

CORPORATION BOARD

Minutes of a meeting held on Tuesday 04 July 2024
Common Leys Campus at 5pm

Present

Nick Handy (Chair)
Alan Bark
Jacqui Canton (Principal)
Ben Haxton
Adam Mumford
Astrid Schloerscheidt (joined online)
Kathryn Schutterlin
David Walker
Jessie Weavers-Medina
Sam Wolfe
Carol Kitching
Amanda Tilley

In attendance

Jo Milsom, Deputy Principal
Olivier Cognard, Vice Principal
Scott Gray, Vice Principal
Mark Lay, Finance Director
Howard Stamp, Clerk & Governance Advisor (Minutes, joined online)

1. Apologies and items to be raised under AOB

1.2 Declarations of interest

Apologies were received from Lucy Butler, Ed Collett, Nicolas Pages, and Mackenzie Nordal Howe. Declarations of interest were noted from staff members present regarding the pay award in item 6.3.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 26th March 2024

2.1 Public Minutes

The minutes from the previous meeting were approved.

3. Matters Arising, Written Resolutions & Action Points

The matters arising were discussed, with the majority completed and two still in progress. These are expected to be completed by the next Board meeting. One written resolution had been approved: the Accountability Statement 2024.

4. Principal's report

The Principal presented a summary of the report, highlighting the Ofsted inspection, where the college received positive feedback and an overall grade of 'Good' with outstanding features. The Principal thanked the governors for their support during the inspection and those who participated in meetings with inspectors. The Board members expressed their collective support and appreciation for the hard work of the Senior Management Team (SMT) and all college teams in achieving this commendable outcome. The Principal emphasised the importance of building on this success and maintaining the standards set by the inspection.

It was noted that the Accountability Statement had been successfully submitted to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) having been approved via written resolution. This statement is crucial in outlining the college's commitment to maintaining high standards of accountability and transparency in its operations.

The Principal provided an update on a confidential item discussed during the strategy day. While specific details remain confidential, the Principal assured the Board that the matter was progressing well, with the SMT receiving full support from the Board in handling this strategic issue. The Board agreed to the continued use of College resource to progress this project. The Principal mentioned the possibility of a tender process related to this collaboration. If required, the college would follow the appropriate tendering procedures to ensure compliance and transparency.

The Principal announced the creation of a new role, Vice Principal for People and Culture, aimed at enhancing the college's human resources service and college culture. The new Vice Principal, currently working with a large college group, will join the team in August. This role is expected to support the college's growth and strengthen its HR infrastructure with a strong focus on fostering a positive organisational culture. The Chair of the Corporation, involved in the interview process, commented on the leadership behaviours framework developed alongside the creation of this role. The framework was praised for its comprehensiveness and alignment with the college's values and goals.

- **Given the Ofsted report was so strong, at what point do we shift the college from celebration to focus on the next steps?**
 - o *The journey to achieving 'Outstanding' status is a long-term objective. However, as an SMT, we believe we need to remain focused on embedding the current 'Good' standards across all areas. Staff commitment remains high, but we still have some distance to travel, particularly in areas such as continuous improvement within the technology faculty, as previously shared.*

The Board approved the report.

5. Curriculum, Quality and Students

5.1 CQS Committee update

The CQS Committee Chair provided an update following the recent meeting. The first item focused on Ofsted and congratulating the team on the report. The subcontracted provision identified through the inspection will be presented as an area of information at the next committee meeting to help understand the provision further.

The committee received a presentation on the SEND provision, highlighting the number of EHCP students, the work on Exams Access Arrangements, and the overall achievements and outcomes of these students. Updates were also provided on qualification reform, achievement rate predictions, and changes for English and Maths. The publication of KCSIE was noted. The NSS survey results were discussed, highlighting positive outcomes and areas for staff training on LGBT and gender pronouns. The Student of the Year awards were also discussed, with the committee agreeing on the overall winner.

The Board noted the committee update.

6. Finance & General Purposes

6.1 F&GP Committee update

The F&GP Committee Chair provided an update following the recent meeting. The People Services report identified that staff recruitment and retention continue to be significant challenges. However, there have been notable improvements in filling vacancies within six weeks, thanks to a reorganisation of the recruitment team and clearer communication within the team. Despite these improvements, staff turnover remains consistent with previous years. However short-term sickness rates are on a downward trend.

