

WALSALL COLLEGE
MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATION
HELD ON THURSDAY 28 JANUARY 2021 AT 1730 HRS
VENUE: VIA ZOOM

PRESENT:

Allan Pinnegar, Chair	Jat Sharma, Principal and Chief Executive
Alan Woods	Jo Hughes
Fiona Macmillan	Heather Lodge
Alastair Scales	Charlotte Bosworth
Jaswinder Dhillon	Graham Ward
Stuart Pedley-Smith	Mary Mahoney
Aisling McGowan	Dave Wheeler
Louise Miller	Shelby Lintern
Paul Averis	

TOGETHER WITH:

Jayne Holt	Assistant Principal Workforce Development and Learning Services
James Norris	Assistant Principal Commercial Development
David Turner	Assistant Principal Quality and HE
Richard Brennan	Assistant Principal Curriculum
Matthew Brown	Director of Finance & MIS
John Adams	Director of Commercial Projects
Alison Buick	Clerk to the Corporation

APOLOGIES: None

26.21 CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for their attendance. Governors were reminded of the usual protocol to raise their hand if they wished to speak. Given the size of the agenda, all were asked to be concise in presentations and strategically focused in questions.

A particular welcome was extended to Louise Miller, Shelby Lintern and Heather Lodge, all of whom were attending their first meeting.

It was also noted that this was Alastair Scales' last meeting as a Governor. Alastair was first appointed in 2010 and since then had taken a full and active role in Corporation, notably as Chair of Audit Committee from 2014. Graham Ward would take over as Chair of Audit Committee.

27.21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

28.21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no additional declarations of interest.

Jaswinder Dhillon had a standing declaration relating to membership of local community and educational organisations.

Alan Woods also had a standing declaration due to his employment as Chief Executive of an awarding body. As previously noted, his organisation had a small contract with the college. In addition, Alan was now the Co-Chair of the Federation of Awarding Bodies.

Jat Sharma reported his recent appointment to the Board of the Black Country Chamber of Commerce.

29.21 MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 20 October and 26 November 2020 having been circulated, were taken as read and approved.

30.21 MATTERS ARISING

Governors reviewed the Action Points Record and noted the following:

Item 56.20

The link to the curriculum items had been emailed as agreed.

Item 06.21

Work was ongoing to update the flowcharts within the Safeguarding policies.

Item 07.21

E&D reporting would be covered later in the agenda.

Item 12.21

A meeting had been diarised for Fiona Macmillan and the Director of Finance & MIS to discuss pensions.

Item 13.21

Current teaching and learning practice would be discussed as part of the Curriculum Report later in the agenda.

Item 24.21

A presentation on T levels had been included on the agenda for the next Curriculum and Quality Committee on 24 February 2021.

31.21 PRINCIPAL'S REPORT

The Principal presented his report and drew attention to the following specific aspects:

- The college was open to a number of staff and students during the current National Lockdown. A small number of vulnerable students were attending daily and staff were supporting this as appropriate. Lateral Flow Testing was available to those staff and students that were in college. Staff from the Hub were administering this with the Estates team. College buildings were fully Covid compliant;
- Staff continued to work extremely hard to support students in a variety of ways;
- Laptops, dongles and other devices continued to be provided to students in need. Demand remained high;
- Engagement in online learning was being recorded. Attendance was lower than target. Students had been RAG rated according to their risk profile, with attendance being a key measure. 46% of the highest risk cohort were BAME;
- The FE White Paper had been published on 21 January. Overall, it was felt that there were no surprises and that the contents were in line with those that had been flagged to Governors previously. The key areas of focus were on employer involvement in local planning,

higher level technical skills, staff training and strengthening governance. Governors had been sent a link to the full paper on the day of publication;

- The update to the Corporate Plan was progressing and this would be covered in more detail later in the agenda. As the White Paper had now been published there would be further refinement to reflect this. Governors were thanked for their feedback to date.

Questions and comments were invited.

A Governor asked whether college would consider extending the term to allow catch up time for practical based subjects where much learning had been lost. It was felt that private training providers may do this. The Principal confirm that there had been some consideration of this. Staff would do everything possible to allow students to complete courses, and this could include weekend and evening sessions. Ofqual guidance on assessment was awaited, and this would be important in determining further actions.

