

**WALSALL COLLEGE  
MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATION  
HELD ON TUESDAY 25 MAY 2021 AT 1730 HRS  
VIA ZOOM**

- PRESENT:**
- |                           |                        |
|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Allan Pinnegar - Chair    | Jat Sharma – Principal |
| Alan Woods                | Paul Averis            |
| Heather Lodge             | Graham Ward            |
| Aisling McGowan           | Jaswinder Dhillon      |
| Shelby Lintern            | Dave Wheeler           |
| Jo Hughes (from 1840 hrs) | Fiona Macmillan        |
| Stuart Pedley-Smith       | Mary Mahoney           |
- TOGETHER WITH:**
- |                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| James Norris    | Assistant Principal Commercial Development |
| Richard Brennan | Assistant Principal Curriculum             |
| David Turner    | Assistant Principal Quality and HE         |
| Matthew Brown   | Director of Finance & MIS                  |
| John Adams      | Director of Commercial Projects            |
| Deb Rajania     | Director of Operations and Resources       |
| Alison Buick    | Clerk to the Corporation                   |
- APOLOGIES:** Charlotte Bosworth

**57.21 CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for their attendance.

Due to the ongoing restrictions because of Covid-19 the meeting was again being held virtually using Zoom. It was hoped that face to face meetings may resume from September 2021.

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.

**58.21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Charlotte Bosworth.

**59.21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Alan Woods and Jaswinder Dhillon made their usual declarations relating to employment and membership of commercial, educational and other organisations. There were no additional declarations in respect of items on the agenda.

**60.21 RE-APPOINTMENT OF TWO EXTERNAL GOVERNORS AND AN ASSOCIATE GOVERNOR**

The Clerk reported the recommendations of the Search and Governance Standards Committee. Efforts to recruit new Governors continued.

It was **resolved** that the re-appointment of both Paul Averis and Charlotte Bosworth for further three-year terms of office each commencing on 5 July 2021 were **approved** AND that Paul Dale be re-appointed as an Associate Governor for Audit Committee for another one-year term of appointment with effect from 21 May 2021.

**61.21 GOVERNORS EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION TRAINING**

The Assistant Principal Quality and HE presented the annual training in the form of an interactive survey designed to review Governors' understanding of protected characteristics, types of discrimination and the requirements for monitoring, reporting and improving EDI.

The college was liaising with colleagues at Walsall Council to consider staff training for next year. If appropriate this could also be rolled out to Governors. The Assistant Principal would review the survey results to determine what further training may be useful.

Governors discussed the college approach to EDI and agreed that it was a key area for ongoing review. The Principal commented that there was much data on students, but less on staff, and therefore that there was a current focus on further developing this. Future reporting to Governors would be through HR reports at Corporation and Finance and Resources Committee.

**62.21 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 March 2021, having been circulated, were taken as read and approved.

**63.21 MATTERS ARISING**

Governors reviewed the Action Points Record and noted the following:

Item 06.21

The updating of flowcharts in the safeguarding policies was in progress.

Item 36.21

The Student Services report would be considered later in the agenda.

Item 50.21

The pay proposal would be considered later in the agenda.

Item 09.20

This item had been transferred to Corporation from Audit Committee. The Director of Finance & MIS noted that there were two separate actions. The one relating to counter fraud strategy was being progressed and would come back to the Corporation in October 2021. The other, relating to ISO accreditation, would be picked up in the newly formed Environmental Strategy Committee.