There were updates from the Estates and Capital Projects team, including current projects at Abingdon and Common Leys for the delivery of new T levels in September. Ongoing issues , such as the fire hydrant at Abingdon and the presence of RAAC, continue to be addressed.

The new Head of Health and Safety has introduced numerous innovative ideas. The college is reviewing its safety management software to improve overall safety protocols. Incident reports have decreased, reflecting positively on the new measures being implemented.

Several finance items were discussed, many of which are on the Board agenda for approval. These included a detailed overview of the management accounts as of 30 April 2024, the 2024/25 Budget and proposed pay award, the financial planning model, the squash club lease, and the Lloyds loan repayment.

- **From the numbers, it looks like there is going to be an increase in staff. Are there going to be any challenges here?**
 - o *Staff recruitment is one of our biggest challenges. The new VP role will have a big focus on the continued development of the People Services team. We advertised a recent Head of Faculty role with AoC, and this gave us a really strong field of candidates.*

The Board noted the committee update.

6.2 Management accounts at 30 April 2024

The Finance Director presented a detailed overview of the management accounts as of 30 April 2024. The college is in a strong financial position, with positive year-end projections for EBITDA and cash holdings. It was noted that there was a good discussion at the recent F&GP committee, which had recommended the management accounts to the Board.

- **While the median payment period is noted as 30 days, do we know what the average is?**
 - o *We don't have this to hand, but the average payment period data can be provided in future reports.*
- **Has anything come up regarding cash holdings since the ONS changes? Is this ever included in bid processes?**
 - o *We haven't heard anything yet, nor have any of our forums. We will keep monitoring any potential impacts on grant bid processes.*
- **Are we in a position to better forecast LSA recruitment and requirements?**
 - o *Yes, within next year's budget we have built in an increased budget. It is difficult to forecast these requirements due to fluctuating student numbers with support needs.*

Action	By Whom	Deadline
Finance Director to add 30 day average to future reports.	ML	October 2024

The Board approved the management accounts.

6.3 2024/25 Budget including Pay Award

The Finance Director presented the proposed budget for the 2024/25 academic year, highlighting several key factors.

It was explained to the Board that the college anticipates an increase in income of £4 million, primarily due to growth in 16-18 year-old enrolments and apprenticeships. However, increased costs, particularly in staff recruitment and consumables, mean the operating surplus will be lower than the current year.

The budget includes provisions for 50 additional full-time equivalent (FTE) positions, mainly for LSAs, to support the anticipated increase in student numbers. The remainder of the roles will be distributed across various departments within the college. The budget also accounts for current recruitment gaps, ensuring that both new and existing vacancies are addressed. The minor capital budget is increased by £250k from the current year budget, with allocations to support ongoing and new projects.

It was highlighted to the committee that the budget demonstrates the college's strong financial health, with projections showing a surplus of £400,000. This surplus ensures that the college will maintain a 'Good' financial health grade, meeting all bank covenants. The budget also reflects the strategic growth in student numbers and the necessary adjustments in staffing and resources to support this growth.

- **Regarding the ESFA recurrent grant, was there any clawback this year?**
 - o *No, not this year.*
- **The staff recruitment, does that include the current recruitment gaps or is this just the new required roles?**
 - o *This includes assumptions for both.*
- **On the hard-to-recruit roles, which trades are challenging?**
 - o *Electricians and plumbers seem to be particularly challenging teaching roles to fill.*
- **On that basis, if we hit the apprenticeship numbers, do we have the staff to teach it?**
 - o *Yes, we are confident we do, but recruitment will be ongoing and remains a key focus for several reasons.*
- **The increase in exam costs, is this due to student numbers or exam board price increases?**
 - o *It includes some of both.*

[Staff members present left the room for pay award discussions]

The pay award was outlined by the Chair as detailed in the paper, explaining that the proposed pay award aims to keep the college competitive in terms of remuneration within the local area and the education sector. This is crucial for attracting and retaining talented staff.

The pay award discussion also highlighted the need for flexibility to address recruitment challenges. The Board discussed ongoing conversations at the Association of Colleges (AoC) regarding pay awards, noting that any future guidance from AoC could prompt a review of the pay award if necessary. The college remains in a strong position regarding pay within the sector, which, coupled with the positive Ofsted report, should support recruitment efforts.