The Assistant Principal Curriculum acknowledged the difficulties for students in learning practical skills. He expected that students in these areas would be prioritised for return as soon as college could fully re-open. Staff had concerns about progression for some students, and this would be a focus. It was expected that the Government would make catch up funding available.

The Principal returned to his report, noting the following:

- The management re-structure was ongoing but not yet complete. The implementation date was 1 May 2021. Further details would be shared with the Finance and Resources Committee, but the main drivers were to enable a focus on curriculum innovation and to move back towards Outstanding;
- The college KPIs were being reviewed in line with the Corporate Plan;
- There was some uncertainty in relation to the current year budget, with AEB being a particular risk. Community centres were currently closed and adult learners generally less engaged, which could affect part of the £1.2m community funding. A financial re-forecast was being undertaken by the Finance team. An update would be presented at the Finance and Resources Committee on 23 February;
- A lease had been signed for Pioneer House in Cannock, as discussed at the last Finance and Resources Committee. This was **approved** as a Chair's Action;
- The Local Authority had received £25m of funding for a Walsall Town Centre project and a further £25m of funding for a Bloxwich Town Centre project. The college hoped to have some involvement in this, with developments planned for Hawbush, Green Lane and an electric vehicle centre. All of these were potential projects in the college property strategy, although none were yet advanced enough to have a full business case for consideration.

It was confirmed that the Walsall Economic Board had approved the town centre plans recently, and that the college was part of the conversations.

A Governor commented on recent reports of the drop in community learning, which was a national issue and not specific to Walsall. The Principal noted that WMCA had asked that colleges use 'best endeavours' to engage individuals in adult and community learning, and cited several examples of actions being taken on this. It was hoped that these endeavours would be recognised in allocating funds.

There was a discussion about digital poverty, both in terms of access to devices and to the skills/confidence to use them. It was recognised that both were issues within Walsall and it was hoped that Government would do more to support improvements.

Governors **resolved to receive and accept** the Principal's Report.

32.21 QUALITY UPDATE REPORT

The Assistant Principal Quality and HE presented his report and highlighted the key aspects. The report aimed to give an update on the current situation during lockdown 3.

- As a result of lockdown 3, all pre planning that had taken place before Christmas changed to allow for the majority of students to switch to remote learning again;
- There was a very small number of vulnerable students physically in college;
- CPD was being provided for staff to enhance their skills in delivering remote learning. Disparities in the quality of remote learning were being noted. Some staff needed more support with this than others;
- It was becoming apparent that students were starting to be fatigued by remote learning. There was a need to continue to stimulate attendance and engagement;
- Demand for counselling services was even higher in this lockdown;
- Retention was currently high in most areas – 97.7% for vocational, 95.3% for HE, 98.4% for GCSE, 96.8% for functional skills and 84.4% for apprenticeships;
- Students were being RAG rated according to the level of concern they were causing based on various factors. 508 were RAG rated at the highest level, although this was reducing as devices continued to be issued;
- 900 devices would have been issued by the end of the week;
- Attendance was 78% at present;
- Staff were being encouraged to make at least weekly contact with students and ensure that everything possible was done to keep engagement high;
- Students were keen to return to face to face learning, but Government announcements meant that the earliest this would be was from 8 March. A phased return was likely;
- Learning walk activity was continuing;
- A survey of destinations of last year's students was being carried out.

Comments and questions were invited.

Governors acknowledged the challenges in providing remote learning and the differences in how staff delivered this. Questions were asked about engagement was measured.

It was confirmed that engagement was measured through attendance at sessions, which were recorded, as well as the level of participation in lessons and the handing in of assignments for marking.

Governors commented that attendance was a key metric to monitor as it was the single most important point of engagement.

A Governor asked about the deep dives in English and Maths that were referred to in the written report. The Assistant Principal Quality and HE summarised the work and findings. There was a need to continue to improve the linkages between Maths, English and vocational areas.

The Assistant Principal Curriculum responded to a Governor question on supporting students to develop independent study skills. The role of specialist personal development tutors in this was explained.

