

**WALSALL COLLEGE**  
**MINUTES OF CORPORATION MEETING HELD ON 25<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2024**  
**PART ONE**

<b>PRESENT:</b>	Paul Averis	
	Charlotte Bosworth	
	Heather Lodge	
	Mary Mahoney	
	Stuart Pedley-Smith	
	Aysha Rahman Amani	
	Tony Sadla	
	Rani Sahota	
	Jat Sharma	Principal
	Ray Simmonds	
	Nelson Tanyanyiwa	
	Nick Tomkys	
	Graham Ward	
	Garry Welborn	
	Dave Wheeler	Chair
<b>IN ATTENDANCE:</b>	Richard Brennan	Assistant Principal Curriculum & Quality
	Matthew Brown	Director of Finance & MIS
	Linda Enow	Associate Governor (Observer)
	Edward Ng	Associate Governor (Observer)
	James Norris	Assistant Principal Commercial Development
	Deb Rajania	Director of Operations & Resources
	Wendy Stanger	External Governance Reviewer
	David Turner	Assistant Principal Quality & HE
	Lesley Venables	Head of Governance
	Geeta Bhucher	College Manager (observer)
	Sarah Cattell	EDI Manager (minutes 100 to 123)
	Charlotte Wood	Head of Safeguarding (minutes 100 to 123)

**CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS**

100 The Chair congratulated Charlotte Bosworth on her appointment as the Chair of the Federation of Awarding Bodies. The Principal had given a presentation on the FE Sector to over 1000 staff from the Department for Education. The Chair and Tony Sadla had attended the staff conference in December, where feedback from staff had been highly positive.

101 Governors were reminded of forthcoming events, namely:  
Higher Education Awards on 7<sup>th</sup> February  
Opening of The Link on 15<sup>th</sup> February

102 A meeting of the committee chairs would be arranged shortly, the outcomes of which would be reported to the Corporation. Governors were reminded to ensure that link activities had been arranged by the relevant manager.

**Governors**

**APOLOGIES**

104 Apologies for absence were received from Barbara Van Der Eecken,

**DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

105 There were no declarations of interest in any specific agenda items.

106	<b>CHAIR'S ACTION</b> The Director of Finance & MIS reported that Chair's Action had been used recently to approve sub-contracting of £1m for Free Courses for Jobs with Learning Curve at the request of the West Midlands Combined Authority.	
107	<b>MINUTES</b> <b>Resolved</b> – That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 <sup>th</sup> November 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair	
108	<b>MATTERS ARISING</b> The Board received a progress report on actions arising from previous meetings and noted that the majority of these were either completed or in train.	
109	In relation to minute 68.23 the Head of Governance reported that Ihasco accounts were being set up for all governors and associates and that they would be required to undertake e-training on items such as Safeguarding, Prevent, Health & Safety, GDPR and EDI. However, if they undertook safeguarding training as part of their employment or another voluntary role, they could provide a certificate of training which would then be uploaded to the College's Single Central Record.	All/Head of Gov
110	The outcome of the review of Higher Education provision would be discussed at the next Learning & Quality Committee meeting (minute 84.23.8 refers). Diversity information would also be included on that agenda (minute 63.3).	AP(QHE)
111	Individual meetings with the Chair and the Head of Governance had been arranged for most governors. Any remaining governors were asked to provide suitable dates for these meetings to take place.	Governors/ Head of Gov
112	<b>WRITTEN RESOLUTION</b> The Head of Governance advised that a majority of governors had approved the recent written resolution approving the Self-Assessment Report for 2022/2023 and the Quality Improvement Plan for 2023/2024	
113	<b>SAFEGUARDING UPDATE</b> The Head of Safeguarding gave a presentation on current issues, together with key data on the number of safeguarding concerns in 2023/2024. It was noted that there had been a significant increase in safeguarding issues (24.29%) and the department had responded to this through additional resources and staffing.	
114	A total of 3 co-ordinators had been appointed with links to particular curriculum delivery managers. This would enable the Head of Safeguarding to focus more on planning and strategy and to develop the facilities further.	
115	A governor asked about the training being provided to these new staff, as some were not safeguarding specialists. The Head of Safeguarding advised that training had been provided for these staff and was currently being contextualised by the current team. All staff were provided with external supervision and were able to professionally challenge each other.	
116	In response to questions about cascading information to all tutors and staff the Head of Safeguarding reported that a system called "MyConcern" was used to record any safeguarding issues and to identify any relevant trends. Training had been undertaken during recent continuing professional	

development days. Caseloads were triaged and each members of the team had their own particular specialisms.

117 A governor queried the level of security of the data contained by MyConcern and was advised that different access levels were allocated dependent on staff requirements. All information was kept within a defined area and it was noted that this software was used widely in other education settings. The fact that schools also used the system should enable secure data sharing to take place, which would support the transition to College programmes.

118 The Head of Safeguarding agreed that it was possible that the number of cases reported could increase as a result of the new system.

