

Minutes of the Corporation meeting held on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> March 2021

Present: Martin Wyn Griffith (Chair)  
Jawad Ahmed, John Arnott Pradeep Bhardwaj, Peter Boucher,  
Simon Cove, John Dernie, Emma Jarman, Carole Kitching, Monica Lawson,  
Charlotte Mannion, Kathy Newman, David Panes, Tim Thurston, Keeran Vetriko,  
Jim Webster, Rob Wheeler

With: Adam Fahey, Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality  
Stephen Horrobin, Deputy Principal Finance and Resources  
Chris Baish, Managing Director IoT  
Lynne Plested, Vice Principal Higher Education  
Mary Prince, Interim Vice Principal Business Development and Employer Engagement  
Tracy Scaife, Head of Governance

67. Apologies for absence and welcome – apologies received from Jessica Bell.

The Chair apologised to the Principal and her Team for being harsh at the meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2020. He added that he was pleased to see the improvement in the papers for this meeting which are significantly better than previously and thanked everyone for such a positive response. He added that the extra step that was introduced had been really useful and helped significantly with agenda planning. He apologised if it had given an additional chore but hopes it has helped to focus on what you really need to bring to the Governors.

He advised the meeting that the Team have been flat out, with the Principal and others not having a proper Christmas break, even holding meetings on New Year's Eve in order to plan everything that needed to be done for the return of students in January. This then turned out to be unnecessary as the college was closed as part of the national lockdown at the end of the first day of term. It has been a 'annus horribilis' for the college and the Chair has advised Carole that he is going to ease off as there is enough pressure as is. Hopefully 2021/22 will be a little more positive, predictable and stable.

The Principal thanked the Chair for acknowledging the difficulties being faced by the college. She added that it is an unprecedented year but it is starting to feel more positive. The immediate challenge is to get through the next week of testing. She added that everyone is looking forward to getting students back on campus.

68. Disclosures of Interest – received as follows:

Tim Thurston advised that he is a Director with Team Doctor who are currently in discussions with the college.

69. Minutes of the last meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2020 and matters arising – agreed as a correct record. There were no matters arising.

A suggestion that actions be tracked in a separate document be produced for future meetings to ensure that no actions are missed or forgotten. The Chair asked for this to be introduced in the next academic year.

70. Any other business – none.

71. Date of next scheduled meeting – Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> May 2021 at 4.00pm

72. Student Voice – report from Student Governors received and noted.

The Chair stated that it was great to see such good involvement by students. The proposals for student wellbeing and student backup plans/future planning were noted.

The Principal stated that she will work with other members of Principalship to try and take these proposals forward. The points raised have been really well made and it is acknowledged that there is a great deal of uncertainty for students at the moment. Communications with students need to be clear. She added that she looks forward to working with the Student Governors and the Student Council to make sure that these proposals can be achieved.

73. Principal's Report – received and noted.

The Principal gave an update on what is happening this week in college. Lateral flow testing is well underway – thanks to Caroline Pooley and Meryl Hamilton and also to David Panes who has worked tirelessly since January on top of his teaching. Testing is a huge exercise, over 4.5k bookings have been made by students. Students are required to have a negative test before coming back into college and are requested to take a second test three days later. From there they are given a box of lateral flow tests to take home to test themselves every three to five days. The A and B grouping system for students will continue and face-to-face learning will gradually increase.

With regard to Employee Self Service it was noted that nobody will be able to look into the records for people that they do not line manage.

Some staff who are furloughed are starting to return and there is a rolling plan to bring people back in and, over the next 3-4 weeks, almost everyone will be brought back. Some staff i.e. those who work in the gym, will remain on furlough until the gym can reopen in accordance with government requirements. The college has been topping up furlough payments to ensure that staff receive 100% of their salary.

74. Post-merger integration – report by Principal received and noted.

The Principal advised that the college has a comprehensive and prudent route forward and it is largely on track. This has been hindered by the Coronavirus pandemic and not being able to get people together. All areas identified through merger planning are being monitored. It was noted that the report makes no mention of cultural issues. The Principal advised that the staffing restructure was the first stage of looking at the culture of the college and it is also picked up in the Strategy. There will also be a project across the college regarding behaviours and values.

75. Strategy – report by Principal received and noted.

The Principal advised that she is keen to get governor input into the strategy. There is some complexity to the paper and it is split in to two halves – short-term priorities and longer term priorities. The short-term priorities need to be completed to make the longer-term priorities happen and Governors need to be aware of these. The overriding priorities are the short-term ones that need to be completed within 12-18 months to 'steady the ship' and 'turn the tanker'. The college needs to become more agile and more student and customer focussed. This needs to be the main theme moving forward and are the key elements of cultural change.

There are key strands that run through the college. The college operates in a range of markets and it can feel very broad. Unpredictabilities need to be looked at as they arise. The college needs to be

able to react to changes. Funding one year in advance makes predictions difficult but it is important to show ambitions. One of the main challenges in Swindon is students and adults not having enough ambition. If the strategy is not ambitious the college cannot be ambitious for its students.

With regard to the vision it was suggested that it is a little weak and needs to be sharpened and be really ambitious.