Governors were reassured to see that the college focus was on learning and asked about differences in the quality and experiences of students. There was a discussion about the varying skills of staff in delivering remote teaching and also in engagement of students, which was affected by many factors. It was confirmed that Ofsted were not expected to be assessing online teaching, as their framework did not allow for this. The planned Ofsted visit to look at T Levels at Walsall had been postponed.

Governors **resolved** to **receive** the Quality Update Report.

33.21 EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION ANNUAL REPORT

The Assistant Principal Quality and HE presented the report, which related to 2020/21. The college was required, under the Equality Act 2010, to monitor progress in this area and to publish an annual report. The report had previously been considered at the recent Equality and Diversity Committee and would be available to all college stakeholders.

It was confirmed that the College was compliant with relevant and current legislation and successfully promoted equality, diversity and inclusion. The report reflected equality work in relation to the whole learning environment, and therefore included information on students, staff and Governors.

Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) was a key topic for the college, and it was apparent from the data that there were challenges for a minority of groups. There was more work to do with a focus on equity as well as equality.

Questions and comments were invited.

The Principal commented that EDI had not been identified as an issue by Ofsted in March 2020. However, some issues were becoming more pronounced as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Further work was needed to look at EDI issues within the staff body, as the recent focus of

the Equality and Diversity Committee had been more on students. A staff survey was planned.

A Governor felt that some information on next steps to address issues identified would be helpful.

Another Governor suggested a review of the OfS frameworks for assessing EDI impact. HE institutions were required to include this in Access and Participation Plans. It could be a helpful starting point. This was agreed. The Assistant Principal Quality and HE would add a review of EDI objectives to the next Equality and Diversity Committee meeting.

It was **resolved** that Governors **approved** the Annual Equality and Diversity Report.

**Assistant
Principal
Quality
and HE**

34.21 CORPORATE PLAN

The Chair commented that a more detailed session would be included in the Governor Training event on 11 February, so the purpose of this item was to provide an overview.

The Assistant Principal Workforce Development and Learning Services outlined the work to date:

- Staff consultation had started 12 months previously;
- Since then there had been several discussion sessions with Exec, SMT and Governors;
- The paper provided for this meeting had been written prior to the FE White Paper publication on 21 January, so some updates would be necessary;
- Six shared values were included, one of which was equity;
- The Teaching and Learning Philosophy was noted;
- The previous five Strategic Ambitions had been replaced with seven Strategic Pledges. These took into account the areas for improvement in the Ofsted report.

The specific comments received from Alastair Scales ahead of the meeting were noted and would all be considered.

The Chair asked when the final document would need to be signed off. The Principal responded that consultation with other stakeholders was needed. The emerging Government plans for post pandemic recovery also needed to be taken in to account. An update would be provided for Governor Training on 11 February but final approval would not be needed until later in the academic year.

Principal

It was agreed that all Governors would read the updated document to be provided and be ready for a fuller discussion on 11 February.

35.21 STUDENT UNION PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The Student Union President referred to her written report, which summarised the activities of the Student Union during the Autumn term. A significant number of these had been virtual due to the coronavirus pandemic.

A full SU Exec team was now in post. Some officers had been elected and some had been co-opted to vacancies. The SU had some finances in reserve and was particularly focused on supporting students to engage with activities outside of their curriculum area as far as possible. This was difficult due to restrictions in place.

Communication with the wider student body was proving more difficult, as it seemed that many students were not accessing their student emails as frequently. This also showed in the significant decrease in votes for the SU officer positions last term. The inability of candidates to meet students in the normal way had definitely impacted on awareness of and interest in the elections.

Some changes had been made to the SU officer positions this year, with two LGBT officers and a proposal to re-designate the Green Lane Officer role to a Communications Officer. The Green Lane position had not been filled for several years, so it was no longer deemed necessary.

Activities planned for the current term were noted.

The Chair commented that the SU had been very busy, and that this was commendable at a difficult time. The President stated that she was happy with the response to the activities planned, particularly in December.

The Assistant Principal Quality and HE noted that some of the SU activities had also been a focus of tutorial activities, so there was a clearly joined up approach in some key areas, such as Holocaust Memorial Day.

The Principal congratulated the President on having brought together a very diverse SU exec team this year.

It was **resolved** that the Student Union President's Report was **received and accepted**.

