

Minutes of the **Corporation** meeting held on Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> May 2021

Present: Martin Wyn Griffith (Chair)  
Jawad Ahmmed, John Arnott, Pradeep Bhardwaj, Peter Boucher,  
Simon Cove, John Dernie, Emma Jarman, Carole Kitching, Monica Lawson,  
Charlotte Mannion, Kathy Newman, David Panes, Tim Thurston,  
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  
Jean Inker, Interim Director of HR (minutes 95 to only)  
Amanda Walton, Head of Marketing (minutes 87 to 89 only)  
Tracy Scaife, Head of Governance

87. Apologies for absence and welcome – apologies received from Keeran Vetriko.

The Chair welcomed Mary Prince, Interim Vice Principal Business Development and Employer Engagement and Amanda Walton, Head of Marketing to the meeting.

The Chair advised that a letter had been received from Charlotte Mannion advising that she intends to resign as a governor of the college and that this will be the last meeting that she will attend.

The Chair stated that Charlotte had made an important contribution to the merger of the two colleges in Swindon and that this had been a massive achievement. She demonstrated a huge interest in further education and has great knowledge of the sector.

The Vice Chair stated that he was sorry to hear that Charlotte was leaving the Governing Body. He added that he always felt working with her was a lot of fun and that, when she was guiding decision-making, she always put the interests of students first. She had the ability to utilise her skills and experience around the board table and was always prepared to call on that experience. She was a huge supporter of staff and their needs generally and this is her prevailing ethos. Finally, he stated that he had enjoyed working with her enormously and hopes that they will stay friends.

John Arnott stated that he was disappointed that he had not got to know Charlotte as well as he had hoped. He thanked her for incredible wise counsel through the merger, an often difficult and emotional time for many. He added that Charlotte helped the merger team to achieve many things not thought possible. He added that he still believes that the merger was the right thing to do and that the new New College Swindon would not be here without Charlotte.

The Principal acknowledged the support and encouragement received from Charlotte and the determination she has shown. Charlotte put a great deal of time and energy into developing the three-way relationship between herself, the Principal and the Head of Governance. She added that she did however come to fear the red pen track changes on her carefully crafted papers! Charlotte was always constructive with feedback and she valued having her there to talk to. She has seen first-hand how she always put staff and students first and was often in college chatting to staff and students and looking at student work. During her time as Chair she tackled some very difficult situations.

The Head of Governance stated that Charlotte had brought governance and the role of the Chair into the college. She was seen, she met with people, talked to people in the corridors and made time for everyone. She brought trust of the governors into the college and was hugely supportive of those that she worked with. People saw her as a friend and a confidante and someone that they could go to with their problems and their successes.

The Chair stated that these comments are a huge testimony to Charlotte and he is conscious as her successor that he is going to have to work hard to follow her.

Charlotte thanked everyone for their kind comments and memories. She stated that the College has been an important part of her life for the past seven and a half years, a time when she has made great friends, shared some interesting ups and downs and been privy to a lot of secrets. It has been one of the most rewarding voluntary jobs she has ever done. She said that her crowning achievement is not seeing the merger through but finding and appointing Carole as Principal.

As she leaves, she would like to respond by sharing some of her thoughts on how she believes the college must move forward into the coming brave new world; post Covid; post Brexit. She believes now is the time for Governors to push for greater vision by asking what this new entity really stands for? Where is it going? And how is it different from all the other 'great' colleges in the country.

The new college has come through a bruising merger all whilst handling the impact of Covid. She believes that from now on governors must work together, share the pain, and agree with the college some awesome and ambitious goals for the future. Governors must ask: What makes this college stand out? What makes it different from our competition. What does it offer students? What is in it for the staff? What does it offer to the community that other colleges and 6<sup>th</sup> forms do not? Governors should be checking out what matters to people in the local community? What matters to young people today? What matters to adults looking to improve their life chances? Watching or listening to the news right now will tell you that for many young people Climate Change matters. Check out social media: Tiktok; Instagram, Twitter, even Facebook to find out how the college could be positioned to meet the needs of young people and adults. The college needs more students, we know recruitment is down: But what do we offer to potential students that is different, inspiring, and ambitious compared with them staying on at school or going out to work? We need to listen to our students: How would they like to be educated to enable them to make a difference in their world? The college needs to shout out loud and demonstrate that it is putting the people and the planet first - for example through all the activities already running in the college. The college staff in a strong vote chose Twigs Gardens as their main charity this year and Twigs are promoting environmental walks throughout the year in gardens cared for by people with mental health issues. Protecting and enhancing the environment matters to our staff and to our students. Right now, awareness of climate change and protecting our environment is being recognised as vital. The college is already doing things about it, but we don't tell anyone. The students don't find out how they can be part of a movement to improve the environment, to build a green economy, care for others; save the planet - until after they have joined us.