The Principal's pay award was also discussed at this point, and following discussions, the Board agreed with the approach taken by the NRG committee.

[All staff members returned to the meeting at 18:20]

The Board requested a paragraph explaining how the pay award fits with the overall strategy, particularly the two different elements of the proposed increase. This would be provided as part of a confidential paper.

Action	By Whom	Deadline
A paragraph to be provided to explain pay award rationale in line with strategy	ML/JC	August 2024

The Board approved the pay award detailed within the paper.

6.4 ESFA Financial Planning model

The Finance Director explained that completion of the financial planning model was a requirement from the ESFA. The model includes growth projections in 16-19 enrolments and apprenticeships, as well as inflationary increases for high needs. The model also factors in growth for staff numbers and inflationary increases for non-pay costs. The model predicts a good financial health grade.

The Board approved the submission to the ESFA.

6.5 Lloyds Loan

The Finance Director explained the rationale behind repaying the Lloyds loan as detailed in the paper. It was noted that the changes in interest rates make holding the loan no longer a financial advantage to the college. The repayment would result in a net benefit to the college.

The Board approved the repayment of the loan.

6.6 Squash Club Lease

The Finance Director presented the report outlining the current lease arrangement with the Squash Club at Abingdon, which is due to be reviewed as it approaches expiration in 2027. It was proposed to renew the lease for an additional 20 years to maintain the longstanding positive relationship with the club. The Board discussed the potential benefits of this renewal, such as continued rental income and community engagement.

- **Is it worth putting a break clause in?**
 - o *We could do, but we don't have much rationale for requiring one.*
- **Does it impact future plans for the college?**
 - o *Very unlikely, as any developments at Abingdon, particularly in this area of the campus, would require significant changes to the parking and driveway. We have other areas we could develop before this space.*
- **Do they use our electricity?**
 - o *No, they have their own supply.*

The Board approved the renewal of the squash club lease as detailed within the paper.

7. Audit

7.1 Audit Committee update

The Chair of the Audit Committee had sent their apologies for the Board meeting. The Finance Director provided a brief overview of the meeting in their absence, explaining to the

Board that there had been updates on the assurance review of HR management and the 2024/25 & 2025/26 TIAA Audit Plan. Minor changes to the high-level risk register were discussed, with new risks to be included. A number of papers have been recommended for approval at this meeting in upcoming items.

The Board noted the verbal update.

7.2 Internal Audit Strategy 2024-26 and Audit Plan 2024-25

7.2.1 Draft Annual Strategy and Annual Plan 2024-25

The Finance Director presented the report and the internal audit plan for the 2024/25 academic year, explaining it as a risk-based approach to support the college. The areas for review were detailed to the committee, including governance, strategic planning, cyber security, key financial controls, health and safety, and business continuity.

The Board approved the report.

8.4 High Level risk register

The Finance Director presented the High-Level Risk Register, noting that it had been reviewed by the Audit Committee and recommended to the Board. It was explained to the Board that there were no significant changes. There had been minor adjustments to some of the scoring, including those related to Ofsted, which had been reduced.

- **On risk 3.9, is it marked as amber or red at the end?**
 - o *Thank you, that is an error; we will amend it.*
- **On risk 6.10, governor recruitment to meet the skills needs, should we also include the external governance review here?**
 - o *Yes, we could update to include this.*
- **On risk 6.11 we need to reflect in the change in chair of governors.**
 - o *Yes, we will update it.*
- **Regarding risk, do we capture anywhere general changes in overarching policy and how this impacts the college generally?**
 - o *We don't specifically, but it may be prudent to add something if there is a change of government, particularly if there is a risk of changes to national policy or funding.*
- **Are there any issues or concerns we have with the AoC currently?**
 - o *We generally have good faith in the AoC, which we believe is shared within the sector. There will always be others who disagree, but we see them as a supportive resource that is currently close to both the government and opposition parties.*

Action	By Whom	Deadline
New risk to be added regards a potential change in government and impact on national policy.	ML	July 2024

The Board approved the risk register.

9. Nominations, Remuneration & Governance

9.1 NRG Committee update

The NRG Committee Chair provided an update following the recent meeting. The committee discussed the terms of office for existing governors and the appointment of new governors, particularly focusing on the roles of staff and student governors who are all soon due for

renewal. The Clerk is undertaking the current required recruitment processes. The need to maintain a balanced and skilled board was also discussed.