## 64.21 PRINCIPAL'S REPORT

### Principal's Report

The Principal presented his report, which highlighted the academic and financial performance for 2020/21 to date. Attention was drawn to the following specific aspects:

- Several Government updates with regard to Covid-19, which covered summer qualifications, catch up funding and programme, levelling up ambitions and the Covid-19 Roadmap. Curriculum staff were currently extremely busy working on Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGs);
- The aspects of the recent Queen's Speech relating to FE were noted. There were clear links to the new college corporate strategy. There had been several references to students being at the heart of the plans, as well as the importance of employers in shaping future provision. College priorities remained jobs and progression for all students;
- The Principal had been appointed to the Board of the Black Country Chamber of Commerce, which was expected to be helpful in the context of the new FE and Skills Bill requirements;
- Learning and Skills investment plans were being formulated and would identify priorities for areas that colleges would need to be mindful of in determining provision. The Secretary of State would have increased powers to intervene in colleges that were deemed to be underperforming or did not meet local needs. There were a range of practical and governance issues in this;
- The college was currently working to prepare multiple funding bids. Some of these would be collaborative bids with other local colleges;
- The staffing re-structure was continuing, with the Directors and most of the Curriculum Managers now appointed. There was minimal impact in terms of people leaving. There would be a second phase of re-structure, partly in response to financial challenges that were emerging for 22/23 onwards;
- JISC had been commissioned for a review of IT security. This was in light of a recent cyber security attack that had resulted in the temporary closure of another local college. The final report on this would be taken to Audit Committee in due course;
- Work continued to fulfil the AEB contract. There were no concerns about achieving the ESFA's target of 90% in order to claim all funding.

Questions and comments were invited.

Governors discussed the Skills Bill that had recently been published. The expectation that colleges would be mindful of Local Skills Improvement Plans to be agreed by the DfE would undoubtedly impose some constraints. However, the lifetime skills guarantee could make adult education more attractive. It was suggested and **agreed** that it would be helpful for the Learning and Quality Committee to further consider how the college engaged with adult learners.

The role of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IFATE) in influencing future funding was noted.

Assistant  
Principal  
Curriculum

A Governor expressed some concern about the potential future role of college boards, given the expected level of influence from EFSA, Secretary of State, WMCA, IFATE and Chambers of Commerce in shaping provision. It was a potentially very complex picture.

The Assistant Principal Curriculum commented on his section of the Principal's report:

- The adult plan had been realigned in some areas in line with WMCA priorities. There was a need for balance between the needs of the WMCA (and therefore what would be funded) and the needs of the community;
- It was expected that 90-100% of the current adult plan would be achieved and therefore that there would be no clawback. The ability of the college to have focused on larger programmes had assisted with this;
- The community offer had been adapted and community funding had been secured;
- Some of the adult curriculum areas had performed better than others in the year. There would be further focus on supporting all areas as part of the re-structure.

Governors discussed the need to focus on the industries within the Black Country and to have a longer, multiple position view on what future provision may need to be. This would undoubtedly change over time. The college was felt to be in a good position to respond to the opportunities that the changing external environment would present.

A Governor commented on the need for the college to be considering the wider regional context and the likelihood of further changes in the sector. The Principal felt that the college was already well placed to have a regional focus, as the financial position was strong. The selection of regional partners would need careful consideration. In addition to this, there were also political factors to be mindful of.

A Governor noted the WMCA push for more Level 4 qualifications and asked what the local appetite for this was. The Assistant Principal Curriculum responded that the WMCA took a regional view rather than a view of the individual boroughs such as Walsall. There was a lot of variation between the boroughs and areas with the WMCA geographical area, and a mixed appetite for Level 4 qualifications both in individuals and employers within Walsall. WMCA was keen to show increased academic level attainment overall. There was evidence of improving Level 4 attainment across Walsall in the last three years.

There was a discussion about monitoring the lower level community offer and providing opportunities to progress to higher level qualifications. This was agreed as a continuing priority to meet the needs of the Walsall community.