119 Following questions about the relatively low number of cases in some areas further work would be carried out.

#### **EDI UPDATE**

120 Governors received an update on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. The team has recently been strengthened with a number of new appointments. The Annual EDI Report would be submitted for discussion at the March 2024 Learning & Quality Committee meeting.

121 Pronoun training had been provided for a group of 15 staff who would then cascade this knowledge across the College.

122 A governor asked how the impact and level of engagement in EDI activities was being measured. The EDI Manager reported that the number of individuals accessing the EDI podcast was monitored, but there was still a significant amount of work to be done in this area. Governors commented that it might be more impactful for a person's individual pronouns to be displayed more prominently rather than relying on their email designations.

123 In terms of well-being strategies, a number of conversation groups had been established on issues such as menopause awareness and LGBTQ+.

124 The Principal added that it was important for the College to celebrate its community and that for many people EDI was a difficult topic to discuss openly. The College provided a safe space in which to do this and staff and students were encouraged to respect each other. Every opportunity to learn about different cultures was maximised, such as the celebration of the Chinese New Year.

**Charlotte Wood and Sarah Cattell left the meeting.**

#### **STUDENT UNION PRESIDENT'S UPDATE**

125 The SU President presented a report on activities in Term 1 and plans for Term 2. These included awareness-raising of safety and security issues and SU-led clubs for students. Positive feedback had been received from learners for the additional security measures in place on the College's sites. In response to questions about the boundaries of the security staff's activities the Principal reported that there was clear guidance as to their areas of operation and that they were not responsible for patrolling the town centre.

126 Over the next few weeks there would be student voice drop-in sessions and a festival of culture.

127 The Chair thanked the SU President for ensuring that more events were brought to the Hawbush Campus.

#### **HEALTH & SAFETY ANNUAL REPORT 2022/2023**

128 Governors received for information the Health & Safety Annual Report for 2022/2023. This outlined the continued reduction in the number of accidents during the past 10 years, which evidenced that the policies and procedures in place were effective. The report also contained a briefing note on governor responsibilities for health and safety produced by the Health & Safety Executive.

129 The Director of Operations & Resources advised that regular health and safety audits/inspections were undertaken using a risk-based approach. It was noted that there had been some health and safety-related issues at the Green Lane Campus, which had now been addressed and had been discussed in detail by the Capital Projects Working Group.

130 Governors agreed that the number of near misses compared to actual incidents appeared to be low but were assured that staff and students were encouraged to report any such events.

131 In response to a question about the reduction in the number of unqualified/clean audits the Director reported that this was due to staff not being aware of the content of the fire briefing, which was a compliance issue.

132 A governor suggested that the 9 year trend outlined in the report should be represented by a 'u' shaped curve rather than a downward trajectory. The Director concurred with these calculations, however, the chart showed the significant increase in the number of students in 2023/2024 which was likely to lead to more accidents. It was agreed that the accident data needed to be contextualised in future and governors requested that the amount of expenditure on health and safety for each year and comparative years should be provided.

**Dir of Ops &  
Res**

#### **FINANCE REPORT**

133 The Director of Finance & MIS presented the finance report to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023.

134 The Board was reminded that there had been a reduction in 16-18s in 2022/2023, which had driven the budget that had been approved in June 2023. At that point, income levels were not guaranteed.

135 Since that time all colleges had been allocated additional monies to cover a pay award for staff and to address staff retention, which was £1.6m in Walsall College's case.

136 Coupled with strong recruitment in September, this had relieved some of the financial pressure on the College in 2023/2024, Nationally, the Association of Colleges had recommended that staff should receive a 6.5% increase for 2023/2024. There was also additional 'wraparound' provision required (such as safeguarding and welfare support) which needed to be factored in.

137 Compared to the position reported at the November Corporation meeting, finances were tighter than anticipated and the College's financial health rating had deteriorated to 'satisfactory'. Spending on 16-18 year olds had increased by 10% compared to the income generated, but at the moment

this was being absorbed. Income levels for adult and apprenticeships were lower than the forecast. There had been a greater reduction in non-funded elements of provision and the College was unable to increase student numbers sufficiently by using the flexibilities of the funding model. Demand was strong for courses of a lower funding value (such as ESOL).

138      Governors noted that the Finance & Resources Committee had approved additional sub-contracting provision (Free Courses For Jobs) with Learning Curve on behalf of the Combined Authority. A governor asked about the level of confidence the management team had in achieving the 4.9% increase in apprenticeships included in the projections and was advised that this was still a risk, as the overall picture was not yet finalised.

139      In terms of the National Tuition Fund provision the Director of Finance & MIS reported that the College was finding it extremely difficult to engage suitable staff to deliver these courses, in line with national challenges.

140      It was noted that Construction College Midlands was not generating any additional AEB capacity in relation to apprenticeships.

141      The Corporation was advised that the overall budget could be achieved, but it needed to recognise that there were additional risks this year, including the level of EBITDA. A governor questioned whether the outturn for this indicator would have any negative implications for the bank covenant on the College's loan. The Director of Finance & MIS reported that a breach was unlikely unless there was a further reduction in EBITDA. Regular discussions took place with Barclays Bank and would cover this item.

