

SOLIHULL COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY CENTRE

MINUTES OF THE CORPORATION MEETING HELD ON 10TH FEBRUARY 2020 AT THE BLOSSOMFIELD CAMPUS, starting at 17.30pm

PRESENT: Barbara Hughes (Chair)
Stan Baldwin
Dr Peter Bebbington
John Callaghan (Principal)
Badri Gargeshnari,
Mark Hayes (Staff Governor)
Paul Large
Lucy Lee
Tony Lucas
Geraldine Swanton
Sally Tomlinson

IN ATTENDANCE: Lindsey Stewart (Deputy Principal and Stratford Chief Operating Officer)
Heather Evans (Vice Principal Finance)
Rebecca Gater (Vice Principal Quality and Curriculum)
Pete Haynes (Vice Principal HR and Student Services)
Theresa Lynch (Clerk)

Rosa Wells (Executive Director Employment and Skills & IoT)
Item 3.3 and 8
Andy Schneider (Head of Science) – Item 5 only
Deb Bunce (Head of Built Environment) – Item 5 only

The Chair welcomed all and thanked Governors that had been involved in walk-throughs and special interest meeting visits over the last few weeks.

1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Paul Assinder and Sukhdeep Nijjar,

2. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no new declarations of interest in relation to the agenda.

2.1 Sanctuary Housing

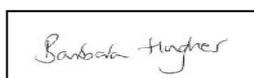
The Chair of the Corporation left during consideration of this item.

3. **Minutes of Previous Meetings and Matters arising**

3.1 Confidential Corporation Minutes of the Meeting held on 27th November 2019

The Confidential Corporation minutes of the meeting held on 27th November 2019 were **agreed** as a true and accurate record.

3.2 Corporation Minutes of the Meeting held on 11th December 2019



The Corporation minutes of the meeting held on 11th December 2019 were **agreed** as a true and accurate record, subject to 2 minor amendments relating to the date in section 3.2, section 4.1 relating to colleges plural, rather than college and a typo in section 6.

3.3 Institute of Technology (IoT)

The Executive Director Employment and Skills & IoT explained that Birmingham City University's full board meeting would be taking place on 11th February to approve the IOT. It was noted that the DfE had set a deadline of 14th February 2020 for the partners to sign off the project. It was anticipated that documentation would be ready for signatures by that date, subject to some minor amendments currently being completed.

Q. As time goes on will it become more difficult to include the learner numbers from September 2019 in the 2019/20 figures?

A. The DfE has agreed that the data can be backdated to September 2019 and, as all documents should be signed off by 14th February 2020, it was anticipated that would still be the case.

Q. How has the £100k per annum to underwrite overspends been accounted for?

A. The amount is up to 50K for each partner making £200k in total. Overspends will be avoided. No provision has been included in the accounts yet. Governors will be kept informed through termly reports.

Q. Are there likely to be any problems with BCU approving the IoT?

A. BCU had verbally confirmed their commitment and were also working towards the DfE deadline of 14th February 2020, so no issues were anticipated.

4. Strategic Development Session Notes from 25th January 2020 and feedback

The Chair presented the notes and confirmed that it had been a useful morning with valuable presentations from Ofsted and RSM. The results will inform strategic planning and Governor input in preparation for the updated strategic plan in July.

5. Curriculum Intent 2019/10 – curriculum design and management

5.1 Science

The Head of School Science presented the curriculum intent for Science provision.

The Chair reminded governors that the Vector data and the Fast Forward Careers website had been presented at the January 2020 development day. The Head of School explained that this information was used to inform development of provision.

Q. How many Level 3 students do you have?

A. About 200 students at Level 3.

Sally Tomlinson explained that she had undertaken a walk-through on 7th February and it had been very interesting and enlightening. Discussion took place regarding the issues relating to students leaving at level 3 because they had unconditional offers or employment.

