

CORPORATION BOARD

Minutes of a meeting held on Tuesday 26th March 2024

Present

Nick Handy (Chair)
Jacqui Canton (Principal)
Edward Collett
Ben Haxton
Mackenzie Howe Nordal
Adam Mumford
Nicolas Pages
Astrid Schloerscheidt
Kathryn Schutterlin
David Walker
Carole Kitching
Amanda Tilley

In attendance

Olivier Cognard, Vice Principal Funding, Planning and Systems Improvement
Mark Lay, Finance Director
Joanne Milsom, Deputy Principal
Jack Price, Vice Principal Curriculum and Innovation
Scott Gray, Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality
Howard Stamp, Clerk and Governance Advisor

1. Apologies and items to be raised under AOB

There were apologies received from Alan Bark, Lucy Butler, Sam Wolfe and Jessie Weavers-Medina. No other apologies were received.

There were no items raised for AOB.

1.2 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 11th December 2023

The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the previous meeting.

3. Matters Arising, Written Resolutions & Action Points

The Clerk presented the paper highlighting the actions that are currently outstanding. It was noted there are a number of actions in progress with the Clerk of which many items were due for approval at this meeting following the outcome and recommendations of the External Governance review.

Two outstanding actions were agreed to be removed from the action tracker relating to adult learning. A link governor is now in place for OAL, and the Board agreed this was sufficient to receive feedback via this route as opposed to the action.

There had been no written resolutions circulated since the last meeting.

4. Marketing Presentation

The Commercial Director provided the board with a presentation on the activity of the Marketing team. The presentation covered a number of key areas including:

- An update on recruitment of staff within the Marketing team and new roles within the team structure, highlighting the positive benefit of some experienced team members working with new members of the team bringing with them different perspectives and ideas.
- An overview of the marketing mix at the college and the functions within the team
- The current methods of attraction and awareness of the college, including promotions and schools' engagement, ensuring activities have a hook and call to action for the target audiences.
- An update on the use of various social media platforms available to the college.
- The informed data and information being used by the team to track applications, offers and acceptance of offers down to curriculum level.

- A reminder of the website redesign launched in June 2023 and the ongoing review cycle into this year.
- An overview of the consistent content used across all platforms and channels to ensure coherent messaging and target reach.

The board welcomed the presentation and the insight to the marketing team and function. Members asked questions within their own areas of interest.

- **When students enrol, do you ask them ‘where they heard about us?’**
 - o *Yes, but often it is not one set item and can be a number of different engagements; this can make it difficult to prove return on investment.*
- **Are you able to capture click rates?**
 - o *Yes, for most of our platforms we are able to monitor this information and helps us to understand the different reach for promotions.*
- **Do the social media posts have direct links?**
 - o *Yes where we are able to; some platforms do not allow this but we are able to direct to a links page.*
- **Do you find school access easy?**
 - o *It depends on the careers advisor in the school. OxLEP skills hub team have also been helpful to link in with some schools.*
- **How many are there in the team?**
 - o *We have 7 now in the team, which is now where we wanted to be.*

The Board noted the presentation and asked for their thanks to be passed onto the marketing team.

5. Strategic Overview

5.1 Principals’ Report

The Principal presented the report highlighting key areas of interest for the Board since the previous meeting. This included an update on the college’s focus on TLA with a ‘back to basics’ approach to ensure all teaching and learning is meeting the Abingdon and Witney standard and is ready for an Ofsted visit.

Some key estates project updated were provided, including the refurbishment plans at Common Leys which are going ahead with some slightly amended plans following discussion with the DfE. The temporary classroom at Witney also remains in place to support the currently closure of a classroom due to ongoing investigations for the presence of RAAC. There are currently positive ongoing conversation with the DfE regards the handling of this.

It was highlighted that the college’s Accountability Statement is due to be updated in June 2024. The report sought approval from the Board for this to be delegated to the NRG committee for review with approval via written resolution to ensure the deadline is met outside of the committee cycle.

The Board approved this proposal.

- **Can you explain a bit more about the new Health & Safety Wellbeing Advisor?**
 - o *This is a new role with joint reporting lines to the Head of Health and Safety and the Head of People Services. It is to recognise that Health & Safety is not just buildings and estates but there is work we can do to support staff in their wellbeing of which in turn can help to support the overall health and safety of the college by identifying and providing preventive measures.*

Action	By Whom	Deadline
Accountability Statement to be added to the NRG agenda	Clerk	May 2024

Clerk to complete written resolution by June 2024 deadline	Clerk	June 2024
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6. Curriculum, Quality and Students

6.1 CQS Committee Update

The Chair of CQS provided a verbal update to the board following the recent meeting. This included a presentation on the Bicester Skills Construction Centre.