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

## 65.21 QUALITY AND HE UPDATE

The Assistant Principal Quality and HE presented his report. The following aspects were noted:

- Results of recent student survey results were being reviewed. Student satisfaction remained high despite the pandemic. A high proportion of students was now back in college on a regular basis;
- Quality Summits for the term had commenced. Thanks were expressed to Governors that had been able to attend so far;
- There were some challenges within the organisation, but staff were responding to these. Examples included ensuring students had both support and challenge, balancing the requirements of the WMCA for adult provision with local demand and growing a quality offer;
- Staff remained ambitious and wished to return to Ofsted outstanding. This had been discussed at length at the recent SMT planning day and the challenge of achieving this was not under estimated;
- Social distancing measures and mask wearing remained in place throughout the college;
- For HE provision the OfS continued to provide challenge and have high expectations for reporting on provision. It was hoped that approval would be given to offering top up degrees in Media and Computer Science with Staffordshire University. A meeting to look at this in detail was planned in June;
- Staff continued to be heavily engaged in the process for providing Teacher Assessed Grades this year. It was a new process for this year and different to 2020. As a result, it was currently difficult to predict achievement.

Questions and comments were invited.

The Chair commented that he had found his attendance at Quality Summits to be very worthwhile and encouraged other Governors to attend if possible.

There was a discussion about survey results, and the Assistant Principal Quality and HE noted that HR were considering a wider staff survey as well. Governors asked what methods were being used to look in more detail at the areas that had scored lower. The Assistant Principal Quality and HE commented on the triangulation of information from learning walks, surveys, Student Voice Committee and student rep meetings in assessing areas needing improvement. A Governor noted some survey issues relating to resources. The Assistant Principal Quality and HE explained that resource allocations were made to support growth, although growth was sometimes faster than the resource allocation. Staff were being encouraged to submit capital bids where needed.

A Governor asked about the apparent need for staff to work on better differentiation, stretch and challenge with students. The Assistant Principal Quality and HE noted that this was a key focus with teaching staff, as it was not currently as good as it had been previously. He was keen to have this as a training topic through the Workforce Development team for next year.

Governors discussed the priorities for re-gaining outstanding from Ofsted. A key focus was consistency of provision. Given that inspectors would meet and speak to many students, this was an important aspect. Governors also felt that it was important for students to have the same levels of aspirations regardless of their course or level of study. Another management priority was to improve the quality of learning walk feedback.

A Governor asked about the financial impact of Aspire to HE. It was explained that an event was to be held to look at HE, and that this would involve students. 90% of current HE students had progressed within the college. An ambition was to increase the level of direct external entries. It was agreed that further information on Access to HE would be included with the next set of Learning and Quality Committee papers.

Assistant  
Principal  
Quality and  
HE

Governors **resolved** to **receive** the Quality and HE Update report.

#### 66.21 STUDENT SERVICES REPORT

The Principal presented the report and the following were noted:

- Support for safeguarding issues continued to be excellent;
- More work was required to improve careers advice for all students;
- Aspire to HE had been covered earlier in the meeting;
- NEET activity figures were included. Staff continued to do good work to identify those most at risk;
- It was felt that Student Voice needed a refresh and actually needed to be louder. This would be a priority focus when a new Director was appointed;
- Consideration would be given to bringing more students into Learning and Quality Committee;
- The newly appointed Head of Personal Development was Helena Platt. She and the Director of Student Services, when confirmed, would report to the Assistant Principal Quality and HE from 1 August 2021;
- The college continued to be firmly committed the wider personal development of students and not just their vocational training;
- The Principal was confident of having the foundations to build an excellent student services team.

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

THERE WAS A TEN-MINUTE COMFORT BREAK.

#### 67.21 FINANCE REPORT TO MARCH 2021

The Director of Finance & MIS presented his report, which summarised the management accounts position to the end of March 2021, plus a number of other finance related matters requiring Governor consideration. Two approvals would be sought. As usual, the year to date position had been considered in detail at the recent Finance and Resources Committee.