Q. In terms of strengthening employer links – which employers do you need to develop links with?

A. It is important to have links with a wide range of employers, but particularly with the NHS and life sciences companies that do research and develop new products. It is a dynamic environment and links are made with new employers all the time.

Q. Where are relevant work experience opportunities?

A. A lot of students go into pharmacies for work experience because they are accessible, even though often that is not what they want to do as a job. Work experience in this area can be difficult because there can be a requirement to be over 18 for a number of the workplaces. However, the School has found a variety of different ways of introducing students to workplace experiences, eg, using virtual technology and getting employers to come and talk to students.

Q. In terms of the dashboard – how does Science appear in terms of recruitment of students?

A. Recruitment is growing year on year – applications this year are higher than previous years. The skills taught are very important for the region and there are a lot of employment and further study opportunities, so it is important to maintain a broad offering for students.

Q. What is the School's destination data like?

A. There is very good progression and destinations data. Most Level 3 students have positive destinations, often going to university and often to Russell Group institutions.

Q. How is attendance?

A. Generally there is good attendance. Science students will not generally achieve if their attendance is poor. Most students are very committed to their studies and enjoy attending because staff try to ensure really good and enjoyable lessons. Where a learner is experiencing difficulties there are good support mechanisms. Poor attenders are identified early and support put in place, as well as contacting parents etc.

The Head of School explained that programmes were accredited by the Royal Society of Biology, but not by the Royal Society of Chemistry yet. Students are encouraged to be aware of the relevant accrediting bodies.

Discussion took place regarding transferable skills and the importance of the scientific method in a number of disciplines. It was noted that the students learn problem solving, independent research skills, as well as team work etc.

Q. What links do you have with the NHS locally?

A. A number of local NHS trusts (UHB) have been involved with the development of the foundation and top-up degree development. A number of students have gone to work in laboratories in local NHS trusts. NHS Middle managers tend to be involved in short term planning at present and less involved in planning for the future workforce, which is a challenge for the College.

It was noted that the pathway for informatics in science would be in place by 2021 - this was a very exciting development.

5.2 Built Environment

The Head of Built Environment presented the curriculum intent for the area. She described the links with the chartered institutes eg CIOB Chartered Institute of

Builders and noted that the School undertook a range of professional chartered qualifications, rather than offering trade-based programmes. She confirmed that most students were apprentices or were employer-sponsored and there were about 350 students in the School.

Q. Who are our main competitors?

A. When comparing provision with other institutions it is difficult to separate out the trades and the chartered programmes. As this School only offers the chartered programmes it does tend to be different from other colleges and providers. Universities and BCU do some of the courses. There is very little of this provision in the East Midlands. The progression pathways and employer relationships that have been built in the School ensure a lot of repeat business.

Q. Do you have sufficient assessors?

A. This tends to be an issue. Assessors need to be credible in the workplace, so we are careful when appointing staff. Sometimes PhD students are used.

Apprenticeship attendance is good because the employer will be informed if a student does not attend. A member of staff follows up every morning. Students have to email the College and their employer. 92% on the dashboard. 87% for 16-18 FT students – quite a few will move onto apprenticeships.

Q. Is there much interest in evening classes?

A. A small number of people are interested in evening classes, with only one course currently taking place in the evening.

The Head of School explained that a lot of work takes place to facilitate work with employers, through site visits, external speakers etc, and Employer Services were helpful in attracting new business. The School would like to do more to increase employer links.

The Chair thanked both Heads of School for their presentations – it had been really valuable to hear first-hand how curriculum areas plan their curriculum and the extensive work that takes place with employers to enhance the students' experience.

6. **Careers Provision**

The Vice Principal HR and Student Services presented the report and noted that the careers team consisted of only 3FTE to work with 4,000 students. The College's careers strategy is to work through vocational subject tutors who deliver personal tutor time backed up and supported by the Careers Team. Learner centred focussed careers support is provided with a wide range of opportunities and activities to ensure the College meets the requirements of impartiality and vocational support.

