

Minutes of the Corporation meeting held on Tuesday 6th July 2021

Present: Martin Wyn Griffith (Chair)
John Arnott, Pradeep Bhardwaj, Peter Boucher,
Simon Cove, John Dernie, Emma Jarman, Carole Kitching, Monica Lawson,
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
Lynne Plested, Vice Principal Higher Education
Mary Prince, Interim Vice Principal Business Development and Employer Engagement
Jean Inker, Interim Director of HR
Tracy Scaife, Head of Governance

103. Apologies for absence and welcome – apologies received from Jawad Ahmmed, Jessica Bell and Chris Baish.

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and expressed his thanks for agreeing to a physical meeting.

104. Disclosures of Interest – none received.

105. Minutes of the last meeting held on 11th May 2021 – agreed as a correct record. There were no matters arising.

106. Presentation on the first year of merger and Principal's report – presentation and report by Principal received and noted.

The Chair advised that following discussions with the Principal the meeting had been restructured to involve more discussion and questioning and hoped that the following presentation would assist that aim.

The Principal advised that her presentation covered the first 300 days post-merger. It has been a tumultuous year and now feels like a good time to take stock and to have a review of what has happened in that time including what has gone well and what has not gone so well.

The Principal's report was noted. The key points of her presentation were as follows:

- Income – noted that pre-merger the income of both colleges had been looked at and obvious differences in income streams were noted. Since merger those income streams have started to balance out although 16-19 remains the largest source, particularly at levels 2 and 3;
- Partnerships income – remains a significant part of college income. Proposed ESFA regulatory changes will have major implications;
- Achievement Rates (ARs) for both campuses were noted. Going forward the figures will be based on one college
- North Star 16-19 provision – some challenges remain although there has been a significant improvement on the previous year. Impact of Covid noted – one improvement has been retention;
- Apprenticeships – starts plummeted over the past year. The figures for Queens Drive almost mirror the national picture and equate to a loss of circa £1m income. Some recovery is beginning but it is expected that starts will flat-line for the coming year as there is no

movement from first to second year. There were some issues with apprenticeships pre-merger at the Queens Drive campus. Apprenticeships at North Star have always been strong. Employer satisfaction with apprenticeships at both campuses is good.

- The philosophies of 'steady the ship' and 'turn the tanker' have been very challenging with the lack of opportunities to meet. The Team is working hard to improve income and quality and is expecting to meet the budget. A lot of work has already been done across integration and more is planned over the summer. There is still work to do on the 'one college, one culture';
- The management restructure has been completed and a further smaller staffing restructure is just completing. There will be major curriculum moves over the summer and it is hoped that these will resolve some of the issues currently being experienced;
- Covid challenges – the pandemic has brought many issues which have had an effect on the mental health of both students and staff – Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGs), online learning, loss of opportunities which would be available ordinarily. There is the potential to appeal on grades. Going forward it will be difficult to judge the level of qualifications that students will join the college with (TAGs) and this will bring challenges and require a more personalised approach;
- Physical work placements have also plummeted due to the pandemic;
- Response and engagement with online delivery has been excellent and the positive elements of this will be retained. It has also been a huge skills development for staff;
- Sudden and immediate changes in Government requirements have occurred throughout the year and it is thought that FE reform will occupy a great deal of time next year;
- There have been substantial increases in Access to HE and distance learning and also Level 2 qualifications;
- The college has worked with employers this year to focus and shape the curriculum;
- New IoT courses and T Levels will be introduced next year – a really strong portfolio;
- A number of bids have come in since January 2021, many with a very short turnaround – circa £5m capital;
- The breadth of strategic partnerships continues to grow;
- Future Talent Forums are attracting a number of employers;
- Many challenges going forward – need to drive growth, more focus on 'one college, one culture' and New College way, ongoing issues from Covid, pace of quality improvements, maintaining the strong cash position, realignment of subcontracting rules, capacity and agility of funding and partnership opportunities, increased regulation of the sector, developing expertise and role of the Corporation, recruitment to fill skills gaps;
- In spite of the many difficulties faced throughout the year there have been some amazing student achievement;

A lengthy discussion was held following on from the presentation, the key points from which were:

- **Resilience** – the Leadership team has done a fantastic job over the past year given that the restrictions they have had to operate under have been surreal. There is an overriding sense of support for the Principal and her Team in getting through the past year. Now is a good time to hit a post-lockdown reset button and ask if anything is missing from the Principalship's approach. Must not lose sight of the excellent work that the Principal has done. Leadership have done a great job, staff and student safety has always been a priority. No apologies needed for the past year. The work that has been done has been spectacular. But there are several opportunities in the next six to nine months.
- **Branding & Communication** – change related to the branding of the merged college is too slow. We still see Swindon College and New College signage at the two campuses and tokens such as lanyards could easily have been updated by now. The college is called New College

Swindon and should always be referred to in that way. Progress on the change programme is not being sufficiently communicated internally (or externally). Noted that there has not been the bandwidth or enough time to push everything out. It is important to be comfortable that the Team has the ability and resources to do what it needs to do. Consider the possibility of using outside agency/ies to assist on a short-term basis. To support growth, recruitment and culture change, branding and communication must be central. Staff need to be reminded why the colleges merged. Need to articulate what the benefits are for students in the merged college – do we know what they are and what we want them to be?

