



**Minutes of the Meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee
held on Monday 26 September 2022**

Present: - Mervyn Jones (Chair)
Abigail Appleton (Principal)
Professor Robin Baker OBE
Clive Hodgeman

In attendance: - Linda Watkins (Clerk to the Governors)

The meeting was quorate as there were four Governors present. The Committee noted that the Finance Director had been on sick leave meaning that he was unable to prepare papers for the meeting. Arrangements for cover were raised noting that the College Accountant was covering some of the duties in the interim.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Peta Darnley and Tim Williams, Finance Director.

2. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the Last Meeting

Governors agreed that the Chair should sign the minutes and confidential minute of the last meeting held on 27 June 2022 as true records.

Matters arising from the Minutes

There were no matters arising.

The Committee agreed: -

- To approve the minutes of the last meeting

4. Student Recruitment [This item was deemed confidential]

5. Finance Report

Management accounts to 31 July 2022 had been issued with no written commentary. This was historical information which will be reported in the annual accounts. Based on the EBITDA it was anticipated that ESFA would grade the College as 'good'. This reflected higher HE recruitment compared to budget in 2021/22.

There was a budget variance in property relating to void rooms at Station Approach last year and some capital projects. This year students have taken the full allocation of rooms at Station Approach with no void rooms.

The plan is for allocation of the whole building to students next year; this is a year earlier based on late completion and handover of the building. The College will work closely with the property management company and NMiTE regarding requirements for student accommodation taking account of applications. Student accommodation has had a positive impact on recruitment. Station Approach is an attractive new building and in close proximity to the College and city centre.

Discussion progressed to current risks including enrolment. Utilities costs are currently in a fixed contract. A Governor asked about the impact of costs to run Artist Blacksmithing which is energy intensive and effected by the increase in the cost of steel. The Principal has arranged to discuss costs with HLNSC. It was acknowledged that the quality of the course and the students' experience must be maintained. The School of Digital Futures is a significant project; costs will continue to be reported to the Committee.

Staff pay and the impact of inflation on the cost of living is a risk. It is anticipated that staff morale could deteriorate with cost of living increases. Regular staff surveys will be useful to measure this.

The Committee agreed: -

- To note the management accounts to 31 July 2022, current risks and continue to measure pressure points in the budget

6. Premises and Accommodation Report [This item was deemed confidential]

7. Estates Annual Report 2021/22

The estates plan was noted which included capital cost expenditure during the year. The capital budget for 2022/23 was £250K agreeing that its allocation will be reported in future. There was discussion about the maintenance backlog noting that this will be incorporated in the estates strategy. A variance between planned budget, actual costs and delivery as a headline compared to quotes was requested in future. This would be tracked operationally to identify variances. **ACTION: PRINCIPAL**

The Committee agreed: -

- To note the annual report

8. Staff Survey Feedback and Action Plan

The summary of feedback provided a snapshot from staff which management have acted upon promptly. A Governor asked if it was possible to draw down to identify specific weak areas from the feedback or campus scores. The Principal would investigate this further as there could be variation in the scores from each campus. **ACTION: PRINCIPAL**

It was encouraging that staff had recognised that individual managers provide staff with the support they need; this score had increased compared to last year. Communication and processes needed to be addressed in some areas. There was no surprise that staff pay was a concern particularly as some staff are paid on a low scale. A scale point and a systematic

method for increases is required. Following discussion Governors proposed an external pay audit to ensure independence, transparency and parity of pay. It would identify any anomalies with a suggestion to mitigate the risk of significant costs and unaffordability by requesting the project and proposals to remain within an agreed tolerance of the existing budget. **ACTION: PRINCIPAL.**

Discussion progressed to culture particularly as leadership and management had a low overall score, which was also low in the previous survey. There was a question if a hierarchical structure is appropriate in a small institution. The Principal explained that the Head of FE and Head of HE engage inclusively with all teaching staff. Internal progression is limited in a small institution; however, staff have some opportunities to take on additional duties. Staff in applicable roles are provided opportunities to participate in training including leadership and management development courses.

The Committee agreed: -

- To note the summary results from the staff survey dated July 2022, benchmark comparisons with other colleges and comparison with the previous results

9. Policies

- I. The Capability Policy was presented which is in line with ACAS procedures and good practice. Changes proposed were outlined including line managers informing HCA People of any incidents. The grounds of use of the terminology 'capability' in the HR context needed to be defined. 3.1.1.3 appeared a 'top down approach' which should be amended to include how a line manager or the College can provide support for the member of staff. 3.1.1.3 to be expanded to include that following consultation the line manager will prepare an improvement plan for agreement and subsequent actions which will be agreed between the line manager and member of staff. 3.1.2.4 Formal stages will include a note taker.
- II. The Staff Disciplinary Policy had been amended following an audit by the College's internal auditors. Changes proposed were outlined including line managers informing HCA People of incidents. 3.3.5 was an additional sanction to issue a letter of management advice based on formal communication with staff which was not a formal disciplinary. This was outside of formal disciplinary which would remain on file for 6 months. An example could be a member of staff who had not completed mandatory staff training. HCA People would send the letter of management advice. 3.4.6 Governors proposed using an alternative word to 'offence'. Throughout the policies the word employee needed to be changed to staff member to ensure consistency.
- III. The New Course Procedure and Business Cases for New Courses was presented in draft format for Governors' input. This would be supplemented by the business case for new courses. The Principal explained that the College is required to submit PV1A forms to UWTSD at an early stage; however, these are not required for sign off by the Board. A Governor asked about implementation of the

Employer Engagement Strategy which the Board had approved in February; resources are being allocated to embed the strategy. Course proposals would include differential and unique sources of value as a key part of the process (in effect a SWOT for art schools). It was proposed that basic core areas are presented in a standardised template e.g. library facilities.

The Committee agreed: -

- To approve the Capability Policy with changes agreed above to be approved by the Principal
- To approve the Staff Disciplinary Policy with changes agreed above approved by the Principal
- The New Course Procedure would be brought to the next meeting

ACTION: PRINCIPAL

10. HE Current Course Development

The Committee agreed: -

- To note the report outlining development of Foundation Degrees, Digital Degrees and the MA programme

11. Any other business

There were no items.

12. Date and time of next meeting

The next meeting was arranged for Monday 21 November 2022 commencing at 5.00 pm.

Signed as a true record

Chair **Date**