The changes in the qualification reforms were discussed following the presentation at the strategy day, with the large volume of courses to be reviewed and redesigned. This is being followed up through the internal curriculum development committee.

The committee discussed matters on Teaching, Learning and Assessment (TLA) with particular focus on attendance and the challenge within the sector. An update was provided on progress reviews. With the next round of reviews expected to give a good indicator for this year's achievement. Discussion was held regards the predicted English and Maths outcomes. It was explained to the committee there may be some expected changes to this years outcomes due to the change in student numbers and entry grades.

The committee discussed in detail the draft transgender guidance. The committee agreed with the SMT who felt this was a step backwards and the college remained with their clear stance and will provide feedback on the draft document issued.

The Chair outlined it was a positive meeting and committee remained confident in the direction of travel.

The Board noted the verbal update.

6.2 Student Engagement Feedback – 4th March

This event took place with one governor in attendance at the Common Leys Campus. Unfortunately, due to apologies, it was suggested notes from the event are circulated to the Board instead of the verbal update.

The Chair also reminded governors of the link governor scheme as another really good way to engage with student and the college outside of the committee cycles. Many governors had already engaged with their link areas and agreed this had been valuable.

The next engagement even was due to take place on the 18th June.

7. Finance & General Purposes

7.1 F&GP committee update

The Chair of F&GP provided a verbal update to the board following the recent meeting. This included a number of policies that had been approved by the committee recommended to this meeting.

There had been a report received from the Head of People Services to reflect on the recent changes within the team, tracking of KPIs, an update on recruitment and staff absence. The committee also held a discussion on staff wellbeing. The Head of Estates and Capital Projects also presented a report on the ongoing and completed projects including Common Leys developments and the now complete English and Maths Hub at Witney. An update was also received from the new Head of Health and Safety on key matters and KPIs including the review on the use of the Smart Log system.

Finance information and reports were presented to the committee some of which have been recommended for approval at this meeting including the current management accounts, budget for the following year and the refinancing of college loans. In addition to the usual reports, post investment appraisals for projects completed in the last 5 years were also presented to the committee., This was welcomed by the committee and provided positive update on these investments. A report was also received on the benchmarking of staff costs, highlighting the challenges and variations in the sector which can make an exercise such as this difficult to draw comparisons. The committee were assured by the detail provided and the comparisons to other colleges presented.

7.2 Management Accounts

The Finance Director presented the Management Accounts for the period to 31st January 2024, that had been recommended by the F&GP committee. The discussion focused on the accounts remaining ahead of the planned budget for the year and highlighting that cashflow does not present an issue remaining ahead of budget.

- **What is the insurance claim for?**
 - o *We had some damage caused over a weekend to equipment.*

The Board approved the Management Accounts.

7.3 Mid-Year Budget Review

The Finance Director presented a strong mid-year budget forecast which included significant increases to two main income areas. The Board were advised that the current mid-year forecast should deliver the college an ESFA financial health grade of Outstanding or at least towards the top end of a good grade.

The committee recognised this and discussed the forecast presented as a helpful update and a true and fair view of the accounts. The Board discussed the request for additional minor capital works following on from the discussion held at the Board strategy day and the update by the F&GP committee chair on investment appraisals.

The Board approved the mid-year budget review and the request for additional minor capital works.

7.4 DfE refinancing of college commercial loans

The Finance Director presented a revised report circulated at the meeting. The report outlined the refinancing of the college's commercial loans into the government, noting that the £1.5m Barclays loan can be refinanced in July 2024, however other loans could not until there was a break point in the loan agreement.

The change was presented as positive move which would result in the college paying less interest on their outstanding loans. The Board recognised the positive change for the college and associated cost savings.

The Board approves the refinancing of the £1.5m loan from Barclays to the Secretary of State for Education and resolve that:

- authority is delegated to the Chair and Principal (the "Authorised Officers") to approve the form of loan agreement (and all documents referred to in the loan agreement and/or ancillary to the loan agreement) (together "the Transaction Documents") with any amendments that the Authorised Officers in their absolute discretion think fit;

- the Authorised Officers are authorised to sign (either together or individually as may be required), deliver and perform the Transaction Documents and/or to witness the affixing of the College seal to any Transaction Documents (as maybe required); and
- the Authorised Officers be and are authorised to do all such acts and things in connection with the Transaction Documents, including the execution of documents, certificates and notices (or if relevant, any drawdown request) in such form, and including such amendments, as they (acting jointly and severally), see fit.

7.5 Update on curriculum planning and forecast

The Vice Principal for Funding, Planning & Systems Improvement presented a forecast overview of the curriculum plan for the next academic year. The 16-19 growth was explained to the committee, including an indication that this is of which is expected to continue into next year resulting in another potential in year growth payment. There is also an expected increase to Apprentice numbers particularly in the construction skills sector.

