

Minutes of the Corporation Meeting held on Monday 18 October 2021

Present: - Mervyn Jones (Chair)
Abigail Appleton (Principal)
Jennette Arnold OBE (via Teams)
Professor Robin Baker OBE
Victor Barratt
Oliver Cameron-Swan
Dr Mia Gordon
Joe Hedges (via Teams)
Clive Hodgeman
Andrew Jones
Hannah Jones
Kate Murrie
Tim Newsholme
John Nicol
Kay Sandford-Beal (via Teams)

In attendance: - Xaviere Hughes (Head of FE)
Linda Watkins (Clerk to the Governors)
Tim Williams (Finance Director)

The meeting was quorate as a minimum of fourteen Governors were present during the meeting.

1. Appointment of Governors

The Chair welcomed new Governors to the meeting with introductions; he specifically welcomed Kate Murrie, as this was her first meeting since appointment, Oliver Cameron-Swan, Victor Barratt and Andrew Jones.

The Board agreed to appoint the following to the Board: -

- Oliver Cameron-Swan as Staff Governor (Professional Services) for a 4-year term in office
- Victor Barratt and Andrew Jones as Student Governors, both studying FE programmes, for 1-year terms in office.

2. Process of the Meeting

- I. Apologies for absence were received from Stevie Callender, Peta Darnley, Katie Seekings and Justin Gregory (Head of HE).
- II. The Chair welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the new academic year.
- III. There were no new declarations of interests. The Clerk reminded Governors to complete outstanding declarations for the current year.

3. Minutes of the Last Meetings

- I. The Board agreed the Chair should sign the minutes, including confidential minute, of the meeting held on 12 July 2021 as a true record.
- II. There were no matters arising which were not covered on the agenda.
- III. The action list was noted.

The Board agreed: -

- To approve the minutes

4. Principal's Report

- I. The Principal drew Governors' attention to an amendment in the report confirming that 526 FE students have been enrolled. HE enrolments will be clarified at the AQ&S Committee. A successful equality, diversity, inclusion and personal safety campaign was held at Folly Lane as a cross-college campaign with the neighbouring colleges. Following this there had been several serious disclosures from students with appropriate referrals made. Governors commended staffs' support to students that disclosures raised are taken seriously with appropriate action.

Sustainability remains a College priority with a presentation to the sustainability group from Steve Frampton, Climate Commissioner for AoC; appreciation was recorded to Governors who had attended. The Climate Commissioner had commended positive steps the College had taken on the climate roadmap. He was confident funding would be made available to education institutions in the future. The Student Union is appointing a Sustainability Officer.

ESFA held its first annual strategy meeting with the Chair, Clerk and SLT last week providing an opportunity for the College to summarise key challenges and strengths. The Chair had outlined the risks relating to the strategy and explained that the Board had previously set strategies to mitigate risks and manage its finances. Currently the most significant risks are driven by Government policy, such as the Skills Bill regarding A Levels and T-Levels as post-16 routes. ESFA had noted issues raised by the College and would feedback to Government. ESFA acknowledged that the College's sustainability is reliant on growth. The new Secretary of State for Education could have a potential impact on the sector. A Student Governor asked if students could take any action with recognition that the student voice could become more important to politicians in the future.

Enrolment data was presented for FE and HE programmes which would be discussed further as part of strategy implementation. Retention at HE had improved evidencing the impact of tutors' significant support provided to students during lockdown. This is also shown in the National Student Survey (NSS) results which are extremely positive and above the national average. Level 4 first year BA (hons) recruitment is better than budget (which was set at

a cautious level and agreed by the Board in July). Detailed achievement data will be presented to the AQ&S Committee. There was discussion about KPIs and how student progress is measured with evidence that staff know students are making progress; the level of student progress and destinations could incorporate high grades and mirror Ofsted's EIF in the College's KPIs. In addition suitability of the curriculum and how this had been developed to meet demographics would be incorporated in the SAR. A target for internal progression from FE to HE was also suggested with better alignment between FE and HE courses to improve internal progression whilst continuing to provide students with rounded advice to avoid any misinterpretation of targets. Objectives and KPIs would be reviewed which align to the five key areas in the strategic plan. **ACTION: PRINCIPAL**