In terms of the budget for 2020/21, Governors were advised that:

- The original approved budget had included a number of prudent assumptions to reflect the circumstances of Covid-19;

- The earlier than planned exit from LCCA had impacted, as the final cohort had not been recruited in October 2020 and therefore income was lower than budgeted;
- There were some Covid related variances in expenditure, such as the costs of sanitiser, distancing measures, split classes and extra teaching costs. There had been a general reduction in staff capacity through dealing with Covid-19 and this had affected costs and income;
- A prudent view had been taken of commercial services, which was reflected in reduced income;
- The revised budget had been approved by Corporation in January 2021 and the current position had remained within that agreed envelope;
- Management were confident of ending the year within the current expected budgetary range. It was hoped that there would be less Covid-related disruption next year;
- The College had budgeted a bottom line deficit of (£632k) for the year and the likely projection at this time was a deficit of (£1,287k), an adverse impact of (£655k). The only major risk to this was if the Combined Authority imposed an AEB threshold of above 90% on the College with a further impact of up to another £400k which the College would be unlikely to fully mitigate.

A Governor commented on the possibility of a third Covid wave in the autumn and the financial impact of this. The Director of Finance & MIS was confident that the expected costs to 31 July were reasonable. Additional costs in the autumn term would be within the 2021/22 budget. The Covid infrastructure was in place to respond to any necessary curriculum or estates changes in future.

A Governor asked whether the proposed 1% pay award was included in the revised budget, and it was confirmed that it was.

Governors considered the current budget position and **resolved to approve** the revised 2020/21 budget of (£1,287k) deficit

The Director of Finance & MIS outlined the emerging budget for 2021/22. The final version would be taken to Finance and Resources Committee in June and then brought back for Corporation approval in July. A balanced position was expected to be achieved. Some of the key items at this time were:

- The position was not linear. Usually budgets flowed from one year into the next, but Covid-19 had distorted this;
- Funding for High Needs provision continued to be disrupted;
- Cost inflation was high;
- Staff costs were around 70% of turnover, which remained above the FE Commissioner's benchmark figure of 65%. An objective of the budget was to keep this below 70%;
- Staffing was being kept under close review as there was a need for the right investments;
- Key income lines were now fairly certain. AEB was expected to be in line with the current year;
- Curriculum planning was 2-3 weeks behind the usual timescale, having therefore a knock-on effect on budget preparation;

- EBITDA and cashflow targets were noted;
- T Level funding was affected by recruitment, and this was explained. Forward funding for September recruitment may reduce funding for next year.

Governors discussed the likelihood of staffing costs being at 70% and the effect on this of the proposed pay award. It was agreed that rewarding staff for hard work was important, and acknowledged that the costs of this would be borne by the college. Government would not fund FE pay awards in the same way that it did for schools.

The Chair of the Finance and Resources Committee commented on the need for the financial impacts in 2022/23 and beyond to also be considered. There would be a number of challenges for the foreseeable future. However, it was expected that there would be positive impact of margins from work in Cannock and other areas.

The Principal expressed confidence in the financial position of the college. Despite the high staffing costs, other financial and quality indicators were good. The college continued to generate cash from its activities.

Governors discussed sector benchmarks and the need to invest in the curriculum. There was a clear need to increase income.

The Director of Finance & MIS outlined the pay award proposal, which was 1% for all staff with effect from 1 June 2021. Staff that qualified for annual increments would receive these as usual in September. The value of increments was £250k and the value of the pay award was £280k for a full year.

A Governor commented on the wider national considerations, including the 2.75% pay award for school teachers and the 1% offered to NHS staff, as well as the budget position of the college.

It was confirmed that the Exec team had widely discussed the proposal, which was felt to be affordable. A higher increase risked being unaffordable in the context of limited increases to Government funding for FE.

Governors asked if there was a de minimis level of pay award, to prevent derisory increases. It was confirmed that there was not, but that this could be considered. It was also confirmed that minimum wage adjustments had been made to staff affected in February 2021. The staff at the bottom of the pay scale were on at least minimum wage but not living wage.

There was a lengthy consideration of the proposal and its affordability.