- **Is growth always better? Or are there targets for particular areas?**
 - *Overall growth is usually better, however there are some areas we have to be mindful of capacity. And we are monitoring numbers at Witney as we have previous seen greater growth at Abingdon.*
- **How is this data being used more strategically?**
 - *It is something we always consider and helps us to review capital investment*
- **The growth we are seeing, where is this from?**
 - *This is a mix of demographics and some changes to curriculum meaning our retention of students is for longer on programmes such as T levels. We are then also seeing growth in our market share in the local area. We are also looking far forward at the potential in years to come of any demographic declines and how we can mitigate these early.*

The Board noted the report.

8. Audit

8.1 Audit Committee update

The Chair of the Audit Committee provided a short verbal update from the recent audit committee. It was explained that this can often be a shorter due to the timing of audit cycles. There were no policies due for approval at this meeting.

There was a review of performance for the external auditors, with some discussion around the in-person activities compared to remote audit work to help better understand the business processes. There was an update provided against ongoing audits including an audit of the ESFA Earning Adjustment Statement (EAS). Other ongoing audits either complete or in progress included HR, estates, and subcontracting.

The high-level risk register was discussed, with 4 items having the risk grading reduced. This had been recommended to the Board for approval.

The Board noted the verbal update.

8.2 High Level Risk Register

The Finance Director presented the high-level risk register, drawing attention to the 4 risk gradings that have been reduced due to the strong financial position of the college.

The Board approved the high-level risk register.

9. Nominations, Remunerations & Governance

9.1 NRG committee update

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The Chair of the NRG committee provided a short verbal update of the recent meeting. There were a number of policies to review, and all were recommended for approval at this meeting. The appraisal of the Chair would usually be discussed at this meeting however as the Chair has recently been appointed this was deferred until the summer cycle at which point the clerk would gather feedback from members.

There was a review of the terms of office and committee memberships with a small change to committee members of which will be communicated to individuals. The committee also reviewed the Draft External Governance review of which was received as a fair review, with many of the recommendations already being followed up by the Clerk. A summary of the report would be published on the website.

There was a lot of information provided at this meeting due to the large number of governing documents for review. The discussion was detailed and positive from all members with suggested amendments to each of the governing documents worked through. The committee reviewed the Instruments and Articles of Governance and the new Standing Orders, which have now been recommended to this meeting for review. The supporting documents from the Standing Orders have been recommended for further review by the next NRG committee and subsequent Board meeting.

The Board noted the verbal update.

9.2 Review of Governance Documents Cover Sheet

9.3 Revised Instruments & Articles of Governance

9.4 Revised Standing Orders

The Clerk presented the revised Articles and Instruments of Governance and the revised Standing Orders both of which had been through detailed discussion and review as part of the NRG committee and recommended to the Board.

It was explained that further work was being undertaken on the supporting documents of the standing orders to be brought for approval in the next Board cycle.

The Board approved both revised documents and agreed with the approach to a further review of the supporting documents.

9.5 External Governance Review Draft Final Report

9.6 External Governance Review Draft Recommendations

The Clerk presented the final draft of the External Governance review. There was agreement that the report provided a fair and accurate record of current governance at the college, however some members felt it lacked some recognition of positive ongoing governance work in some areas. The recommendations provided were discussed and agreed by the board to be taken forward by the Clerk. One key action agreed was a Governor Skills audit to be undertaken by all members.

The Board agreed to accept the report and publish a short summary to the website.

Action	By Whom	Deadline
External Governance review summary to be added to the website	Clerk	May 2024

10. Policies

10.1 Policies Cover Sheet

The Chair outlined the policies that had been reviewed through the committee cycle. There were no further questions raised.

- 10.1 Delegation Framework
- 10.2 Governance Assessment and Quality Improvement
- 10.3 Board Confidentiality
- 10.4 Governor Expenses Reimbursement
- 10.5 Reserves Policy
- 10.6 Staff Relocation Expenses Policy
- 10.7 Revised Family Friendly Relocation Policy
- 10.8 Fire Safety Policy

The Board approved all policies and agreed for the Staff Relocation Expenses and Family Friendly policies to be delegated to the F&GP committee and the new Fire Safety Policy to be delegated to the SMT.

11. Future Business

11.1 2024/25 Board and Committee Dates

The Board approved the calendar of dates for the next academic year.

12. Any Other Business

There was no AOB raised.

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Thursday 4th July held at Common Leys campus from 5pm.

Approved for signature: 26/03/2024

N Handy
 10/07/2024 10:11:19
 Signature *Nick Handy*

Date 10/07/2024



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Email	nick.handy@abingdon-witney.ac.uk
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