Progress against targets was reported noting that the pandemic had impacted on the priority of some objectives; this was acknowledged. The Board would discuss and define new strategic objectives in December following input and further discussion from Committees. **ACTION: PRINCIPAL**
[Jennette Arnold left the meeting]

- II. There was an update on operations during the pandemic which remain extremely demanding on management. Staff absence has impacted on teaching following a few staff who had tested positive for covid-19 in FE and HE; cover had been provided. Contact tracing was reintroduced following guidance from Public Health England. The registry team manage this which is challenging and time consuming. Staff and student wellbeing remains a priority with support available. The Incident Management Group continue to meet to address issues resulting from the pandemic. A Governor asked if lessons learnt previously had been noted in the event of increased breakouts or closure. The Head of FE responded that an online teaching day had been arranged for FE students in November to identify any student access or WIFI issues in the event of future closure. Student Governors were asked their views on how students are addressing the pandemic. In summary, pandemic related practices have become the new normal with social distancing and hygiene measures adopted. The first open day had been held onsite with visitors requested to remain in family groups, wear masks and hand sanitise. The Student Union are taking covid into account when arranging social events.
- III. ESFA correspondence to Accounting Officers dated 22 September 2021 was noted.
- IV. The risk register, particularly revised scores, were outlined noting that changes to Government policy had consolidated three separate risks with a revised score of 12. The risk regarding student accommodation had decreased following the opening of No1 Station Approach. The impact of Brexit on student recruitment had decreased which could be removed as the College recruits very small numbers of overseas students. HE recruitment remained a high scoring risk and a priority. A Governor had proposed adding a generic risk to the risk register to

include a College wide welfare risk (e.g. as a result of an epidemic, fire etc.). **ACTION: FINANCE DIRECTOR**

The Board agreed: -

- To note the reports

5. **Finance Report**

The Finance Director highlighted key points from the written report. FE recruitment had increased to 526. A breakdown of learners by 16-18 and 19+ was provided noting that in-year growth funding was not anticipated this year. 16-17 years are funded on a higher rate which will increase funding. Advanced learning loans income had increased which reflected enrolments to the Foundation and Portfolio courses. Higher needs funding had reduced by £21k this year. The OfS grant had decreased marginally after the budget had been agreed. HE tuition fee income had increased by £212k after the cautious budget assumption. Utilities contracts are fixed term or capped with an increase anticipated which should be mitigated next June when the contracts are due for renewal.

The overall impact is a positive net income of £123k; however, the Finance Director was mindful that there are some unknown factors at this early stage in the year.

ESFA are introducing a new financial health rating which will not have a positive impact on HCA's financial health which would be reported as deteriorating in two additional areas. This had been noted with ESFA and FE Commission at the annual strategy meeting.

The College has a nominations agreement with Cityheart to fill 89 rooms at Station Approach; this year there is a shortfall of 12 rooms with an anticipated liability of £72k.

Staff costs as a percentage of income are 69% this year compared to 64% last year. The proportion of fixed costs is higher for the College as a small organisation meaning student growth is a priority as opposed to reductions in costs.

The Board agreed:

- To note the finance report at this early stage in the year

6. **Strategy Implementation 2021/22**

The report had been discussed in detail by the F&GP Committee covering progress towards the strategic priorities for 2021/22 which were reported at the previous meeting. HE recruitment, course validation and the development of delivery clusters to strengthen the student offer are key priorities. A comprehensive report of actions was noted which are on target.

Internal progression is low compared to the sector. This is being addressed with better alignment between the FE and HE curriculum, opportunities for FE students to see HE students' work and collaboration between staff. Marketing plans have been front loaded to commence marketing strategies earlier in the year. The Student Union were willing to provide input including seeking to recruit FE representation on the Student Union which is being publicised.

Careers enterprise, the impact of education policy on Level 3 courses and the Skills Bill are crucial influences. A Governor suggested working with external creative industries which dovetailed with course offers and HE revalidation. There was another suggestion to publicise or showcase staff practitioners' work and research more effectively as part of industrial engagement. There is guidance and materials about working with employers in consultative groups for delivery of T-Levels. A Student Governor commented that online blogging by students about their experience at HCA and showcasing their work or events could be another effective tool and useful for applicants. The Student Governor (HE) offered to share ideas about open days with the Principal separately.

A Governor referred to recruitment compared to the budget reiterating that increasing internal progression would have a significant impact on achieving the strategy, which is dependent on growth based on 2022/23 budget forecast of 120 HE enrolments.

