



*Wirral Met College has a vision to be an inclusive, outstanding college*

**CONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE**

**BOARD OF GOVERNORS MEETING**

**HELD REMOTELY ON WEDNESDAY 14<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2021**

**Present:** Lucky Ali, Anna Barnish, Lucy Barrow, Gary Doyle, Sue Higginson (Principal), Lorraine Jones, Tim Kelly (Chair), Richard Mawdsley, Joe McArdle, Gill Roberts, Paul Smith, Jayne Winders, Vix Wrigley

**In attendance:** Ste Bailey, Assistant Principal – Student Services  
Christine Carter, Vice Principal – Curriculum  
Pooja Furniss, Executive Director of People & Culture  
Phillip Jones, Vice Principal – Quality  
Nikki Leising, Financial Controller  
Sarah Norris, Student Enrichment & Engagement Manager  
Michael Norton, Deputy Principal  
Lesley Venables, Clerk to the Governors

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

314 Apologies for absence were received from Lisa Buxton, Phil McKeown and Ian Parkinson. Lucky Ali and Gill Roberts were welcomed to their first meeting as external governors.

**DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

315 The following interests were declared:

- Lucy Barrow - on secondment from Wirral Council to the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.
- Tim Kelly - any matters relating to the Merseyside Pension Fund.
- Joe McArdle – employed by the University of Chester and daughter is a student at the College;
- Paul Smith – employed by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council and wife is a member of staff at the College.

**PRINCIPAL'S UPDATE**

316 The Principal gave a verbal update on recent College activities, including COVID-19 arrangements.

317 The Hamilton Campus would be completed prior to the September enrolment period and was on time and on budget.

318 Whilst it had been difficult for employers to offer work experience opportunities to some students during the lockdown periods, this situation was now improving. Innovative strategies, such as virtual work experience, were being used in curriculum areas where attendance on site was problematic (for example, motor vehicle courses) with a high level of engagement from local employers.

319 In relation to quality indicators, the College's retention rates continued to be strong. Significant work had been undertaken to complete the Teacher Assessed Grades which had been introduced as an alternative to examinations for 2020/2021. However, examinations were still required for Functional Skills courses and, due to the profile of these students, it was likely that performance levels would be lower than previously, particularly amongst the 16-18 group.

320 Governors received for information a copy of a letter from the ESFA, confirming the College's financial health grading as 'outstanding' for 2020/2021 and 2021/2022.

321 On behalf of the Board the Chair thanked the Principal, management team and the staff for their resilience and commitment in such a difficult year.

### **BALANCED SCORECARD 2020/2021**

322 The Vice-Principal (Quality) presented the Balanced Scorecard as at May 2021. It was noted that achievement of the ESFA Adult Education Budget target was graded as 'red' as a result of reductions in income due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Governors were advised that the ESFA had set a tolerance level of 90%, with any institution not meeting this subject to potential clawback. The College had already submitted a business case to the ESFA, the outcome of which had been positive.

323 Traineeships had started to increase (by approx. 100) since the relaxation of the lockdown restrictions. Income for higher education programmes had risen compared to 2019/2020 due to better management of any bad debts. Apprenticeship income had improved more than anticipated and was almost at the identified target.

324 Exception reports were included within the report on the areas of responses to the National Student Survey (the results of which would be published shortly), learning talks, satisfaction, learning talks, progress against the Strategic Plan, developments in the College's estates strategy and health & safety with particular emphasis on COVID-19. A governor questioned whether the impact of the exception reports was being measured, to which the Vice-Principal responded that this was reviewed prior to each Board meeting. Any element was graded as 'amber' would remain in the report for the rest of the academic year.

325 There had been a total of 164 positive cases of COVID-19 amongst students and staff since September 2020. All actions resulting from recent audits and health and safety inspections had been implemented and testing facilities for students (on a voluntary basis) could be remobilised at short notice, should the need arise.

326 The Vice-Principal was asked to check that there were staff trained as first aiders at the Twelve Quays Campus, as this information had been omitted from the report.