The Vice Principal HR and Student Services explained the national context in relation to the adoption of the Gatsby Benchmarks within the National Careers Strategy to ensure development and improvement of the careers provision across the FE sector. It was noted that the College's audit against the Gatsby Benchmarks had been circulated. It demonstrated substantial achievement against the Benchmarks and identified where further action was required.

Governors were advised to ask learners, when doing walk throughs, whether they had had careers advice and discussions to obtain assurance that the careers conversations and opportunities are being presented to all students.

Lucy Lee noted that there is a charity called Career Ready that aimed to engage schools and colleges to promote a consistent approach to career provision. She would provide details to the Vice Principal HR and Student Services. **ACTION.**

Q. In terms of impartiality is there any evidence that schools have provided this?

A. The Careers and Marketing teams work with a number of schools to provide advice for pupils regarding the opportunities the College, however, there are some schools that do not invite College staff in.

Q. How is careers advice provided for apprentices?

A. A lot of apprentices don't necessarily think beyond their own employer, however, the College does offer opportunities for impartial advice. Assessors are key in working with apprentices and there is an element of the review session that considers the apprentice's next steps. The Assessor will start to discuss options with the apprentice to ensure they have unbiased and impartial conversations. There are also online resources available for all students.

7. **HE Report – Access Agreement Monitoring Return for 2018/19**

The Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality presented the report and explained that a monitoring report regarding the Access and Participation Plan for 2018/19 students had to be submitted by 28th February 2020 to confirm what funds had been spent to support these students. Spending had been in line with the Access Agreement 2018/19, with a little extra on welfare and support for students with disabilities.

8. **Apprenticeship Report 2019/20**

The Executive Director Employment and Skills & IoT presented the report and described recent successes. She explained funding changes for non-levy providers. Staff were working with SMEs to support them to take advantages of the changes. An update on recruitment was provided and it was confirmed that 96% of the target had been met by December 2019. It is anticipated that achievement rates would improve throughout the year. The Chair noted that previous data had included legacy learners that had a negative impact on the data. It was hoped that there would be very few left in 2019/20. Employer survey data was noted and it was explained that this was a continuous survey.

It was suggested that Governors review apprenticeship recruitment on the Governors' Dashboard. The latest data was available and showed a positive picture.

Q. Is there any financial advantage between recruiting 16-18 or adult apprentices?

A. There is no preference, but progression routes are important. There is a financial incentive for taking 16-18-year olds, but they do tend to need more support compared to adults. Age does not tend to affect achievement rates, rather it tends to relate to length of programme. A lot of apprenticeship programmes are 12 to 18 months long and higher-level programmes are 3 years. This length of course may have an impact on retention and success rates. It is also difficult to use national benchmarks and averages to compare data, as these are often quite old with survey information relating to 2016/17 data at the moment.

The Executive Director Employment and Skills & IoT explained that the internal College apprenticeship survey would be launched 24th February with a closing date of 30th March 2020.

Q. How are employers informed about the government apprenticeship survey?

A. The Government does inform employers directly. However, the College is working on informing employers of the national survey too, but there is a need to ensure it is easily available and accessible for employers. There are 2 surveys – the Government survey and the internal, annual College survey released in the Spring term.

Q. Following the election has there been any announcements about changes to apprenticeships or about addressing the decline in Level 2 apprenticeships?

A. A report was released in early February. It stated that there was going to be a review of skills education and it had an example of a programme with £3k funding. Further the DfE has been in contact with the College about Business Level 2, so it seems there is interest in the area, but uncertainty about whether a clear strategy will be developed or ad hoc action taken to meet employers' needs.

Discussion took place regarding the Government's strategy and the role of employers, whilst Colleges did not seem to be central to plans.

It was suggested that a Curriculum Intent presentation for apprenticeship provision be provided for a future Corporation meeting to show implementation and impact.

