

Minutes of: Governing Board

Date: 8th July 2024 **Location:** A10, College Road Campus

Present	In attendance
Mervyn Jones (Chair) Abigail Appleton (Principal and CE) John Auckland Judy Balderson Myfanwy Page (Staff Governor) Charlotte Semus (Student Governor) Oliver Cameron-Swan (Staff Governor) Kate Seekings Jennette Arnold Caroline Sedilek (Staff Governor) Ian Axtell Russell Roberts Helen Hurford (Student Governor) Clive Hodgeman	Justin Gregory (Vice Principal HE) Xaviere Hughes (Vice Principal FE) David Hawkins (Vice Principal – Business Development and Student Experience) Tim Williams (Finance Director) Rebecca Semple (Clerk to Governors)
Quoracy: meeting was quorate	

1. Apologies and introductions

- Apologies for absence** – Apologies were received from Kate Mori and Joe Hedges
- Declaration of Interest** – no new declarations of interest
- The Chair shared with the Board that the Clerk was leaving her post at the end of Augusts 2024, and thanked her for her work.

2. Minutes of last meeting

- Approval of minutes of meeting held 13th May 2024** – minutes were approved as a true and accurate record
- Matters arising** – all actions noted as complete or in progress

3. Principal's Report

a. Principal's written report

The Principal presented this report, highlighting key areas.

Board were updated on Staff development week activities designed to help focus on recruitment and retention issues, creating opportunities for staff to share information and build on internal relationships and support conversations about how we can deliver value and get message out. The Principal highlighted the role of the Digital Skills centre delivery in inspiring further physical possibilities, including as part of conversations with the local council around future sites for student residential accommodation (also updating the Board on the progress with related feasibility studies).

Board Members asked about the net zero element of residential accommodation build/development, the arrangement of rooms towards social interaction, the possibility of incorporating the Queens Building and potential related upgrade of current resource. Also discussed were the relationship of these conversations to current lease negotiations, local cultural funding streams involved in student accommodation, course space vs accommodation space in existing buildings and incorporation of student consultation (particularly around disability needs). The Board noted that these developments presented opportunities for the college in terms of their links with the local community.

The initial response to the recent new Government was discussed – the Principal reported that she expected more positive conversation around education and arts, and that work experience (already part of the College Strategy) may become more important, bringing a potential need to accelerate this operationally.

Board Members noted the supportive nature of the recently-elected local MPs, looking forward to conversation with the new one in particular, as well as generally the positive end of term Principal's Report received.

b. KPIs and objectives

The Principal presented this report, highlighting student and staff communications as a specific focus, and noting that the link between this and improving external communications has led to raising its risk level and prioritisation.

c. Strategy update: Personal and Professional Development Plan

The Principal gave a presentation which outlined the reasons for a Personal and Professional Development strategy and its aims, the alignment of this with other strategies, progress towards implementation and key themes arising as part of implementation over the past year. The Board noted that the strategy has been through AQ&S with much support, and expressed their support for the strategy.

4. Governance

a. Board Chair 2024/25 (as recommended by S&G) *(the Chair left the meeting for this item)*

The Chair of Search and Governance reminded the Board that the current Chair comes to the end of his second term of governance at the end of August 2024, and reported that the S&G Committee recommend he is elected for one further year. The Board noted that with a change of government and strategy implementation, continuity was sensible, and would also give time to find a successor. The Chair of S&G agreed that S&G Committee will work on a job description for the Chair, and move forward with this next term.

Decision: *the Board agreed to appoint current Chair MJ as Chair for 2024/25 for one more year*

b. Governor Induction and Development Plan – The Board noted this and agreed that it should be implemented.

c. HCA Annual Cycle of Business 2024/25 - The Board noted the current Annual Cycle of Business.

d. Annual Board Self-assessment – The Board noted this self-assessment against the AoC 2023 Code of Good Governance.

- e. **Replacement of Clerk** – The Chair updated the Board with the plan to advertise as a 0.4FTE role, using the current job description, and to hold the advert open until the end of August. The Principal noted that some leads had been gained through existing networks.

5. Audit reports

- a. **External Auditor Audit Strategy Memorandum to 31 July 2024** – The Chair of the Audit Committee presented this report from Forvis-Mazars to the Board.

Decision: *The Board agreed to approve the External Auditor Audit Strategy Memorandum*

- b. **Audit Committee succession-planning:** The Chair of Audit Committee also noted the need for suitable new committee members, notably a governor with accounting background. The Chair of S&G confirmed that this need was being addressed by S&G Committee.

6. Finance reports

- a. **Risk Register** – The Board noted this report as having no major changes and reviewed by the Audit Committee in June.
- b. **Management Accounts including key risks** – The Board noted the Management Accounts as having no major changes for highlighting, and having been reviewed by the F&GP Committee in June as part of their wider financial conversations.
- c. **ESFA Confirmation of Financial Health** – The Board agreed to note this report.

d. **Budget 24-25 and Financial Plan 2025-26**

The Finance Director presented this report to Board, noting that it had been reviewed by F&GP Committee who had asked for some further clarification to explain the improvement in expectation since they last reviewed in March 2024 (and Board subsequently approved their recommended 2024/25 Staff Pay Award on March 18th 2024). A £285K deficit predicted in March has now reduced to a £149K deficit. He reported that more detailed data partly explains the more accurate forecast.