- **Culture & Change** – there remains a them and us culture inside the two campuses. The ‘One College’ change programme must be a priority going forward. The pace of change varies and does not always go as planned. The college has fared quite well in terms of embracing what it has been able to do over time and with the external restrictions forced upon it. Important to accept that it does take time for the merger to fully embed. There have been many other challenges for the college apart from the merger - these include financial matters and harmonisation, none of which have been straightforward. Need to accept the challenges and the delays and move on. There has been no choice but to prioritise Covid related issues and the IoT project and these have undoubtedly had an impact on the overarching transformation programme for the college. It is time to focus on that programme and to identify the key actions to drive the presence of the college in Swindon and the surrounding area and to push the one college culture. Previous attempts at merging the two colleges always raised the issue of the culture differences of the two former colleges – time to move on.
- **Customer focus** - When everything is important, nothing is important. Priority should be the students, they are our customers – no students equals no college. There has been very little discussion about students and there should be more. More information is needed about students motives and feedback - greater customer focus is needed. From focussing on student needs, priorities can be developed. Must not lose sight of the employers. We must ensure that students can leave the college and gain employment if they choose that path. Important to consider all possible customers – need to recognise that there are several types of customers.
- **Strategic Priorities** - need to be clear on strategic priorities, especially what are the top three that would make the biggest difference. Branding seems to come up the most often so maybe that is the number one priority. We must accept the impact of the Covid pandemic and to categorise the impacted areas – strategic, operational, short-term, long-term, high impact and low impact. Difficult to know what new regulations/demands are going to come out of Government and it is important to recognise that it is not possible to do everything. Priorities may need to be changed over time. Need to be clear on what the strategy is before developing key performance measures – a huge piece of work. Important to note that the college does have KPIs. They might not be sufficiently communicated to staff, but it is important to share them, particularly those relating to behaviours and values.
- **Reputation & Positioning** - The college is successful at positioning itself with stakeholders, partners etc. but needs to use that momentum to focus more clearly on our development. Need to ensure everyone knows what the college is famous for, why did the colleges merge (more than financial) and why people should come to the college; need to plan towards something positive within the next six to twelve months, forget the past and move on. College has taken a big risk by becoming a provider of all aspects of FE. It is known that the college is losing core customers to Cirencester College, start with that and go from there. The former colleges started with a focus on 16-19 study - that is the core business of the college and we should focus on getting that right.

The Chair thanked the Principal and her Team for the achievements over the past year. He added that the Principal had shown resilience, determination and compassion in her leadership style.

107. Student Voice – report by student governors received and noted.

The meeting agreed that the report was an incredible piece of work by the students. It was noted that this would be the last Corporation meeting for the current student governors and the Chair asked for the Corporation's thanks to be passed on to Jawad Ahmmed and Jessica Bell and also to Joanna Saunders, Student Enrichment Co-ordinator who has worked with them.

The meeting asked if the Corporation would receive updates on the actions within the report and the Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality advised that he would ensure that they did.

ACTION: AF to report update on actions to Corporation; TS to pass on thanks of meeting to student governors and JS.

108. Safeguarding update – report by Director of Student Services received and noted.

Simon Cove, Safeguarding Lead Governor advised that there are two main areas within the report to note. Mental health remains a serious issue and a great deal of work is being done to support students in this area. The recent Ofsted review into peer-on-peer abuse and sexual harassment in schools is a difficult read. The Safeguarding Team are working on various actions including a review of the tutorial curriculum and the new tutorial Scheme of Work which includes more content on the issues contained in the findings from the report and links back to the new RSHE (Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education) curriculum published recently by the Government. Further training will be rolled out for all staff which will include peer-on-peer abuse. The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality advised that the Inspection Framework had been amended in the past week and will take a strong line on how colleges report on sexual harassment issues ensuring that the culture of reporting such issues is taken seriously. A response to the Framework is currently being worked on. He added that it is vital that everyone buys in to the culture of reporting as failure to do so will result in serious consequences.

With regard to CCTV, it was noted that a considerable amount of money has been invested in improving coverage at the Queens Drive campus. Coverage at the North Star campus is good.

109. Risk management update – the Deputy Principal Finance and Resources advised the meeting that there were no new material risks to report since the last meeting.

110. Written resolutions – report by Head of Governance received and noted.

111. Annual Partnerships update – report by Head of Partnerships received and noted.

The Interim Deputy Principal Business Development, Employer Engagement and Recruitment urged governors to read the report as it advises on significant changes to subcontracting rules which will be introduced shortly. The college has a particularly high level of income reliance on partnerships and the changes will have an impact.