36.21 STUDENT SERVICES REPORT

The Assistant Principal Workforce Development and Learning Services presented her report.

- Student Services covered a diverse range of areas, so this report focused on the headlines for Governors;
- There was a continued focus on safeguarding with a range of referrals being made to the trained staff. This reflected the disruption to learning after the first lockdown period and the associated impact on mental health. Demand for counselling services was high;
- Counselling staff had reduced appointments from 30 minutes to 20 minutes to allow more students to be seen. Anxiety cases had increased. The breakdown of safeguarding cases was noted;
- Partner working with the police, local authority and others was strong;
- Some of the college's usual activities involving metal detectors and dogs were on hold;
- There had been further training for mental health first aiders;

- 241 students were engaged with the careers collaboration fund for NEETs;
- Support had been provided for students making UCAS applications;
- Induction activities had had a different focus for this year, as many of the new 16-18 cohort had not been in school since March 2020 and needed preparation to move back into learning.

Questions and comments were invited.

A Governor suggested that it would be useful to see trends in safeguarding figures so that areas of increase and decrease were clear. It was agreed that this would be added to the next report.

Governors **resolved** to **receive** the Student Services Report.

A five minute comfort break was taken.

37.21 FINANCE REPORT TO DECEMBER 2020

The Director of Finance & MIS presented his report.

The management accounts position to 31 December 2020 showed that the college was broadly in line with budget and had a solid financial position. At that time the college had expected to be open for the remainder of the academic year.

Since the start of the third national lockdown in early January, the position had shifted and there were now some potential risks to income if delivery did not match the agreed profile. The college was engaged in discussions with the WMCA.

Costs related to Covid-19 continued to be incurred. Material sums were being spent, regardless of whether the college was fully open or not.

Taking everything into account at this point in time meant that there were many more uncertainties to the achievement of budget than there would be in a 'normal' year. The situation had changed quickly after Christmas. The Director of Finance & MIS felt unable to guarantee that the college would achieve its budget and meet all educational commitments for the year as there were too many unknown factors. However, the Finance team was working to update the forecast and this would be brought back to the Finance and Resources Committee in February. By March Corporation it was expected that a reasonable outturn position would be available, assuming by then that the college had re-opened and the summer assessment process was known.

Governors noted that the college was in a relatively strong position with reserves available, and having signed off its accounts in December. However, a cautious approach was needed and was endorsed.

The Director of Finance and MIS commented on the budget setting process for next year. The entry position would be very different to usual. It was hoped that Government catch up funding might be available.

Comments received from the Chair of Finance and Resources Committee via Convene were addressed and clarification given on the questions

raised. In particular, the HE loans variance was due to the termination of the LCCA contract and the short term creditors balances related to a number of income streams yet to be released.

The Chair observed that whilst the position was not as strong as it had been historically, it seemed better than that at other colleges.

Governors discussed the financial impact of the college being closed to most students. Expenditure was largely unaffected by this and there was no material impact on cashflow.

The reasons for possible fall in income were discussed and further explained. The main impact was for AEB. Adult learner numbers were down as a result of the pandemic impact. It was hoped that 90% of the AEB contract could be achieved, but there were many factors affecting recruitment and retention of adults.

The Principal confirmed that growth in 16-18 was strong. However, demand for adult courses was down due to the lockdown. It was hoped that there would be some recovery later in the year. The Assistant Principal Curriculum added that recruitment to higher level adult programmes had been better than expected in the autumn term, so this provided some insulation against current concerns. The college was taking a prudent approach to the financial impact of the pandemic. The ESFA had been slower to provide assurances about college funding in this lockdown compared to previously.

The Director of Finance & MIS noted that the Chair of Audit Committee had asked for an update on the Board Assurance Framework. Work continued on this and it had been reviewed by internal audit in December 2020. The audit report was supportive of the framework in place and some actions were being agreed.

A Governor asked about the environmental credentials of LGPS. The college had no influence over where they invested funds, although the Director of Finance & MIS did have some information on this from having attended their AGM.

Governors **resolved** to **receive** the Finance Report.