Themes within the strategy were felt to be strong. It was suggested that structurally it might be better if the plans were brigaded under the themes.

With regard to the PAR and self-assessment it was noted that the North Star campus appears to be struggling compared to the Queens Drive campus and it was queried whether enough energy was being put into lifting North Star.

The Principalship Team were asked how committed they were to the strategic direction proposed and if they had had sufficient opportunity to contribute to its development.

The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality advised that he is completely committed to the strategy. He added that he agrees that progression is not given the gravity that it needs in the report. Progression has been the guiding light throughout his career in further education. The Managing Director of the IoT stated that the culture and values of the whole college are crucial to move the college into a position where it consciously gets things right. It is important to focus on the end point and who the college is serving. Post-merger defining culture is important as it is an area that will help bring the two former colleges together. North Star have done a lot of work around Pivotal. The Principal advised that she is not very familiar with this but will look at it. The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality advised that Pivotal is being reviewed and other colleges using it have been approached for feedback. The Vice Principal HE and Curriculum further advised that she has been tasked to work with the Pivotal teachers and to provide a demonstration to the Principalship Team on why it should be pursued.

The Deputy Principal Finance and Resources stated that he echoed the comments made previously regarding culture and the importance of engaging the large group of staff below the Principalship Team. He added that he does not feel that there is enough reference to partnerships in the strategic plan and reminded the meeting of the financial contribution that partnerships make to the college.

Further observations made on the paper included the need for more ambition around skills and employers. Community resource could also be incorporated and a broader skills and engagement remit. There is no mention of SEND and ambitions for that area and this is an area that Ofsted will look at. KPIs and real targets re. progression are needed but there is no focus on this area coming through.

With regard to the Institute of Technology (IoT), it was asked if the same vision applied as to the whole college or whether it would have a separate vision. Increasing employer engagement from the IoT side is important and this does not come through as clearly as it could do.

Remote learning has been key over the past year and will become part of the foundation of the college.

It was suggested that the college could become a place for young people within the community to gather and this could encourage them to become students in the future.

With regard to universities, there appears to be some confusion as reference to encouraging more students towards Oxbridge and Russell Group universities seems to be at odds to the college achieving Taught Degree Awarding Powers. It was noted that having a range of progression opportunities is important. A Levels are currently being woefully neglected in almost everything that is coming out from the Government. The idea of sponsoring the new secondary school in the North Eastern Village (NEV) to act as a sixth form feeder. Concerns about this were raised given the previous experience with the Great Western Academy.

The Principal advised that the discussion had been really helpful. With regard to the challenge on the vision statement, she advised that she will do more work on this to sharpen it and make it more ambitious. Some missing areas have been rightly identified – community, SEND and high needs and progression. The suggestions with regard to layout are welcome and the Principal will amend the document as suggested. When looking at an external version the suggested format will work really well. Observations are correct in that the IoT does not feature enough and more work needs to be done on the vision of the IoT and it would be timely to address this now. The college and the IoT need to be aligned but the IoT also has a very distinct purpose.

When asked if the 100% pass rate across the whole college was realistic the Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality advised that while it is ambitious it is a good ambition to have and is realistic. There are colleges that do achieve this.

The inclusion of digital elements within the strategy were raised, specifically more data driven outcomes and ambitions.

Long-term, full-cost international development is a possibility that should be considered. This is a lucrative area and could assist with financial sustainability.

The Vice-Chair stated that he felt some excellent points had been raised throughout the discussion. He added that he felt it would be beneficial to have the Principal's final version of the Strategic Plan circulated to all governors. Once finalised, the plan needs to be driven through the organisation. He further stated that it might be helpful to have some sense of process and timing of taking it through the college.

The Principal advised that she would like the opportunity to incorporate the feedback received. Some of the common themes raised will lend weight. She added that she would like to redraft the Plan as two documents – one internal facing and one external facing with the Board signing off both. The Chair suggested that the Principal updates the Strategic Plan as suggested and forwards it/them to Governors via email for approval. Regular review of the Strategic Plan will be built in to the business planning cycle.

The chair summarised that there is broad approval of the proposed strategic direction and added that he looks forward to receiving the amended document(s).

**ACTION:** *CK to circulate amended Strategic Plan(s) to governors.*

**76.** Risk management update – report by Deputy Principal Finance and Resources received and noted.

The Chair congratulated the Deputy Principal Finance and Resources on resolving the two litigation matters inherited from the former Swindon College. The change in prediction with regard to the Adult Education Budget (AEB) was noted.

77. Updates – noted as follows:

(i) Safeguarding – Simon Cove advised that he had recently caught up with Thom Young, the Director of Student Services and DSL (Designated Safeguarding Lead). His main concern is getting his team together. Virtually all of the previous Team were lost during transition and he feels as if he is slightly exposed at the present time until the full team takes up their positions in early April. The number of referrals has fallen considerably but is expected to climb again once students are back on campus. The college has signed up to Togetherall whitewall counselling which is independent from the college. While it provides a significant additional support to the College's work, it still needs to be on top of students using the service to ensure that proper data is received and there are no data breaches. Comparative data with national and local figures show that the college is following trends. The Principal advised that it has been a challenge to get the Team together but it is important to bear in mind that there is some continuity. She added that Togetherall is not replacing the college counselling service but is in addition to it.