Board Members asked about the source of the significant depreciation noted – some assumptions about unspent grants,

The Chair of the Board (and Chair of F&GP Committee) highlighted that staff costs as percentage of income is currently 71%, which is above the sector recommended average of 65%. He detailed the F&GP Committee discussions around tackling this, while retaining an awareness of the importance of a critical mass of staff due to the college's small size. He reported that F&GP Committee had therefore agreed that a focus on marketing and recruitment should be exploited in order to reduce this ratio, as opposed to considering redundancies, recruitment being the biggest lever of cost-reduction. The Principal outlined some current approaches being taken as part of staffing planning, involving redesign of roles rather than redundancy.

The Board noted that the 2024/25 budget plan accepts a deficit, but that the following year plan brings the college back to a positive EBITDA.

Board Members noted the reassurance gained from the explanations for the change in situation since March 2024 and for the rationale for not addressing the deficit by direct staff reduction, and discussed and acknowledged experiences of negative effects of staff reduction elsewhere.

Board Members asked about expectations of uptake of undecided HE places likely following A level results, the pay rise assumptions for 2024-5/2025-6 made in the budget plan, and about the level of staff awareness of the current financial situation. A Board Member commented that while acknowledging that a deficit situation is not desirable, it can serve as a good focus for the mind, and the Board agreed that it was positive to see this focus in action.

Decision: *the Board agreed to approve the Budget 24-25 and Financial Plan 2025-26*

7. Marketing and Recruitment

a. Marketing and Recruitment update

The Principal gave a presentation to the Board, which referred to the new Marketing Strategy, its rationale and implementation to date, noting also that the marketing team are not solely responsible for recruitment, this being a role of the whole college team in various ways.

The presentation highlighted the opportunities taken with some staff movement, bringing in new staff with additional skills such as organisation and planning and relationship-building skills, which had also allowed moving of some responsibilities within the team.

The revision and improvement of processes was outlined, including internal data capture, internal progression, internal communications, application processes, noting where the direction for these has come from.

The new Marketing Strategy was summarised as focusing on improving physical marketing material, data gaps, broadening range of marketing platforms, internal marketing, and increasing student voice and engagement.

Board Members asked about local marketing and whose role this is, the use of good news stories of the year and opportunities for working with local TV as part of wider marketing.

b. Marketing Strategy - the Board noted the new Marketing Strategy

c. New website – progress update

The Vice Principal (Business Development and Student Experience) gave an overview of the in-development new website via a presentation, highlighting the new benefits it brings, the themes being used by the website developers (many gained by talking to staff), and presented visual examples of the new website in use. The Board noted and discussed the personalisation possible for each visitor, the colour palette and accessibility issues taken into account as part of the development.

Board Members also asked about the editing functionality, visitor data capture, student-involvement in design and testing, ways in which Governors can support, and the likelihood of making August deadline.

8. Academic Quality

a. Access and Participation Plan (discussion of work in progress)

The Vice Principal (HE) gave a presentation, reminding the Board that this Plan is an OfS regulatory requirement but which ties in with the college's ethos. He reported that it was on track for completion by the October 2024 deadline.

b. Student Charter (for approval, following AQ&S review)

The Vice Principal (HE) presented the Student Charter, outlining its role. He noted that no changes had been made since last year, following review by Student Council, Academic Board and AQ&S Committee.

Decision: *the Board agreed to approve the Student Charter*

9. Policies for noting/approval

a. Student Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Misconduct policy (for approval following AQ&S review) – The Vice Principal (HE) outlined importance of this policy, and the OfS requirements that it meets.

A Board Member asked about the date of the KCSIE update referred to within the policy, and for an explanation of a paragraph relating to data protection. The Vice Principal (HE) and The Vice Principal (FE) responded to both.

Decision: *Board agreed to approve the Student Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Misconduct policy*

b. Student Complaints Policy (for approval, following AQ&S review) – The Principal noted updated in line with new Office of Independent Adjudicator guidance. One amendment identified and agreed for Principal to make.

Decision: *Board agreed to approve the Student Complaints Policy, subject to the above change*

c. Annual Health& Safety Statement (for approval, following F&GP review) – The Board noted this Statement.

Decision: *Board agreed to approve the Annual Health and Safety Statement*

Action: Clerk to publish all approved policies above

10. Committee draft minutes - the Board noted the draft Committee Meeting minutes below. A Board Member asked about CTL training for governors mentioned in the AQ&S Committee minutes, and the Principal assured the Board that these will be circulated when available.

- a. Audit Committee (10th June 2024)
- b. Search and Governance (24th June 2024)
- c. Finance and General Purposes (24th June 2024)
- d. AQ&S Committee (18th June 2024) – BM asked about CTL training for governors – principal assured will be circulated

11. Any Other Business

- e. A Board Member highlighted an upcoming Courtyard production involving FE music students

7. Date of next meeting: 4.30pm Monday 14th October 2024

Minutes approved: Date: