

WALSALL COLLEGE
MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SEARCH AND GOVERNANCE STANDARDS COMMITTEE
HELD ON TUESDAY 26 JANUARY 2021 AT 1000 HRS
VENUE: VIA ZOOM

PRESENT: Allan Pinnegar Chair
 Alan Woods
 Jat Sharma Principal & Chief Executive
 David Wheeler
 Graham Ward (until 11am)
 Alastair Scales

TOGETHER WITH: Alison Buick Clerk to the Corporation

APOLOGIES: None

14.21 CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS

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

15.21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

16.21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Principal noted his recent appointment as a member of the Chamber of Commerce Board.
Alan Woods reported that he had now taken up position as Co-Chair of the Federation of Awarding Bodies.

17.21 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 October 2020, having been circulated, were taken as read and approved.

18.21 MATTERS ARISING

The Action Points Record was reviewed and the following updates were noted:

Item 31.20.1

A process for reporting Student Voice actions had been agreed.

Item 31.20.1

The Chairs had met in November.

Item 31.20.3

Updates on Board Assurance and Risk Management had been given at Governor Training and Audit Committee in the autumn term.

Item 04.21

Minutes were now being added to the college website termly as agreed.

Item 05.21.1

Chair role descriptions had been added to Governance at Walsall College as agreed.

Item 05.21.2

It was agreed that the Chair and Vice Chair would provide Governor testimonials, and that if possible a video of the Chair would be provided.

Item 05.21.3

Convene functionality reminder to be issued.

Item 06.21.1

Agreed to offer Mary Mahoney opportunity to be Link Governor for Foundation and Community Learning.

Item 06.21.2

Governor recruitment strategy discussed with Chair and agreed no further action required.

Item 07.21

Training topics for February Governor session considered and agreed.

Item 08.21 1

Governors had been unable to attend any college events due to the pandemic.

Item 08.21.2

Reviews of committee effectiveness were not due until the summer term.

Item 09.21.1

The college membership of EAUC had been confirmed.

Item 09.21.2

Section on ethical governance to be added to Governance at Walsall College.

Item 09.21.3

ISO 2600 would be considered as part on ongoing development of environmental strategy. The Vice Chair noted the AOC's roadmap document, which he felt had some helpful content. He was using this to inform work on this in his own organisation.

19.21 CORPORATION MEMBERSHIP

The Clerk referred Governors to her written report and the following was discussed:

Terms of Office

Governors were advised of Governor terms of office expiring in the next calendar year. No recommendations were needed at this meeting, but it was agreed that the Clerk would speak to the Governors concerned to ascertain whether they wished to be considered for re-appointment. Further information would be brought back for discussion at the next meeting.

It was suggested that it would be useful to include a summary of current terms of office for all Governors in the next committee update on membership, and this was **agreed**. In the interim, the Clerk's existing summary of this would be circulated to all committee members.

Clerk

Student Governor

The appointment of Shelby Lintern as the second Student Governor with effect from 7 January 2021 was noted.

External Governor Vacancy

There was currently one vacancy for an External Governor, plus another that would arise in February when Alastair Scales' term of office ended.

Recruitment of new Governors was discussed and the following were considered:

- An approach to the recently retired chief executive of a local housing association;
- An approach to the chief executive of a local housing building company in Walsall;
- The need to further strengthen the membership of the Audit Committee, and therefore to seek at least one new Governor with skills to support this. This did not necessarily need to be a background in audit, as the new committee Chair had these skills;
- Whether any existing Governors could or should be moved onto Audit Committee from another committee. Governors were reminded that Audit Committee membership could not include the Principal, Chair or any members of the Finance and Resources Committee. No firm decision was made on this;
- That there were two potentially interested individuals, and that exploratory meetings were being set up with the Chair and Principal.

The Clerk noted that she had prepared an updated Skills Audit template, and that she wished to circulate this for completion as soon as possible. The Skills Audit had not been refreshed for two years, during which time there had been several membership changes.

The new document was considered. It was **agreed** that the Skills Audit should be updated and that Governors should be asked to complete this within two weeks. Governors discussed how to use the responses, which would be partially to support recruitment and partially to identify training needs. The document would also sit alongside the information gained from the Chair's one to one meetings with Governors in summer 2020. Asking some questions that required written responses from Governors would also give some feedback on whether Governors were making best use of their skills and what options there were for succession planning.

There was a discussion about the wider context of governance, including the recently published FE White Paper 'Skills for Jobs', and the work of the FE Commissioner. The White Paper would shape the thinking of the college going forwards, and the summaries of the Commissioner's published reports into colleges in difficulty were a useful learning tool against which to measure practices at Walsall. It was suggested that a more in depth case study of FE Commissioner reports and lessons learned may be a useful focus for a future Governor Training event. This would be considered, as would extending an invitation to a member of the Commissioner's team to attend a future Training event.

Clerk

Chair/
Clerk

The challenges of remote governance were noted, although there was recognition that the college had adapted quickly in the circumstances last March. At that time, it had not been anticipated that the situation would still be ongoing ten months later. This would be picked up again later in the agenda.