A survey has been conducted with last year's FE leavers to identify reasons for their progression choices. The financial incentive for internal progression will be publicised widely. The National Student Survey (NSS) result is phenomenal and will also be publicised.

The Board agreed:

- To note the report agreeing HE recruitment, growth of internal progression and HE course validation are priorities

7. Accommodation Report

The Principal reported that progress of short term leases at CRC for the Hive and Chapel needed to be finalised with Herefordshire Council. An update on progress of the successful Stronger Towns bid, progress to appoint consultants to prepare an Estates Strategy was also reported.

No1 Station Approach and the students' experience during the first few weeks since it had been operational were reported with further discussion by Governors. A Student Governor had visited and confirmed that the accommodation was outstanding with a great atmosphere. In future, open days will include a tour of Station Approach.

Cityheart are managing the accommodation and liaising with Engie regarding a programme for all outstanding issues including incomplete work, defects and snags; these have had a negative impact. A Governor enquired if high-level management meeting about operations are held with the executive; these are currently held fortnightly. A question followed regarding Keeping Children Safe in Education and if this is followed at residential accommodation. There was confirmation that there are robust safeguarding and wellbeing policies and procedures ensuring students understand reporting mechanisms. The College's Wellbeing Lead is engaging with Cityheart. There have been a small number of reported incidents to date, predominantly low-level situations which have been addressed with support provided for students.

The Board agreed: -

- To note the accommodation report

8. **Safeguarding Briefing**

The Head of FE gave a presentation summarising how the College has embedded Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) which is managed using the MyConcern platform. All staff are required to read KCSIE part 1 and Governors are required to read part 2. There are additional powers to safeguard students. This covers peer on peer abuse, sexual violence and harassment, employment and training of all adults with rigorous checks required by the employer, mental health and a focus on online safety and cyber-crime.

A Governor asked if there was data showing students' use of online information and if it would be possible to track and identify students' concerns anonymously. Use of specific online information used by students is not currently being tracked; however, students' generic use of the wellbeing page is anonymous showing the number of hits but not individual concerns.

The Board agreed: -

- To note the safeguarding update particularly KCSIE and Governors' responsibilities. The Clerk would send a link to KCSIE part 2 to Governors **ACTION: CLERK**
- To track the wellbeing page impressions for online resources to identify how effectively students use resources **ACTION: HEAD OF FE**
- The Principal, Head of FE and Student Governor (HE) would discuss wellbeing provided for students outside of the meeting **ACTION: PRINCIPAL/HEAD OF FE/STUDENT GOVERNOR (HE)**

9. **Governors' activity 2020/21, recommendations 2021/22**

[Interests were recorded from the Chair, Vice Chair and Committee Chairs]

This was presented to the Board annually to confirm and endorse key appointments and inform Governors of activity undertaken during the previous year covering the following: -

- I. Composition of the governing body 2021/22 noting that there are currently two vacancies which are being addressed by the Search and Governance Committee.
- II. Attendance by non-members at Board Meetings 2021/22.
- III. Appointment of the Chair, Vice Chair and Chairs of Committee 2021/22
- IV. Membership to Committees 2021/22.
- V. Attendance records 2020/201 showed 80% attendance at Board and Committee meetings which was between 73-96% at colleges in the sector.
- VI. Appointment of designated Governors to safeguarding and health and safety, namely, John Nicol and Clive Hodgeman respectively.
- VII. Review of confidential minutes 2020/21.
- VIII. Standing Orders and Terms of Reference 2021/22 were presented proposing minor amendments which were outlined in the cover sheet.
- IX. A Summary from the Chair of the Corporation's appraisal evidenced that the Chair effectively leads the Board. It was also acknowledged that the Board has a positive and open relationship with the executive.

The Board agreed:

- To note the paper endorsing the current number, composition and membership to the Corporation, appoint Chairs for 2021/22 and release of confidential minutes as recommended
- To approve the Standing Orders and Terms of Reference 2021/22
- To note the Chair's assessment which was extremely positive

10. Any Other Business

The Chair informed Governors that a book was being launched about Ferrous 2019 regarding the positive 150ml steel challenge which had received global submissions.

11. Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting would be on Monday 13 December 2021 commencing at 4.30 pm.