ACTION.

Q. Are degree level apprenticeships attractive to employers?

A. Depends on the size of the employer. Progression routes are important. Engineering and management degree level apprenticeships are attractive.

Badri Gargeshnari noted that he and Sukhy Nijjar had undertaken a special interest visit to discuss apprenticeships and had been reassured by the Executive Director Employment and Skills & IoT, but would be reviewing the dashboard and scrutinising reports to confirm the positive picture indicated.

Discussion took place regarding the range of assurance mechanisms in place to monitor performance of apprentices. It was noted that audits tended to monitor compliance, whilst quality was monitored through deep dives and College quality processes, as appropriate. It was also noted that as Ofsted Inspectors, both the Vice Principal Quality and Curriculum and the Chair of the Corporation were able to provide a judgement about College apprenticeship provision in relation to other colleges and providers.

Thanks were given to Rosa Wells for the report and for ensuring repeat business and good relationships with employers. It was noted that the changing landscape made the growth and improvement of apprenticeship provision challenging, but the efforts being made were very good and ensured the College was able to compete in the sector and develop this provision well.

9. Budget Re-forecast 2019-20 and Financial Plan

9.1 Budget Re-forecast 2019-20 and Financial Plan

The Vice Principal Finance presented the report and explained that the new ESFA return required the Principal to confirm that the Corporation had been briefed on the underlying assumptions relating to the Financial Plan for the next 2 years. The assumptions were outlined.

The Governor with Special Interest for Finance had requested that the Income and Expenditure table be updated with the 2022/23 projections too. **ACTION.** He had

provided feedback to the Chair following a meeting with the Principal and the Vice Principal Finance.

Q. HE income has reduced – why is this the case?

A. The reduction in HE income will be replaced through Higher Level Apprenticeships, but this growth is not necessarily showing directly. A report would be produced to demonstrate this for the next meeting. **ACTION.** Very cautious growth has been built in due to non-levy providers moving to digital accounts. The College will continue to work hard to manage recruitment. Issues relating to universities making unconditional offers and having lower fees continue to have an impact on recruitment.

Q. What status does this new ESFA return have?

A. The aim of the ESFA is to give an early warning of a college that could be getting into financial difficulty. Details about the status of the return are not fully clear, but it is important that the Corporation is content with the assumptions and that the College is clear about any changes in financial position in a timely fashion and can demonstrate good financial health. Advice had been received from Julian Gravatt, Deputy Chief Executive of the Association of Colleges (AoC), regarding the difficulties of producing the information required and the AOC was continuing to liaise with the ESFA on behalf of colleges.

Concern was expressed by a governor that the time to discuss this had been limited and this was a concern in ensuring effective and robust governance.

[POST MEETING NOTE: all governors were invited to the IFMC pre-submission meeting on 25th February 2020, to provide additional time for discussion].

Thanks were expressed to the Vice Principal Finance and the team for the immense amount of work that the new return required.

RESOLVED that the following be approved:

- Budget Reforecast for 2019/20;
- Financial objectives for the College, as previously agreed;
- Assumptions to be used for the indicative budget (income and expenditure) for 2020/21 and 2021/22;
- Principal to sign the ESFA Return based on the agreed assumptions following a review by the Chair of the Corporation and the Governor with Special Interest for Finance, prior to submission.

9.2 Dashboard – Finance and Funding and PMR December 2019

The contents of the Dashboard and the PMR December 2019 were noted for information.

9.3 New ESFA College Financial Handbook 2019 (Nov 2019)

The New ESFA College Financial Handbook, published in November 2019, was presented for information.

10. Sub-contracting Termly Report

The Deputy Principal presented the Sub-contracting Report and described the contracts with Learning Curve and SW Training that had been negotiated. It was noted that Learning Curve was a big provider and worked with other colleges, however, SW Training no longer does. She confirmed the reduction overall in relation to the College's commitment to sub-contracting provision.