Governors **resolved** to **receive** the Corporation Membership report.

20.21 GOVERNANCE QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Clerk presented the Governance Quality Improvement Plan update, details of which were in the accompanying papers. Most actions were ongoing due to the nature of the required monitoring until the end of the academic year. The fact that progress was limited was noted. This was due to the SAR and QIP only having been approved in late November and no Learning and Quality Committee having taken place since that date. There were no areas of concern at this stage, although there may be expected to be some impact from the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

Governors discussed the need to ensure that curriculum innovation was monitored by all Governors and not just at committee level.

Governors **resolved** to **receive** the Governance Quality Improvement Plan report.

21.21 REVIEW OF COMPLIANCE WITH THE ENGLISH COLLEGES' CODE OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

The Clerk presented her paper. It had been some time since a review had been conducted against the Code of Good Governance, which had been adopted at Walsall College when published in 2015. It was understood that the AOC planned to update the code, although a date for this was not available. The impact of Covid-19 had likely delayed this.

The paper gave a self-assessment of the college position against each of the suggested standards.

A Governor had provided some comments on Convene and these were considered. Clarification was provided in several areas. There was a discussion about learning walks. Governors were keen to undertake some remote learning walks where possible given that they were unable to visit college in person. Some guidelines and suggested questions for this would be helpful. The Clerk noted mixed success with this in the previous term but would discuss again with the Assistant Principal Quality and HE. The Chair of Learning and Quality Committee also wished to consider this further at the next committee meeting.

It was suggested that some video clips of excellent teaching and learning would be useful for Governors. The Principal was aware of good examples and would share these. The Chair of Learning and Quality noted that an invitation had been extended to an external speaker for the next Governor Training event. He was an expert on digital teaching and learning. There was a distinction between teaching and learning, and his views on what good digital learning looked like when teaching was delivered remotely would be of great interest.

Clerk

Principal

There was a discussion about levels of progress being made by students. Staff were concerned about this. The funding available for catch up work was noted. It was hoped that this would be available next year as well. Recovery work would be critical for students.

A Governor asked whether the college had a stakeholder engagement strategy or similar. The Principal responded that stakeholder views were being considered in the ongoing refresh of the Corporate Plan. It would be a key element in response to the recently published White Paper, which focused on employer engagement.

The extent to which the college approach to corporate social responsibility was stated was considered. A Governor suggested the addition of charitable, ethical and community focused activities. It was also suggested that the college statement on public benefit be expanded beyond the short statement included within the accounts, and that AOC guidelines on this be considered.

Principal

It was agreed that the Governors had confidence in the financial and other information provided by management, but that reference to independent sources of assurance provided by auditors should be included in the review document.

Clerk

22.21 GOVERNANCE UPDATES

The Clerk referred to her report which covered:

- FE White Paper;
- Spending Review 2020; and
- Virtual Meetings.

Governors noted that the White Paper had been issued in the previous week, just after the publication of the committee paper. The Principal would cover this in more detail at the Corporation meeting later in the week.

A Governor asked if curriculum staff could share some examples of innovative practice with Governors for information. The Principal would discuss this with the Assistant Principal Curriculum. There were many examples.

Principal

Student access to devices was discussed. This was the main barrier to engagement. College continued to provide devices to those in need, based on a RAG rating. It was noted that a significant proportion of students without devices were BAME. Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) were therefore a concern. The Principal planned to conduct an EDI audit in year.

Governors discussed the effectiveness of virtual meetings, which had been held since the start of the pandemic in March 2020. The following observations were made:

- There had been no changes to the number, length or frequency of meetings;
- Some meetings had too many people;
- There was some dis-engagement of some Governors;
- Exec staff tended to present their papers in detail and this prevented all Governors wishing to speak from doing so;

- The Corporation agenda was too long;
- Governors must be assumed to have read papers, so that staff only needed to cover up to six key points when presenting a summary;
- Ideally staff should try to anticipate the questions they may be asked;
- Some colleges had moved to having more meetings during the working day and less in evenings. This could be considered. Governors present were mindful of staff time and wellbeing with late meetings;
- Better use of Exec summary papers could reduce presenting time in meetings;
- There was too much duplication between Corporation and committees;
- Having more meetings with fewer agenda items could be considered;
- No changes had been made at the outset as it had not been expected that the pandemic effects would last so long. In March 2020 it could not have been anticipated that meetings would still be virtual ten months later.

The Chair, Principal and Clerk would consider the points raised.

23.21 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

It was **resolved** that the next meeting would be held on Tuesday 11 May 2021 at 1000 hrs.

Governors noted that this was Alastair Scales' last attendance at this committee after many years of service to Corporation. There was a reflection on Alastair's numerous contributions, his diligent approach to all meetings, his attendance at college events and his significant support to new Governors.

The meeting ended at 1155 hrs.

How Governors challenged management		Impact of meeting on College	
21.21	Whether there was a clear stakeholder strategy.	19.21	Agreed to update the Governors' Skills Audit.
21.21	Whether there was sufficient focus on the college's charitable, ethical and community activities in its published documents.		
21.21	Whether the public benefit statement should be expanded.		