

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS MEETING

HELD ON MONDAY 8TH JULY 2024

Present: Ali Amirkhalili, Lucky Ali, Gary Baines, Gill Banks (Principal), Simon Wrigley (staff governor), Paul Gaskell, Joanne Henney (Chair), Karen Lowe, Debbie Wilkinson, Ian Evans (staff governor), Paul Smith (online)

In attendance: Christine Carter, Vice Principal – Curriculum
Kevin Williams, Vice Principal – Finance, MIS & Estates
Lesley Venables, Governance Professional
Martin McNeill, External Governance Reviewer (observer)

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

282 Apologies for absence were received from Penny Haughan, Phil Vickerman and Amelia Jones (student governor).

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

283 Paul Smith declared a standing interest in relation to his employment by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council and his spouse being a member of staff at the College.

MINUTES

284 **Resolved -** That the minutes of the meeting held on 22nd May 2024 (Parts 1 and 2) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair

MATTERS ARISING

285 Governors received for information a progress report on actions arising from the previous meeting and noted that these were either under development or featured on the agenda.

286 In relation to minutes 259-260 the Governance Professional was asked to issue Teams invites for all meetings in 2024/2025. These would be copied to governors who were not members of particular committees (with the proviso that those serving on the Audit Committee could not attend Finance & Resources Committee meetings and vice versa), with a view to improving governor knowledge and quoracy (if required).

287 Under minute 221 the Principal clarified that this would now take place from the new academic year.

PRINCIPAL'S UPDATE

288 Governors were thanked for their attendance at the College's further and higher education celebration events over the past week and student success had been the focus of the STAR awards. The Chair was congratulated on her recent award of Merseyside Woman of the Year.

- 289 The Principal advised that there was evidence of the 'green shoots' that the Board had discussed previously in relation to predicted achievement rates for 2023/2024. As reported at the recent Quality & Standards Scrutiny Committee meeting attendance for Maths and English examinations had improved by approximately 10% compared to 2022/2023. Apprenticeship achievement levels had also increased to 62.7% overall (a 10% increase on the previous year).
- 290 However, Functions Skills achievement levels were a concern for the management team, particularly Maths. An action plan to address this would be implemented over the summer which would impact on the re-sit programme in the Autumn Term.
- 291 XX for 16-18s was 87% and 96.7% for adults. Pass rates were currently 88.1% but retention was likely to fall compared to 2022/2023, but it was noted that the predicted retention levels for that year had been unrealistic.
- 292 The ESOL summer school had been well-attended and the aim was to improve achievement levels by 3% in 2023/2024.

Ali Amirkhalili joined the meeting.

- 293 The Finance & Resources Committee had discussed in detail the proposed budget for 2024/2025. This included details of the new pay structure and, once approved by the Board, all staff would be notified individually of the impact on their respective salaries.
- 294 Some aspects of the College estate had caused concern over the past year, but it was now felt that the new leadership in this area would have a positive effect and enable the College to develop an effective accommodation strategy.
- 295 The revised draft Strategic Plan was featured under a separate agenda item and would be launched to stakeholders in August. Governors were informed that the approach used for the development of the Plan had been much more collaborative and inclusive than in previous years and that staff at all levels and governors had provided invaluable inputs to the process. Work on the re-branding of the College was now completed and would be rolled-out at the same time as the Strategic Plan.
- 296 Following the recent General Election, the Association of Colleges had written to the new Secretary of State for Education on the conditions of funding for FE, levels of pay compared to the school sector and the need to pause the current curriculum reforms affecting colleges.
- 297 Governors were reminded that Ofsted would be undertaking a monitoring visit in 2024/2025 to follow up the action points from the October 2023 inspection. The College was still working through the various challenges but the Board was reassured that management were aware of the areas for improvement and that robust actions were in place, evidenced by the Strategic Implementation Plan.
- 298 There had been a significant number of positive developments over the past year, including the College's Teacher Education provision being graded as 'Outstanding' and a recent visit by the Archbishop of York. All of these meant that the College was influencing and engaging with the local community that it served.

- 299 Changes to the curriculum management structure were almost complete, which would provide additional capacity and succession planning opportunities. Further support had been engaged through a number of consultants (some through the FE Commissioner's Team).
- 300 A governor asked about staff morale and retention levels in view of the competition with local schools for experienced and talented staff. The Principal felt that the new pay structure would assist in making the College more attractive to potential employees. The quality of the applicants for the posts of Head of MIS and Commercial Director had been high and this was replicated for other jobs for which management was interviewing this week.
- 301 In response to questions about filling vacancies for Maths lecturers the Principal reported that this was a constant challenge. Recruitment would continue throughout the academic year to fill any gaps. The College was working in partnership with Edge Hill University to engage recent graduates to teach English and Maths.
- 302 There had been gaps and variations in staff utilisation across the organisation, but it was hoped that more effective timetabling would address this issue.
- 303 The new Aspiring Professionals programme would provide pre-Level 2 qualifications for students and represented a progression route to higher courses.
- 304 On behalf of the Board the Chair thanked the Principal and the staff for their outstanding contributions over the past 12 months and the major projects that had been achieved in addition to normal operations.