Several Governors felt that the 1% proposed was fair in the current circumstances. There was a suggestion that a 'thank you' for working Covid may be appropriate. Exactly how this may look was not clear, but it could be disaggregated from the pay award in some way. Management felt that there were already a number of non-financial benefits to staff, such as efficiency days and a generous holiday entitlement. Staff had also been awarded £4 per week as a food allowance during Covid, and this had been extended to the end of the financial year.

The Chair commented that the desire to pay staff more was correct, but that the budget needed to be balanced, therefore affordability was critical.

The Director of Operations and Resources commented on his recent discussions with union colleagues. It was confirmed that they were fully aware of the college position and understood the 1% offer.

It was agreed that further work was needed on the impact of the pay offer and that a de minimis limit of the higher of £250 or 1% should be calculated. The **pay award** was therefore **approved** on this basis, with the Director of Finance & MIS asked to circulate further information to all via email as soon as possible. There were some complexities for staff receiving minimum wage increases and increments, but the Director of Finance & MIS would comment further on these in his email.

Director of  
Finance &  
MIS

It was **resolved** that the Finance Report was **received and accepted**.

#### 68.21 CHAIR'S REPORT

The Chair gave a verbal update on his recent activities, which included:

- The usual cycle of committee meetings since the last Corporation meeting;
- Attendance with the Exec team at the ESFA's 'annual conversation' via Teams earlier in May. This was a new initiative which had been interesting;
- Attendance at the AOC and ETF Chairs' meetings, which continued to be useful in understanding wider sector issues;
- The start of the one to one meetings with Governors. All had now been scheduled and would be completed in June.

#### 69.21 GOVERNANCE MATTERS

The Clerk's written paper included the schedule of dates for meetings in 2021/22 for approval. There had been one change of start time since the version previously circulated.

It was **resolved** that the schedule of meeting dates for 2021/22 was **approved**.

The second part of the paper related to discussions about the succession planning process for the positions of Chair and Vice Chair. This had been considered at the Search and Governance Standards Committee earlier in May. There were no firm proposals as yet, but an update would be brought to the next Corporation meeting in July, after all planned one to one meetings with the Chair had been concluded.

#### 70.21 OBSERVATIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY, SAFEGUARDING AND HEALTH AND SAFETY

The Clerk advised that Prevent training for Governors had been arranged. This would take place on Monday 21 June at 5pm via Teams.

#### 71.21 CORPORATION COMMITTEE MINUTES AND REPORTS

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

- Search and Governance Standards Committee 26 January 2021; and
- Finance and Resources Committee 23 February 2021.

It was also reported that:

- Learning and Quality Committee met on 24 February 2021;
- Student Voice Committee met on 11 March 2021;
- Audit Committee met on 16 March 2021;
- Finance and Resources Committee met on 29 April 2021; and
- Search and Governance Standards Committee met on 11 May 2021.

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 earlier in this meeting.

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

#### 72.21 MATTERS OF REPORT, INCLUDING LINK GOVERNOR FEEDBACK

Governors were reminded of opportunities to attend Quality Summits and that recordings of virtual learning walks were available to view. The Assistant Principal Quality and HE expected to be able to do in person learning walks from October 2021, Covid restrictions permitting.

#### 73.21 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

It was **resolved** that the next meeting would be held on Thursday 8 July 2021.

The meeting ended at 2045 hrs.

How Governors challenged management		Impact of meeting on College	
67.21	Discussed impact of pay award proposal on staff cost percentage.	60.21	Approved re-appointment of two External Governors and re-appointment of an Associate Governor.
67.21	Considered implications of the college pay award in the context of those in schools and the NHS.	67.21	Approved revised budget for 2020/21.
67.21	Asked for a de minimis pay award to be considered to avoid the potential for derisory offers to staff at the lower end of the pay scale.	67.21	Approved pay award of the higher of £250 or 1% for all staff with effect from 1 June 2021.
		69.21	Approved schedule of meeting dates for 2021/22.