Q. How does the College ensure a high level of scrutiny in relation to quality in sub-contracting provision?

A. Quality visits take place to all contractors and deep dives are conducted.

Q. Is the data available on the dashboard for this provision?

A. The data is at cost centre level. The Deputy Principal would confirm which cost centres this provision is in. **ACTION.**

RESOLVED that the following be approved:

- Issue a contract to Learning Curve for up to £200k;
- Issue a contract to SW Training for up to £150K (subject to WMCA approval).

11. Treasury Management Report and Policy Review

The Vice Principal Finance presented the report and explained that the Policy had not been changed. She explained that this information is presented monthly in the PMR, but it was felt that it was also useful to consider the Treasury Management strategy annually.

Q. If interest on loans is £800k per year, is there any merit in paying them off?

A. This was reviewed at the Finance and Resources Expert Group in November 2018 and it was agreed to pay off the Stratford upon Avon College loans. This has reduced the level of interest to about £400k now. The payment of loans was considered alongside the KPI to maintain £6m cash levels and Stratford upon Avon investment and it was considered that this was an appropriate level to pay. Further, some of the loans would incur penalties and it is considered that making a lump sum payment to the pension fund of £800k is better value for money, as this provides a 6% return.

Discussion took place about interest bearing accounts held by the College and whether there were better rates of interest available in the market. It was noted that investment on the money-market had not been previously considered, but this could be reviewed in the future if risk was minimal.

RESOLVED to approve the Treasury Management Policy.

12. Bids and Projects Report

The Vice Principal Finance presented the report and provided an update.

13. Property Report

13.1 Property Report

The Vice Principal Finance presented the report and explained that the Strategy had been reviewed at the Property Special Interest Group in December 2020. She provided an update on work currently taking place at the Stratford upon Avon campus and noted that it was suggested that the project be extended over 4 years, with a scaling back of work for phase 2. It was suggested that a variation to the current Overbury Contract be made, so that they could continue with work on B Block work over the summer break in 2020.

The Vice Principal Finance explained that tenders had been received for the sale of the car park at the Stratford upon Avon campus and further information would be provided at the next meeting. **ACTION.**

Tudor Grange House – discussion took place regarding the transfer of land to allow a diversion of the road for the development of TGH by Macc group. It was noted that there would be no cost, but there would be a positive impact for the College regarding access at the front of the campus and this would keep the 2 properties separate. Macc Group would cover all legal costs.

RESOLVED to approve:

- the Property Strategy;
- in principle the revised programme for Phases 2 and 3 of the Stratford Campus Re-development and a variation to the Overbury Contract to accommodate the revised programme;
- the revised boundaries and land swap proposed by Macc Group for Tudor Grange House.

13.2 Sanctuary Housing

Barbara Hughes left the meeting during consideration of this item.

This item was deemed to be commercially sensitive and therefore confidential.

13.3 Property Notes of the meeting on 18th December 2019

The notes of the Property Special Interest Group meeting held on 18th December 2019 were received for information.

14. Student Governor Appointment

The Interview Panel fed back relating to the interviews that took place on 7th February 2020. It was noted that the appointment of Raees Iqbal was recommended as it was felt that he would be able to give value as Student Governor, as well as being able to benefit from the experience.

RESOLVED:

that Raees Iqbal be appointed as student governor for a 4-year period (or until the end of his programme of study) with effect from 10th February 2020, and

that the HE Student Voice Officer be invited to take on the role as HE Student Governor.

15. Regular Update Reports

15.1 Use of the College Seal and Use of the Chair's Electronic Signature

The contents of the Use of the College Seal Report were received for information.

15.2 Tender Update Report

The contents of the Tender Update Report were noted for information.

16. Date of Future Meetings

The date of the next meeting is Tuesday 3rd March 2020 at Woodlands Campus.

Barbara Hughes

Signed: _____

Date: 3rd March 2020

Barbara Hughes