CHAIR'S UPDATE

- 305 The Chair reported on recent activities that she had undertaken, including regular meetings/contact with the Principal and the Governance Professional and attendance at the College's graduation ceremonies.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- 306 Governors received for information a report on Key Performance Indicators as at the end of May 2024 and noted that the majority of these targets were on track to be achieved by the end of the academic year. Performance levels had been discussed recently in detail by the Finance & Resources and Quality & Standards Scrutiny Committees.
- 307 A performance dashboard was under development which would be used to monitor progress in future, to which additional KPIs could be added as required. Governors would have access to the latest information via the new portal.

STRATEGIC PLAN 2024/2025

- 308 The Principal outlined the strategic planning process that had been undertaken to date, culminating in the draft Plan, Mission and Purpose presented to this meeting, which required approval by the Board.
- 309 Governors discussed the options provided in relation to the Mission and Purpose.

- 310 The next stage of the process would be to prepare a final version of the Strategic Plan for launching in September 2024 alongside the new branding for the College. The content of the Plan would be communicated to stakeholders over the summer.
- 311 All future reports to governors would indicate how their content and proposals related to the achievement of the Strategic Plan, which would enable the Board to monitor performance.
- 312 **Resolved -**
- 1 That the Strategic Plan for 2024/2025 (including the Mission and Purpose detailed below) be approved
 - 2 That the Mission of “Empowering Success, Enriching Communities, Supporting Industry” be approved
 - 3 That the Purpose of “To provide inclusive, highest quality education and training opportunities to meet the aspirations of students and the needs of the local community and industry. We will do this by: Equipping individuals with the knowledge, skills, behaviours and qualifications necessary for workforce success and career growth. Serving as a hub for lifelong learning, community engagement, and personal development, enhancing social mobility and economic prosperity.” be approved

TUITION FEES POLICIES

- 313 The Vice-Principal Finance & Resources presented minor amendments to the Tuition Fees Policies for Further and Higher Education for 2024/2025. Governors were advised that approval by the Board was a statutory requirement.
- 314 In response to questions about the level of student debt being carried by the College the Vice Principal reported that this was minimal and that there were robust internal controls in place to maintain this.
- 315 **Resolved -** That the Tuition Fees Policies for both Further and Higher Education be approval for 2024/2025

BURSARY POLICY

- 316 **Resolved -** That the revised Bursary Policy for 2024/2025 be approved

AUDIT COMMITTEE

- 317 The Chair of the Audit Committee presented the minutes of the meeting held on 12th June 2024 and gave a verbal summary of items that had been discussed or recommended.
- 318 An Internal Audit Report on Trips & Visits had been received which graded the College’s internal controls as providing ‘partial assurance’. A high level of challenge was evidenced from governors on the outcomes of the audit, with assurances given by management that processes were now in place to remediate any potential risks. The Internal Auditors would follow-up on the recommendations made during their next visit and as part of their annual work.

- 319 Progress on the implementation of previous recommendations had been slow and the Committee had agreed that the relevant managers would be invited to future meetings to explain any underlying reasons
- 320 A number of items had been recommended for approval by the Board, copies of which had been circulated within these papers.
- 321 The Committee had received for information a revised version of the ESFA's Post-16 Audit Code of Practice, together with updated Self-Assessment Regularity Questionnaire and a report on themes from recent funding assurance audits
- 322 The Committee Chair reported that, following changes to the membership earlier in the year the Committee had enhanced its skills profile and was now better able to provide robust challenge to management and the auditors.
- 323 **Resolved -** That the following items be approved:
- Internal Audit Plan for 2024/2025
- External Audit Plan for the 2023/2024 Financial Statements & Regularity Audits
- Risk Management Policy and Risk Register

FINANCE & RESOURCES COMMITTEE

- 324 The Chair of the Finance & Resources Committee gave a verbal summary of the meeting held on 20th June 2024, supplementing the draft minutes.
- 325 The Committee had received a detailed presentation on the current position of the Estates Strategy. Concerns had been highlighted by management on the lack of a recent condition survey and asset register.
- 326 Performance against a number of human resources indicators was discussed, together with further analysis of the information in the Gender Pay Gap Report for 2022/2023.
- 327 The management accounts for April 2024 had been received for information.
- 328 Progress on the Towns Fund project had been noted. A total of 4 'spokes' had signed legal agreements, with a further one due shortly. The completion deadline for a further spoke had been extended to November 2024 in agreement with Wirral Council.
- 329 Governors had received a detailed Health & Safety report which included concerns in relation to the College's minibus fleet and fire inspection at one campus. Accident reporting data indicated an increase of 55 minor incidents since the March 2024 meeting.
- 330 In response to questions about the number of trained fire marshals and first aiders amongst staff the Vice-Principal reported that staff were willing to undertake the required courses but were reluctant to take on responsibility across all campuses; this was common within other colleges. Measures such as increasing the honorarium for these staff and having a minimum number of days 'on call' were being considered by management.