142      Governors debated whether the previous decision on the level of EBITDA continued to be acceptable, given the need to balance the financial and quality elements of the business. The Principal commented that action plans to address any shortfalls in income were being prepared.

143      It was agreed that this would be explored further at the next Finance & Resources Committee meeting, particularly as further changes in external influences could add to the level of risk of achieving the budget. Management felt that it was inappropriate to take radical action at this time, as the College would be rewarded in 2024/2025 for the increase in its 16-18 numbers in 2023/2024 and the proposed pay award was covered by the additional allocation received from the DfE for this purpose.

**F&R Cttee/Dir  
of Fin&MIS**

144      A governor suggested that the future viability of apprenticeship provision needed to be considered carefully. Management responded that these conversations had already been initiated internally, following difficulties in the sector nationally.

145      Levels of cash and investment in the College's estate had been good for the last few years. The turnaround of enrolments in 2023/2024 had been difficult and had caused other issues such as increased pressure on accommodation in some areas. Apprenticeships had under-performed both financially and from a quality perspective and adult funding was becoming more complex due to the requirements of the Combined Authority. Ensuring that levels of pay were appropriate and competitive was also a challenge.

146 The Principal reported that the College was planning and front-loading resources for the next academic year, but there was a significant amount of work to do to achieve this.

#### **STAFF PAY AWARD 2023/2024**

147 The Director of Finance & MIS presented proposals for a 6.5% pay award for all staff (excluding senior postholders) for 2023/2024 with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> February 2024, in line with the AoC's recommendation. For all eligible staff it was also proposed that the College should also adopt the latest real living wage rate of £12 per hour.

148 As outlined in an earlier agenda item the overall outlook for income delivery was riskier than in November 2023. Management was confident that the budget could be delivered (including the proposed pay increases) however, if the respective levels of income were not fully secured then it may be necessary to make some in-year savings and efficiencies. They felt that the 6.5% was affordable and had been funded through the additional allocation of £1.6m received from the DfE.

149 Governors asked about the numbers of staff who would be impacted by the pay increases and were advised that the current cohort of 177 staff receiving the RLW would reduce to 135 once the proposals were adopted. This phenomenon was causing some difficulties within the pay structure, as a few roles had been moved to just above the RLW and the pay levers that could be used were limited. Feedback from staff had been positive in terms of improving retention and recruitment.

150 The Board recognised the challenges on pay and noted that the achievement of the approved budget required the commitment of the whole College. Governors were supportive of the proposals and felt that with careful monitoring and management, the budget could be delivered, as it had been in the past.

151 **The Corporation was asked to vote on the proposals and the motion was carried unanimously. The staff and student governors and the associate members were excluded from this vote.**

152 **Resolved – 1** That all staff (except the 2 senior postholders) be awarded a 6.5% increase in pay with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> February 2024  
**2** That all eligible staff be paid the Real Living Wage of £12 per hour with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> February 2024

#### **EXECUTIVE REPORT**

153 Members of the Executive Team presented an update on current issues.

154 The Principal reported on recent discussions with staff from the DfE, where he had emphasised the need for supporting teachers in the classroom and to reduce bureaucracy for colleges to enable them to focus on their core activity. In his networking events other public sector bodies had expressed similar challenges.

155 Governors were advised that due to the higher recruitment of 16-18 year olds this year the number of GCSE re-sits for Maths had increased significantly, which was having an impact on recruiting and retaining staff and elements such as accommodation for the examinations.

- 156 A new behaviour management process had been introduced which put a greater onus on teaching staff to deal with any issues. This had impacted positively on retention which was currently 97.8% and subject to robust monitoring.
- 157 Attainment for students accessing free school meals, with SEND needs and from deprived backgrounds had widened compared to those without these characteristics. This would be highlighted during any Ofsted inspection and it was important for the College to contextualise the data. A governor questioned whether the Catch-up Funds were being maximised and suggested that some schools were now offering a 2-week half term break in October for teachers as a recruitment incentive rather than higher levels of pay.
- 158 The College had been selected for a further funding audit in 2023/2024, which was currently underway. The same lines of enquiry on apprenticeships had been drawn out by the audit team.
- 159 The opening of The Link was due to take place on 15<sup>th</sup> February. The Combined Authority's new employment and skills strategy would be launched at this event. Already there had been 116 enquiries and 24 individuals had enrolled on AEB programmes.
- 160 A review of the College's higher education provision was being completed and would be presented to the Learning & Quality Committee in March. The Executive was also preparing a revised Curriculum Strategy, which aligned to the College's statutory requirement to review how its provision met the skills needs of the local community.
- 161 Preparation for an Ofsted inspection was at an advanced stage and this would be the focus of the governors' training event on 8<sup>th</sup> February.

#### **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

- 162 There was no other business.

#### **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

21<sup>st</sup> March 2024

**The staff and student governors, associate members and the Executive Team left the meeting at this point.**