38.21 CURRICULUM UPDATE

The Assistant Principal Curriculum presented his report, and the following areas were noted:

- The calculated grades for Maths and English in 2020 had affected this year's students, some of whom were not at the level that their grade suggested. Most of these students had no exam experience. This was a factor that had led to a high number of transfers between courses;
- The dual delivery approach with some students in class and some joining remotely was noted. It was very difficult for staff to teach in this way so had not been done very often. It was also not always a successful experience for students;
- Many students had elected to sit GCSE Maths and English in November, and numbers were significantly higher than usual for

this time of year. High grade performance was similar to the previous year;

- Lockdown 3 had quickly changed the plans for this term, which had initially been to teach on site and to roll out Covid testing for staff and students;
- Staff were now working with three options – synchronous online learning to maintain engagement, deferring some practical aspects to term 3 when it was hoped that students would again have access to specialist equipment and asynchronous learning;
- All groups were having synchronous sessions, although some staff were coping better with this than others. Support was being put into place where needed;
- All teams were holding weekly conferences to discuss students. This allowed early intervention where needed;
- All three T Level areas were running well, other than the work placement elements were not possible due to pandemic restrictions in many work places. However, the DfE had recently relaxed the rules on this and had agreed to 35 hours (of the total of 315 required) being virtual

Questions and comments were invited.

A Governor asked what proportion of LAC and EHCP students were attending. The Assistant Principal Curriculum noted that there were around 20 students in college every day, but these were self-selecting. They were split between SLLD students and cross college cohorts, and represented around a third of those that the college had invited to attend. The other two thirds were working at home with tutor support. Some EHCP students were shielding. Safeguarding staff made regular calls to vulnerable students.

The Assistant Principal Quality and HE added that of the 500 students identified as at risk, 30 were classed as vulnerable, 11 were LAC and none were high needs.

Governors welcomed the change to the work placement element of T Levels but felt that the learning experience originally planned for the qualification could not be delivered. Differences between teaching and learning were noted.

It was confirmed that college was still responding to requests for devices from students. More had been issued this week. There had been no funding for these. Some phone companies had offered free dongles and data but these were not for post 16 students. There was a clear divide between students with access to suitable IT and those without. The college was encouraging families that had received devices to sign up for courses in how to use them.

Governors **resolved** to **receive** the Curriculum Update Report.

39.21 CORPORATION COMMITTEE MINUTES AND REPORTS

It was **resolved** that the following minutes and reports were **received and accepted**:

Student Voice Committee 6 February 2020;
Audit Committee 9 June 2020; and
Finance and Resources Committee 6 October 2020.

It was also reported that:

Learning and Quality Committee met on 30 September 2020;
Search and Governance Standards Committee met on 8 October 2020;
Audit Committee met on 17 November 2020;
Finance and Resources Committee met on 24 November 2020; and
Student Voice Committee met on 27 November 2020.

No approved minutes of these meetings were yet available, although Governors noted the items discussed, as set out in the Clerk's paper.

Governors were advised that the recommendations of the various committee minutes included in their packs had been considered by Corporation in previous meetings and there were no further matters needing discussion at this time.

Governors **resolved** to accept the Corporation Committee Minutes and Report.

The Clerk advised Governors that:

1. A new Skills Audit document had been issued for completion;
2. The AOC Midlands had announced a regional governance conference to be held in February. Further details would follow.

40.21 CHAIR'S REPORT

The Chair had produced a short written report of his recent activities, which had been added to Convene.

41.21 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

It was **resolved** that the next meeting would be held Tuesday 23 March 2021 at 1730 hrs via Zoom.

Governors and staff noted that this was Alastair Scales' last attendance at Corporation after many years of service as a Governor and Associate Governor. There was a reflection on Alastair's numerous contributions, his diligent approach to all meetings, his attendance at college events, his chairing of Audit Committee and his significant support to new Governors. Alastair Scales responded that it had been a great privilege to be a Governor and to work with the Corporation and management team.

The meeting ended at 2025 hrs.

How Governors challenged management		Impact of meeting on College	
31.21	Whether the college should consider extending the term to make up for lost learning time.	31.21	Approved Chair's Action to sign lease for building in Cannock.
33.21	Suggested that the EDI Annual Report should include actions to address issues.	33.21	Approved EDI Annual Report.
36.21	Suggested trends in safeguarding data be added to the next Student Services Report.		