- 331 The Committee had noted that there were still a number of compliance elements that needed to be resolved. The Estates department was stretched across all campuses and only had the capacity to deal with essential items. Governors had asked the Director of Estates to assess whether sufficient resources had been allocated and to bring proposals for addressing any shortfall to the next meeting.
- 332 The Budget for 2024/2025 and the Three Year Financial Forecast were recommended for approval by Board, including proposals for a new pay structure. The Committee had noted that, although the College's financial health grading assessed it as 'Outstanding' levels of staff pay were below those of competitor organisations. This had now been addressed through the revised salary structure.
- 333 A governor questioned why most of the figures in the Three Year Financial Forecast were the same for all 3 years. The Vice-Principal Finance & Resources reported that a prudent approach had been taken when drafting the Forecast, with 16-18 learner numbers and funding levels unchanged as these were no guaranteed.
- 334 Revised Financial Regulations and Policies were recommended for approval by Board, together with an updated Supply Chain Fees & Charges Policy. It was agreed that further work was required on the Anti-Bribery section of the Financial Regulations and would be submitted for consideration at the Committee's next meeting.
- 335 **Resolved -** That the following items be approved:
- 3 Year Financial Forecast 2024/2025 for 2024/2027 and Budget for 2024/2025
 - Financial Regulations 2024/2025
 - Financial Policies and Procedures
 - Standing Orders for Contracting and Purchasing
 - Supply Chain Fees & Charges Policy for 2024/2025

QUALITY & STANDARDS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

- 336 The Chair of the Quality & Standards Scrutiny Committee provided a verbal report on the meeting held on 26th June 2024.
- 337 The Committee had received a presentation on Employer Advisory Boards which was highly informative. These had been designed to ensure high levels of employer engagement that would shape the curriculum and enable students to progress to employment. It had been agreed that a future meeting would look at particular EABs, curriculum adaptations, changes to content and any bespoke elements.
- 338 Positive achievement rates (62.7%) and increased numbers locally for apprenticeships had been evidenced. High quality data was now available which enabled management and governors to undertake more robust monitoring and interventions.
- 339 Governors had discussed a report on English & Maths which indicated that exam attendance rates had improved. Staff were hopeful that this would impact positively on outcomes overall. The steps being taken to improve Teaching, Learning and Assessment in these areas were noted by the Committee.

- 340 Further information on the integrated approach to curriculum planning was received, aligning this process with the budgeting/resourcing plan. Governors hoped to observe the impacts of EABs on this process at future meetings.
- 341 Teaching, Learning & Assessment initiatives such as deep dives in curriculum areas had resulted in a demonstrable improvement in retention and projected achievements. The programme of extensive teacher CPD had been welcomed and valued by staff and it was noted that the additional capacity in the quality team was having an impact on performance.
- 342 Governors had been advised that retention for HE courses was 92% and attendance 89% overall, which was an improvement on 2022/2023 and commendable given the level of disadvantage experienced by many students. A total of 46 students would graduate in 2023/2024. There had been 134 applications for courses in 2024/2025 and it was felt that the College's achievement of the 'Outstanding' teaching training accreditation had attracted individuals to enrol.
- 343 The Committee Chair commented that the structure and content of the reports providing consistent high-quality information for governors and was a substantial improvement. The Committee's membership had also been strengthened in 2023/2024, which enabled governors to support and challenge in a robust manner.

PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT PROCESS 2023/2024

- 344 The Governance Professional presented proposals for the Governance Performance Assessment for 2023/2024. Governors were advised that it was considered to be good governance practice for the Board to review its performance on an annual basis and this is a requirement under the Association of Colleges' Code of Good Governance, which the Board has adopted.
- 345 The process would cover the following elements:
- a) Individual governors
 - b) Corporation and its committees
 - c) Chair of the Corporation
 - d) Individual committees
- 346 It was intended that the questionnaires would be sent to governors for completion by the end of July. The Chair and the Governance Professional would then meet with each governor between August and early September 2024 to discuss their comments, identify any training needs or other issues.
- 347 Once all meetings had taken place a report would be drafted, outlining common themes and an action plan to address any areas for improvement. This would be submitted for discussion at the Governance & Search Committee meeting in September 2024.
- 348 **Resolved -** That the proposals for the Governance Performance Review process for 2023/2024 be approved

DATE OF NEXT MEETING – Wednesday 23rd October 2024

- 349 The Chair thanked governors and senior staff for their contributions during the year. A significant amount of progress had been made, with a clear strategy and identification of the key issues for the College.
- 350 A list of College events that governors may wish to attend would be added to the schedule of meetings. It was anticipated that a new Sharepoint site/governor portal would be available next term, together with revised reports and a performance dashboard.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'D. Henney', is centered within a light blue rectangular box.

Signed:

Date: 25th October 2024

Chair