The remuneration of the Principal and the Clerk was reviewed and compared against national benchmarks received from the AoC. The Principal's pay award was also an item for discussion, with the outcome noted confidentially.

The strategic plan, along with a SWOT analysis, was reviewed by the committee, which found it to remain relevant and robust. No major changes were recommended at this time. The Accountability Statement 2024 was reviewed by the committee and subsequently recommended for approval by written resolution.

The committee then held discussions on the review of governance documents, including the terms of reference for committees, standing orders, supporting documents, and the Declaration of Interest form for 2024. These documents were recommended by the committee to the Board.

The Board noted the verbal update.

9.2 Governance Documents

9.2.1 Standing Orders – Supporting Documents

9.2.2 Committee Terms of Reference

9.2.3 Declaration of Interest form 2024

The Clerk presented a summary of each of the Governance documents, explaining to the Board that the documents had undergone significant changes as part of the annual review. The changes have ensured the documents are reflective of the sector and current working practices. The review also combined some documents and supported more consistent and concise versions across all documents. All documents had been reviewed by the NRG committee, who were happy to recommend them to the Board.

The Board approved the Governance documents.

10. Policies

The Board reviewed the Policy Cover Sheet presented by the Clerk, outlining the changes required for each of the policies due for approval. Each of the policies had been reviewed and recommended by the relevant committee. The policies included:

- 9.1 Safeguarding Policy
- 9.2 Financial Regulations
- 9.3 Health & Safety Policy
- 9.4 2024/25 Tuition Fee Policy
- 9.5 2024/25 Sub Contractor Fees and Charging Policy
- 9.6 Link Governor Policy
- 9.7 External Governor Recruitment Policy

The Board requested a small change to be made to the Financial Regulations Policy relating to financial limits.

Action	By Whom	Deadline
Financial Regulation to be updated prior to publication	ML	July 2024

The Board approved all the above policies.

12. Future Business and Reflection

12.1 Draft Cycle of Business

The Clerk presented the draft cycle of business for the next academic year, noting no significant changes from this year.

The Board approved the report.

14. Any Other Business

Student Engagement and Link Governor Roles

Feedback was provided from the most recent student engagement held this month, which saw active contributions from all students present, despite the smaller number of attendees. It was highlighted that student engagement and satisfaction have shown significant improvement, particularly at the Abingdon campus (where this engagement was held), where recent student services initiatives have been very well received. The Student Conference held at Abingdon, featuring external speakers, was a notable success, attracting considerable student participation and positive feedback.

The Chair outlined the importance of student engagement and the Link Governor scheme. It was agreed that enhancing the link between students and governors is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and responsive governance structure.

Timings for Future Board Meetings

The schedule for future Board meetings was reviewed, with a focus on optimising timing and format to maximise attendance and engagement. Various options were considered, including adjusting the start time of Board meetings to either 5pm or 6pm, incorporating a 30-minute pre-meeting session for informal discussions and networking, and including a training item at the start of each meeting to ensure continuous professional development for Board members.

The possibility of more online committee meetings was also discussed. While recognising the benefits of in-person meetings, it was acknowledged that online meetings could offer greater flexibility, particularly for those with challenging work commitments. The Chair of each committee will have the discretion to decide the format of their meetings, balancing the need for effective communication with the practicalities of members' availability. It was generally agreed that in-person meetings should remain the default unless specific items allow for online discussion or if availability constraints make online meetings more practical.

Process to Identify a New Chair

The Chair highlighted the requirement to identify a new Chair of the Corporation by July 2025. This had been raised early to ensure a smooth transition and ample time for potential candidates to consider the role. Interested Board members are encouraged to express their interest early, allowing for thorough discussions and preparations. The current Chair emphasised the importance of continuity.

Student Governor Appreciation and Farewell

Jessie Weavers-Medina took the opportunity to thank the Board for the support and opportunity to serve as a student member over the last three academic years. Jessie expressed gratitude for the collaborative spirit and the professional development gained

through the Board's activities. The Chair and the Board members reciprocated, thanking Jessie for her valuable contributions across all committees, student engagement, and Board meetings, and wishing her well in her future endeavours.

The next Board meeting was scheduled for Thursday 10th October 2024 at 5pm.

N Handy
03/Mar/2025 10:09:21

Signature*Nick Handy*.....



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