327 Governors concurred that the measures taken to mitigate against the spread of COVID-19 were exemplary, but sought assurance on the robustness of preparations for the Autumn/Winter period, particularly following the removal of restrictions on 19<sup>th</sup> July. The Principal responded that the College would continue to follow the latest Government guidelines. The risk assessment had been reviewed to determine the possible impact of the relaxation of restrictions on 19<sup>th</sup> July and the College, local authority and Public Health England officers had the authority to make changes to these arrangements where appropriate.

328 It was likely that some existing measures would be maintained, such as only one person in the lifts at any one time and a carer if needed, masks in communal areas and Personal Protective Equipment and Lateral Flow Tests in the salons. Every encouragement was being

given to staff and students to take up the offer of vaccinations against COVID-19. Currently, the infection rate amongst the local population was higher than under lockdown (525 per 100,000).

329 The Principal was a member of the local Health & Wellbeing Group and there were positive relationships with Public Health England staff. It had been decided that students could retain the laptops that had been distributed previously, in case of further lockdown situations.

## **BALANCED SCORECARD 2021/2022**

330 The Principal recommended that, due to uncertainties within the external environment, the current key performance indicators on the Balanced Scorecard should also be used for 2021/2022 and that a set of targets would be submitted for approval at the October 2021 meeting.

- 331 **Resolved -**
- 1 That the existing KPIs be used for measuring performance in the 2021/2022 Balanced Scorecard
  - 2 That revised targets be submitted for approval at the October Board meeting

## **MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS TO 31<sup>ST</sup> MAY 2021**

332 The Financial Controller presented the Management Accounts as at 31<sup>st</sup> May 2021. The College continued to be in a positive financial position and financial health remained as 'Outstanding.' The current year end forecast was for a surplus of £873K, which was slightly lower than the approved budget (£986K), but still a significant achievement against the background of the pandemic.

333 As reported earlier and at the previous meeting, management were concerned about the ESFA 16-18 year old target allocation for 2021-22 and a business case had been made successfully to the ESFA, with the additional income included within the forecasts.

334 Governors noted a number of movements in income and expenditure since the March meeting. These included a reduction in income for apprenticeships and fees/commercial income due to the impact of COVID-19 on delivery models. A governor sought assurance that the reduction in HE income (£116k) due to withdrawals and bad debts had been resolved. The Deputy Principal reported that, although the College had recruited in line with the target, a proportion of students had opted to defer the start of their programmes until 2021/2022. The new HE management team had worked with colleagues in Finance to reduce the amount of bad debts, which now stood at £38k.

## **FINANCIAL POLICIES/PROCEDURES 2021/2022**

335 The Financial Controller presented revised Financial Regulations, Policies & Procedures, together with Standing Orders for Purchasing.

- 336 **Resolved -** That, subject to a few minor amendments, the following items be approved:
- 1 Financial Regulations.
  - 2 Financial Policies and Procedures.

### THREE YEAR FINANCIAL FORECAST & BUDGET FOR 2021/2022

337 Governors received the updated Three Year Financial Forecast and Budget for 2021/2022. The ESFA required a completed cashflow to be submitted by 31<sup>st</sup> July 2021, using a standard template, known as the College Financial Forecasting Return (CFFR) and based upon the WMC monthly cashflow forecast. The CFFR had been designed to enable colleges to manager their cashflow more efficiently and alert the ESFA of any potential issues.

338 Once approved by the Board, the figures in the 3 Year Forecast would be transposed into the CFFR. The accompanying commentary followed the ESFA format and would be submitted at the same time.

339 The Deputy Principal demonstrated the alignment between the Strategic Objectives (meeting local needs, continuous quality improvements and efficiency) and the Forecast

340 The College's finances continued to be strong and had been graded as 'outstanding' by the ESFA. Cash balances were £9m at the year end, compared to £5.1m in the original forecast for 2020/2021. Income levels had been achieved for the majority of streams and the College would probably exceed its adult funding contract. As all costs for 2021/2022 were known at this stage, but some income was uncertain, a slightly reduced surplus had been forecast.

341 A total of £2m had been included for capital expenditure, which could be offset against allocations from various bids to the ESFA, if successful.

342 Governors noted that the budget had been prepared on a zero-base, which minimised the risks of unexpected items having a negative impact on the outturn.

343 In response to a question about having sufficient cover for staff who may be absent from work due to COVID-19 in the Autumn Term the Principal reported that this was part of the College's risk assessment process. There had been two positive cases amongst staff today and both individuals were able to work from home due to the infrastructure already in place (such as laptops and an investment in the College's online IT facilities).

344 A contingency had been built into every curriculum area, that included managers stepping in to teach classes, together with sessional workers. All teachers had additional lessons already prepared to enable their colleagues to deliver these if they were absent. Teaching contracts also contained a provision to increase their weekly hours for a maximum of 10 weeks at a time, if operational requirements made this necessary.

- 345 **Resolved -**
- 1 That the Three Year Financial Forecast and Budget for 2021/2022 be approved
  - 2 That the College Cashflow Forecasting Return be approved
  - 3 That delegate authority be given to the Principal to sign off the CFFR prior to its submission to the ESFA

**Sarah Norris joined the meeting.**

### STUDENT UNION REPORT & BUDGET FOR 2021/2022

346 The Student Enrichment and Engagement Manager presented a report on Students' Union Activity In 2020/2021 and the proposed Business Plan for 2021/2022.

347 Governors were informed that, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Students' Union had engaged with students through a variety of virtual events with a particular emphasis on health, well-being and mental health. Positive relationships had been developed with external agencies such as Wirral Council to provide appropriate support to students.

348 Wellbeing awareness would continue to be given high priority in 2021/2022 and the Student Union planned to support the learner voice strategy through a variety of resources and online activities to keep the student community active. There would be a significant amount of work to undertake next year, especially for those students who had been unable to attend school due to the various lockdowns, which required an increase in the budget from £8.5K to £9.5K.

349 Governors commended the efforts of the Students' Union to build strong relationships and to engage with students remotely during the pandemic.

350 **Resolved** That the budget of £9.5K for the Students' Union for 2021/2022 be approved.

**Sarah Norris left the meeting.**

## **POLICIES**

351 The Deputy Principal presented draft policies on Fee Remission & Fee Appeals and Higher Education Fees, which formed part of the governance framework and required approval by the Board.

352 **Resolved -** That the following policies be approved:

- 1 Fee Remission Policy and Fee Appeals Procedure
- 2 Higher Education Fees for 2021/2022

## **CHAIR'S REPORT**

353 The Board received for information a report on the Chair's activities since the May 2021 meeting.

## **APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR & VICE-CHAIR**

354 The Clerk reported that the 2 year terms of office of the current Chair and Vice-Chair were due to expire in July 2021. Following discussions at the May meeting it had been decided that the appointments of the Chair and Vice-Chair for 2021 to 2023 would be undertaken at this meeting.

355 Governors were advised that both current incumbents were willing to serve for a second term of office.

356 **Resolved -** That Tim Kelly and Jayne Winders be appointed as Chair and Vice-Chair respectively for a 2 year term of office, commencing on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2021

**Lucky Ali left the meeting at this point.**

## **BOARD MINUTES**

357 **Resolved** That the minutes of the meetings held on 19<sup>th</sup> May and 9<sup>th</sup> June 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

358 Governors received a progress report on the actions identified at the previous meeting. In response to a question the Principal reported that the ESFA had approved the College's submission of business case for further growth funding and this had been included in the allocation for 2021/2022 (minute 252 refers).

359 An application would also be made at the end of the academic year on the AEB/Traineeship contract (minute 259). In relation to minute 272 on to funding to support the impact of those Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) the Principal reported that the College had already spent significantly more than its allocation of 'catch-up' funding and that the budget had included some provision for COVID-19 measures.

## **GOVERNANCE & SEARCH COMMITTEE**

360 The Chair of the Governance & Search Committee presented for information the draft minutes of the meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> June 2021. The Committee had met with 3 individuals who had applied for Board membership, the appointment of whom had been approved by the Board at a special meeting in June.