As a governing body we will never find our values until we are clear what we want to achieve, where we are going and how we plan to get there. Whatever the college agrees, her parting gift is to ask governors to please stand by the college - get to really know the 'new College'; meet up with staff and each other in groups; online; in person - imagine the best future possible. It will then be possible for the governors of New College to set the agenda, agree some awesome ambitious goals for the College and help Principalship to achieve them.

88. Disclosures of Interest – none received.

89. Risk management:

(a) update: report by Deputy Principal Finance and Resources received and noted.

With regard to catering, it was asked if it would be possible to bring back in-house, using catering students to run it under the supervision of a catering manager. The Deputy Principal Finance and Resources stated that there were several reasons why this would not be possible, one of the main reasons being buying power. Large companies are able to negotiate much better deals than an individual would never be able to match. Aramark, current providers at the North Star campus, have been approached and if they do not come through alternatives will need to be sought. The Principal added that she would like to see students running the catering at the college but at the present time there is not the capacity to do so. This needs to be built up over a number of years.

(b) 16-18 student recruitment – The Chair welcomed the Head of Marketing to the meeting.

The Head of Marketing advised that there are two sets of students – returning and new applications. Enrolments in September 2020 were down by approximately 100, mainly new first years and mainly for the Queens Drive campus. The number likely to return for this September is less again. A better indication of numbers will be available within the next few weeks. Current applications are circa 150 down compared to last year – equating to a 12% deficit. During the past year it has not been possible to get in to schools and only 4 in-person events have been held, the remainder have been online. There are some Covid-19 related reasons for students not choosing the college, with students having a tendency to stay on at their school sixth form. Inflated grades from schools have also been a factor, as has increasing competition from school sixth forms. Cirencester College is also competition and there appears to be a snob value – Cirencester is seen as a nicer town, with the college in a better location. It is accepted that there will be a period of instability as the merger beds down. Data is being analysed from various views to enable the best picture to be derived.

It was suggested that the college asks itself what makes it different from the other providers and how to reinvent itself in the minds of the local community. There are a number of options available to students for A Levels and vocational courses and the college needs a unique selling point to differentiate itself from the others and to stand out. Sales and marketing can only work with what they are given. Recruitment cannot be blamed on marketing and is not a marketing issue or problem. An honest appraisal of how the curriculum is arrived at needs to be undertaken and the question needs to be asked if the curriculum design is genuinely responding to the customer base reflected in the product range. It was noted that a lot of work is already in progress and that the Business Development, Employer Engagement and Recruitment committee has asked for a marketing plan covering 3 and 5 years to be drawn up. The college needs to use this opportunity for change and look at the offer on a strategic level. The college needs to keep up with what drives young people and what young people want. Parents need to be able to see that the college offers good routes for further study and good opportunities for employment. The college needs to be a place where young people want to be, even at times when they are not studying.

The Head of Marketing advised that previously there have been issues with parents not wanting their son or daughter to attend a particular campus, reasons included location and friendship groups. There has also been some negativity about the merger from a minority of people and this too has had an affect. She added that there is still almost five months until the beginning of the next academic year to work on recruitment.

90. Minutes of the last meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2021 and matters arising – agreed as a correct record.

There were no matters arising.

91. Any other business – no items raised.

92. Date of next scheduled meeting – Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> July 2021 at 4.00pm. The Chair advised that the meeting will be held via Microsoft Teams.

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

The meeting commented that it was an excellent paper from the Student Governors and the Chair stated that he hoped that management would be acting on the points raised.

94. Principal's Report – received and noted.

The Principal advised that an ex-student of the college known as S1mba is nominated for the Best British Single award at the Brit Awards this evening.

