of the biggest issues the college is facing at the present time. Overall the college will look different with some changes for the better but inevitably some issues/projects further behind than had originally been predicted.

With regard to the recruitment of staff, the meeting noted that this is generally okay but some key roles are proving extremely difficult to fill. Increased salaries in other sectors have meant that recruitment in some areas has become unaffordable for college. There are concerns that recruitment in the public sector will be a challenge in the coming years.

181. Risk management update and risk register red rated risks – reports by Deputy Principal Finance and Resources received and noted.

The Deputy Principal Finance and Resources advised the meeting of the two significant risks being faced by the college – attendance and material increases in gas and electricity costs. With regard to attendance, the fall in numbers and retention of students affects future funding due to lagged funding methodology and will be mostly seen in the 2023/24 academic year. Costs of gas and electricity are going to increase significantly more and faster than expected with costs likely to increase three or four-fold in the next year posing a huge risk across the sector. This will be kept under review but the expectation is that it will be a very large unexpected cost. It was suggested that the college could see this as an opportunity to draw on the skills of the students with this being a project around the environmental and sustainability agenda to come up with possible ways the college could reduce its energy usage and/or change the fuels uses. It was further suggested that the college look at investing in further solar panels and also explore feasibility and the likely payback period on geo-thermal and air source heating.

With regard to the risk register the meeting noted that the extract of the register presented to the meeting referred to the highest risks being faced by the college. The Deputy Principal Finance and Resources advised that the amount of income shortfall now predicted is significantly less than originally forecast. The risk relating to Institute of Technology (IoT) capital income is also

significantly reduced thanks to a huge amount of work by staff to submit claims amounting to £3.7million earlier this week. The meeting asked for their thanks to be passed on to the relevant staff.

182. Update on progress on reporting of performance data – report by Deputy Principal Finance and Resources received and noted.

It was further noted that the table included within the paper is for illustration purposes only and does not relate to the college.

The proposal is that such a report/table be taken to each committee for review and for them to come back with any questions/suggestions for amendments etc. It's important to keep the table concise and focussed on key measures. There is also a need to understand the colour coding and the bandwidth for each colour. There will be considerable data behind the document.

With regard to the length of time it is taking to fill vacancies the student Governor reported that for computer science A level classes there has not been a qualified teacher for the whole of this academic year. The Principal agreed to investigate.

ACTION: *Principalship to prepare health-check reports including colour coded dashboards for each committee. These will be developed over the next few months.*

183. Safeguarding update – report by Safeguarding Manager received and noted together with report on the Swindon Borough Council Safeguarding Audit.

It was further noted that safeguarding is judged as effective. Safeguarding concerns are fairly consistent between the college and its partners. It was noted that it appears that there still a high number of staff – circa 20% - who require training with regard to Keeping Children Safe In Education (KCSIE). The Principal will investigate further the numbers presented. A more detailed report will be forwarded to Simon Cove, safeguarding lead governor. It was felt that a specific timescale for the completion of all safeguarding related training by staff should be set. The Principal advised that there will always be a number of staff who need to complete this training as it is undertaken post commencement of role. It was also noted that there are some governors who still need to undertake safeguarding training and this will be arranged as soon as possible. The Chair of the Nominations, Remuneration and Governance committee advised that governor training is a matter that the committee is keeping under constant review.

ACTION: *CK to ask HR to send safeguarding staff training information to SC; TS to liaise with HR and safeguarding team re. training for governors*

184. Strategic Plan – verbal report by Principal received.

The meeting noted that the Strategic Plan was approved last year. It has been shared with all staff and training with cross college managers to take forward plans in a more unified way has recently been undertaken. The Corporation needs to meet before the end of the academic year to review more fully the Strategic Plan in light of changes to government policy/requirements, the impact of the skills bill and other legislation etc. as well as local issues. The meeting noted that governors had been asked to hold the day of 10th May 2022 in their diaries for a training/away day and this will be included.

The Business Development, Employer Engagement and Recruitment committee changed its status at the end of the previous academic year to an advisory group and it is hoped to hold the first meeting shortly. There is a desire for the group to talk about the branding of the college, marketing review etc.

The needs of students also needs to be considered, especially how the students have been affected by the pandemic and how that should affect our offer to students. Students born in Generation Alpha will also be coming through and they will have different expectations about learning and careers.

185. Quality Improvement Plans (QIP) – the meeting noted that the three QIPs presented to the meeting were all previously presented to the Curriculum and Quality committee on 28th February.

The Plans are used to constantly remind us of actions needed to bring about improvements. Some items within the 2020/21 QIP were not progressed as they should have been due to the pandemic and the merger. This has resulted in a number of areas being carried forward to the 2021/22 Plan. The QIP for 2021/22 will be monitored throughout the year. The Curriculum and Quality committee are recommending the approval of the 2020/21, 2021/22 and HE QIPs.

RESOLUTION: that the Quality Improvement Plans (QIPs) relating to the 2020/21 and 2021/22 academic years and Higher Education be approved.

186. Fees 19+ - report by Head of Marketing received and noted.

The meeting noted that recruitment is responsive to fees and that fees can be a huge issue to those who have to pay for their education, especially if they are on a low income and the college is sensitive to this. Competitor pricing is tracked. Some course fees are dictated and it is not possible to increase these above the set amount i.e. part-funded courses.

RESOLUTION: that fees for 19+ remain at the current rates with the college retaining flexibility to price certain courses on an individual basis.

187. Governance matters – raised as follows:

The Chair of the Nominations, Remuneration and Governance committee advised the meeting that the documents circulated with regard to the AoC Code of Good Governance for English Colleges, Governance Framework and Protocols and Scheme of Delegation had been considered at the last meeting of the committee and is recommending to the Corporation that they be approved and adopted.

RESOLUTION: that the following documents be approved and adopted by the Corporation –

- AoC Code of Good Governance for English Colleges (AoC GGEC)
- Governance Framework and Protocols
- Scheme of Delegation

188. Size and composition of Corporation – report by Head of Governance received and noted.

The Chair of the Nominations, Remuneration and Governance committee advised the meeting that the committee had considered this proposal and were in favour of reducing the size of the Corporation as set out in the report.

RESOLUTION: that the size and composition of the Corporation be amended as follows –

- The overall size of the Corporation being reduced from twenty (20) to eighteen (18) members;
- The number of external governors being reduced from fourteen (14) to twelve (12);
- The Instrument and Articles of Government being amended to reflect the above.

ACTION: *TS to amend I&As.*

189. Any other business – raised as follows:

(a) T Level Wave 4 – request for governors to authorise the college to proceed with an application for Animal Care Capital Build and Equipment Grant bid – the Interim Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality advised the meeting that governors will be receiving an email asking them to authorise the submission of a bid as detailed above. The bid is for the full amount of the project but it is expected that the college will receive 50% of the total with the remaining cost being covered by the college. Animal Care is a curriculum area that has seen substantial growth over the past year and forecasts to continue growing. Work is in progress to source employers to support the bid.

190. Date of next meeting – Tuesday, 10th May 2022 at 4.00pm. The meeting noted that they should have a training/away day pencilled in their diaries from 10.00am on that date. Further details of this will be forwarded in due course.

191. Marketing Review action plan – confidential minutes refer.

192. Staff Survey update – confidential minutes refer.

193. Confidential minutes of the Resources, Integration and Change committee held 25th January 2022 – confidential minutes refer.

194. Senior Team update – confidential minutes refer.

195. Confidential minutes of the Corporation meeting held 7th December 2021 – confidential minutes refer.