The Vice Chair of Corporation advised that he had attended the Partnerships Day the previous week. The event was very well organised by the Partnerships Team. One thing that came across was the extent to which the partners appreciate their relationships with the college. One presentation given by Ian Taylor, Learning Technology Manager showed the incredibly impressive work that had been done to ensure that students had access to materials they needed during the pandemic.

112. Annual buildings and property update – report by Deputy Principal Finance and Resources with Nathan Hall and Chris Pailor received and noted.

With regard to the North Star catering contract a question was asked with regard to healthy options which are referred to but not delivered. The Deputy Principal Finance and Resources advised that this has been picked up.

113. Review of committees and committee Terms of Reference – the meeting received and noted a graphic showing the proposed revised committee memberships.

The Chair of the NRG committee advised that he had not progressed as far as he had hoped with the review of the Terms of Reference for committees. From an initial look it appears that there will not be substantive changes. He will be arranging off-line conversations with the chairs of the committees to discuss and will work with the Head of Governance to bring amended Terms of Reference back to the Corporation for approval.

The meeting noted a proposal to disband the BDEER committee as a formal committee of the Corporation and to make this an advisory group to meet as required.

The Chair advised that he had made contact with a potential co-opted member for the Audit committee and that the Chair of the committee, the senior team involved with the committee and the Head of Governance will be contacting and meeting with him to progress his potential appointment.

RESOLUTION:

- (i) that the Chair of the NRG committee meets with the chairs of the other committees to discuss any changes to their committee Terms of Reference;
- (ii) that the revised committee memberships be agreed;
- (iii) that the BDEER committee be disbanded;
- (iv) that the Chair of the Audit committee, the Principal, the Deputy Principal Finance and Resources and the Head of Governance meet with the potential co-opted member of the Audit committee.

ACTIONS: *JA to arrange meetings with committee chairs; TS to arrange meetings with potential co-opted governor.*

114. Corporation performance review – the Head of Governance advised that at the time of publishing the papers for the meeting there had not been a good response to the exercise and therefore it will be re-run at the beginning of the next academic year.

115. Schedule of meetings 2021/22 – received and noted.

RESOLUTION: that the schedule of meetings for the 2021/22 academic year be approved.

116. Performance review of the Chair of Corporation – the Vice-Chair of Corporation advised the meeting of the procedure that he would be following for the performance review of the Chair of Corporation over the summer. All members of the Corporation and Principalship will receive an email and questionnaire later this week which they are asked to complete and return to the Head of Governance. He added that the questionnaire is comprehensive and it is accepted that it will not be possible for all questions to be answered by everyone.

ACTION: *TS to circulate questionnaire re. Chair of Corporation performance.*

117. Appointment of Chair and Vice-Chair – the Head of Governance advised the meeting that nominations for the position of Chair of Corporation had been received in respect of Martin Wyn Griffith for Chair of Corporation and Jim Webster for Vice-Chair of Corporation. Both nominations were duly seconded. No further nominations were received at the meeting. The meeting agreed that as only one nomination had been received for each position there was no need for either nominees to leave the meeting.

RESOLUTION:

- (i) that Martin Wyn Griffith be appointed as Chair of Corporation for a term of office of one year until July 2022;
- (ii) that Jim Webster be appointed as Vice Chair of Corporation for a term of office of one year until July 2022

118. Minutes of committees – noted as follows:

- (a) Audit committee: 25th May 2021
- (b) BDEER: 14th June 2021
- (c) NRG: 22nd June 2021 – noted that a Board Assurance Framework will be presented to the first meeting of the committee in the next academic year.
- (d) RIC: 23rd June 2021

119. Any other business – raised as follows:

(a) Governor recruitment – the Chair advised that there are still three vacancies on the Board. The preferred skills areas are HE, estates and legal. Governors are asked to engage with their networks to identify any potential contacts.

A push will be made on governor recruitment over the summer and if this fails to identify any new governors an agency will be employed to assist the process.

(b) Insolvency training – the Chair advised that it had been hoped to run this training within this meeting but due to the size of the agenda this has not been possible. The Head of Governance will arrange a separate training session for this purpose for a date in September. A suggestion was made to include some training dates in the schedule of meetings.

ACTION: *TS to arrange insolvency training; TS to include dates for training within the schedule of meetings for 2021/22.*

120 Date of next meeting: Tuesday 19th October 2021 at 4.00pm

121. Confidential minutes of last meeting held on 11th May 2021 – agreed as a correct record.

(Staff governors and members of the senior team other than the Principal and the Interim Director of HR left the meeting and took no part in the following items.)

122. Confidential minutes of committees: noted as follows:

- (a) NRG: 22nd June 2021(sets 1 and 2)

(b) RIC: 23rd June 2021

123. Remuneration of Principal – confidential minutes refer.

124. Remuneration and contracted hours of Head of Governance – confidential minutes refer.