(ii) Predicted Achievement Rates (PAR) – noted

(iii) Compliance with OfS Ongoing Condition C1 – noted

(iv) Self-Assessment Report (SAR) – the Chair advised that the SAR needs to be approved by the Corporation and not just noted.

The meeting noted that the SAR went through an external validation process which recommended some changes to narrative and grades. The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality advised the validation process had taken place with an external consultant plus a panel of Curriculum and Quality committee members who considered the recommendations. The main changes made were to the grades for the North Star campus. Significant improvements have been made in some areas but these have not been sustained long enough to warrant the higher grade given by the college. With regard to Ofsted, the only data that they will use for inspection in the next academic year is that from 2018/19 except for MIDAS for which they will use 2019/20 data. Clarification of the grades was noted.

**RESOLUTION:** that the Self-Assessment Reports (SAR) for both the former Swindon College and New College be approved.

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

The meeting noted that there are a combination of things that need to be looked at when setting prices including competition, market forces, and recruitment trends.

**RESOLUTION:** that fees for 19+ for the 2021/22 academic year be agreed as follows:

- Courses at Level 2 and below – fees to be set at 60% of the LARs (Learning Aims Reference Service) rate (weighted for vocational and unweighted for GCSEs);
- Courses at Level 3 and above – fees for those eligible for free courses to be set at 100% of the LARs funding rates (weighted for vocational and unweighted for A Levels);
- Flexibility to be allowed to price individual courses according to online and local competition and market demand.

79. Governance matters –

(i) Reappointment of Kathy Newman – report by Head of noted.

**RESOLUTION:** that Kathy Newman be reappointed as a governor of New College Swindon for a further term of office of four years, commencing on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2021, ending 16<sup>th</sup> June 2025.

(ii) Standing Orders – report by Head of Governance received and noted.

**RESOLUTION:** that the Standing Orders as presented be adopted by the Corporation.

(iii) Code of Conduct for Corporation Members – report by Head of Governance received and noted.

**RESOLUTION:** that the Code of Conduct for Corporation Members as presented be adopted by the Corporation.

(iv) Amendment to Instrument and Articles of Government – report by Head of Governance received and noted.

**RESOLUTION:** that Instrument 13 be amended to reduce the percentage of governors required for a meeting to be quorate to 35%.

(v) Current Governor vacancies – verbal report received from the Head of Governance.

The meeting noted that there are currently two governor vacancies. In order to fulfil a fuller skills set the college is seeking to recruit one governor with HE experience and a second ideally with someone with either a legal or practical corporate real estate experience. When recruiting a governor from the HE sector or with a background in HE, care needs to be taken to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest with partnerships that the college already has with HE establishments.

Current members of the Corporation were asked to consider whether they can identify anyone within their networks who might be interested in and suitable for the role.

The Chair of the Nominations, Remuneration and Governance committee and the Head of Governance will work together to produce an information document on the roles which can be circulated to all governors to pass on to anyone interested in the role.

80. Minutes of committees to note –

(i) Nominations, Remuneration and Governance: 19<sup>th</sup> January 2021

(ii) Resources, Integration and Change: 26<sup>th</sup> January 2021 – The Chair of the committee advised the meeting that the committee has spent a considerable amount of time on finance. The Deputy Principal Finance and Resources has produced a yearly forecast which will be considered later in the meeting. Although the figures are slightly below plan, cash is critical and there needs to be more emphasis on cash. The savings plan has been reviewed and while significant savings are required, it is important not to go so hard on savings that the budget is hollowed out.

The IoT Sub Group has met several times. A large funding hole had developed and those working on the Project have done a great job in value engineering the project down by circa £650k and in

obtaining additional funding from the Department for Education (DfE). The Chair of the committee thanked the team for the fantastic work that they have done. It was noted that the Corporation will see a number of requests coming through for additional spend for the IoT. The first of these will be sent within the next week. The project is 6-8 weeks behind schedule but contingency plans are in place so that teaching can start on time. The Chair of the Corporation stated that he felt it would be helpful for the Chair of the IoT Sub Group to lead and share his opinion on the requests when they are sent out.

The Deputy Principal Finance and Resources advised the meeting that over the next week the Corporation will also be asked to approve a work in progress estates strategy. This is required for FECA funding.

The meeting considered whether approving items by email provided enough challenge. The meeting was reminded that all the items that will be coming through have been through committees and are not new to many Governors. The process is one of formally approving proposals at Corporation level rather than considering new proposals for the first time.

(iii) Curriculum and Quality: 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021 –

(iv) Audit: 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2021 – as an addendum to the minutes the Chair of the Audit committee advised that following the meeting a paper showing an action plan for IT was requested.

81. Full year forecast – confidential minutes refer.

82. Appointment of External Auditors for year ended 31<sup>st</sup> July 2021 – confidential minutes refer.

83. Corporation 8<sup>th</sup> December 2020 – confidential minutes – agreed as a correct record.