361 Attendance data for 2020/2021 had been received and the Committee had recommended the draft proformas for the governor review process, with individual meetings between governors, the Chair and the Clerk taking place over the summer). A revised schedule of meeting dates for 2021/2022 had also been recommended.

- 362 **Resolved -**
- 1 That the paperwork for conducting the governor review process for 2020/2021 be approved
  - 2 That the revised list of meeting dates for 2021/2022 be approved

## **AUDIT COMMITTEE**

363 The Chair of the Audit Committee presented for information the draft minutes of the meeting held on 29<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

364 Governors had been advised that a recent audit by the Office for Students on the College's Individualised Learner Records (ILR) system relating to higher education students for 2019/2020 had concluded that the College's internal controls for HE data management provided 'limited assurance' and made a number of minor recommendations to improve its processes. Governors were reassured by management that the majority of points related to areas of recommended good practice, rather than regulatory requirements. There were no funding clawback implications for 2019/2020 and it was noted that HE provision formed only a small part of the College's overall profile. All recommendations had been agreed by management and would be implemented in line with the relevant timescales.

365 A presentation had been received from the Internal Auditor on the role of the Audit Committee.

366 Recent internal audits of the College's performance management and examination processes had been graded as providing 'substantial' levels of assurance and had identified a number of areas of good practice.

367 The draft Internal Audit Plan for 2021/2022 and the Plan for the audit of the Financial Statements for 2020/2021 were discussed in detail and recommended for approval by the Board. The Committee Chair highlighted that the fees for the latter would increase due to a change in policy by the ESFA, which required colleges to obtain their own assurance over the College's Individualised Learner Records system, rather than this being undertaken by ESFA-appointed auditors.

- 368 **Resolved -**
- 1 That the Internal Audit Plan for 2021/2022 be approved
  - 2 That the Plan for the Financial Statements Audit for 2020/2021 be approved, subject to any increase in fees in relation to work on the ILR

### **QUALITY & STANDARDS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

369 The Board received for information the minutes of the Quality & Standards Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

370 The Committee had received a presentation from two of the Assistant Principals on the College's status as a World Skills UK Centre of Excellence. The activities that were underway aligned well to the College's inclusion agenda and there was a high level of engagement from students and staff.

371 Governors had been informed that the College's 16-18 cohort was currently 2258, which represented an increase of 33 students since the April report and were spread across a range of disciplines.

372 Positive relationships with the local authority continued, particularly around the NEET agenda and ensuring opportunities for this group of students.

373 Student attendance levels for both on-line learning and classroom-based activity were in line with or had exceeded the targets. Retention was also good against the background of COVID-19 and increasing infection rates within the Borough.

374 Governors had been advised that students undertaking Functional Skills were required to sit formal examinations in summer 2021, as opposed to GCSEs where outcomes would be determined by Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGs). Through the Association of Colleges the FE sector had lobbied the Government to change this policy as it impacted negatively on the most disadvantaged students.

375 Staff had worked enormously hard to complete the Teacher Assessed Grades for each student and submit these to the respective awarding body, which had now started to ask for supporting evidence.

376 Apprenticeship performance had improved considerably compared to the 2019/2020 academic year, although it had been negatively impacted by COVID-19. A sharp increase in activity for the Construction sector had been noted and a potential upturn in the Visitor Economy sector.

377 Information had been received on successful employer engagement initiatives. Regular contact took place with employers with which the College worked, with a significant number of employers providing activities such as master classes throughout the lockdown period.


378 Governors had been assured of the robustness of the College's quality processes including lesson observations and learning walks (both physical and virtual). Progress against each of the areas identified in the Quality Improvement Plan was on track. Feedback on the learning walks undertaken to date was discussed in detail.

379 The Committee had noted the levels of performance by the two organisations to which is sub-contracted provision, together with the College's performance as a sub-contractor.

### **RETIREMENT OF GOVERNOR**

380 On behalf of the Board the Chair thanked Lisa Buxton for her service as student governor for the past 12 months.

### **DATE OF NEXT MEETING – Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> October 2021**

Signed:  \_\_\_\_\_ Date: 20 October 2021

Chair