The Principal shared a PowerPoint relating to the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill. She added that there was little mention of it in the Queen's Speech earlier in the day but it is expected the Bill will come forward within the next two weeks. The three main points in the Bill were noted. The Principal added that the focus on FE and lifelong learning is welcomed but to succeed, loans will need to be backed up with maintenance loans/grants and a reform of benefits. There are real challenges to be faced with employer versus student demand and Local Skills Improvement Plans will need to be aware of this. One question that needs answering is who will fund non-viable courses. Another question is if legislation for further intervention powers is really necessary, the Government needs to be clear what problems it is trying to solve.

The meeting noted that the Government has recently set up the Skills Accelerator Programme looking for 6 – 7 pilots across the country and has also invited colleges to bid for a £65m Strategic Development Fund pilot. The College is working with Business West to support its bid to become a Local Skills Improvement Plan trailblazer and is also supporting Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce in their bid for the Thames Valley. The Strategic Development Fund is looking for 12 – 16 areas to pilot the Fund. The fund will consist of 60% for capital and 40% for revenue and must be used by March 2022. The Programme's aim is to build stronger partnerships between employer groups and providers to fill local skills gaps. The College is working with Wiltshire College and others on a bid focussed around Health and Social care and Life Sciences.

The Chair asked for a verbal update on the College Collaboration Fund. The Principal advised that this is a peer-support programme to help colleges share good practice and develop quality improvement priorities. It is match-funded and the college is not looking to do anything of huge significance with it.

The Managing Director of the Institute of Technology (IoT) stated that there will be a formal release of bids for the IoT later in the week.

95. Strategy update: report by Principal received and approved subject to further work on the vision statement.

The meeting agreed that the layout of the Strategic Plan was much improved on the previous version and agreed the themes and the sub-headings within them. With regard to the vision, the meeting preferred something more specific rather than 'to be a great college' and suggested that this needed to be defined i.e. within the top 10% of colleges in the country. The Chair suggested that Governors approve the strategic plan and park the vision statement for now as this might drop out of the work on values. A further suggestion was that the vision statement could include innovation and diversity. The Chair asked that if any governor had any specific thoughts on the vision they email the Principal within the next few days.

96. Written resolutions: report by Head of Governance received and noted.

The Chair outlined the background that had led to the report and the suggested recommendation. He stressed that in future he would like this method of approval for matters to only be used in cases of emergency and that any known matters should be agenda items and included within the cycle of business.

**RESOLUTION:**

(i) that in order to allow governors the opportunity to discuss written resolutions prior to giving their consent, the generator of the request provides a drop-in session for governors. The session will be arranged by the Head of Governance and all governors eligible to vote on the resolution will be invited to join. Attendance will be entirely voluntary and will not be included in any attendance statistics collected.

(ii) that following confirmation of written resolutions a report will be made to the next Corporation meeting by the Head of Governance. The report will contain details of the written resolution, the outcome and details of voting. The confirmation of the written resolution will be attached to the report.

**ACTION:** *TS to report all written resolutions to the Corporation as required.*

97. Updates – noted as follows:

(i) Safeguarding – report by Director of Student Services received and noted.

Simon Cove advised that the number of safeguarding cases reported had increased as expected as students have returned to college. One further issue raised was the wearing of lanyards and ID badges, ensuring that all staff and students are wearing them and also that they are exercising due caution when they come onto the college sites. General access to the North Star campus is an area of concern as it is a site made up of multiple buildings. The Principal advised that this currently being looked at.

98. Minutes of committees to note –

(i) Resources, Integration and Change: 27<sup>th</sup> April 2021 – noted.

(ii) Business Development, Employer Engagement and Recruitment: 28<sup>th</sup> April 2021 – The Chair of Corporation referred to a recent situation where four meetings had considered recruitment and stated that he is keen to ensure that the committee complements and does not duplicate the work of other committees and also the IoT groups. It was noted that there will be a review of the Terms of Reference of committees by the Nominations, Remuneration and Governance (NRG) committee who

will consider this. The Chair of the NRG committee advised that he would be arranging to meet the Chairs of all of the committees at some point before the end of the academic year.

(iii) Curriculum and Quality: 4<sup>th</sup> May 2021 – noted.

99. Post-merger integration update – confidential minutes refer.

100. Confidential minutes of last meeting held 9<sup>th</sup> March 2021 and matters arising – confidential minutes refer.

Agreed as correct record.