CORPORATION BOARD

Minutes of a meeting held on Thursday 12 December 2024
Abingdon Campus at 5pm

Present
Nick Handy (Chair)
Alan Bark
Jacqui Canton (Principal)
Nicolas Pages
Astrid Schloerscheidt
Ben Haxton
Adam Mumford
David Walker
Abigail Kyei
Sam Wolfe
Carole Kitching
Amanda Tilley
Ed Collett

In attendance
Jo Milsom, Deputy Principal
Olivier Cognard, Vice Principal
Scott Gray, Vice Principal
Jack Price, Vice Principal
Kash Barlow, Vice Principal
Mark Lay, Finance Director
Howard Stamp, Clerk & Governance Advisor (Minutes)

1. Apologies and items to be raised under AOB
1.2 Declarations of interest

The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming all attendees and noting the apologies received. Apologies were received from Mackenzie Nordal-Howe, Helen Brown, and Lucy Butler, who had recently resigned as a governor due to professional commitments. The Chair extended thanks for her contributions.

The resignation of the Clerk and Governance Advisor was also noted, with recruitment for the role already underway.

Items raised under Any Other Business (AOB) included feedback from the Student Governor meeting, focusing on recent engagement activities and their outcomes, and an update on the progress of recruiting a new Chair, which remains a priority to ensure strong leadership continuity.

A declaration of interest was made from all staff members present in relation to item 8.4 Update of 24/25 Financial Forecast and Pay Award.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 4th July 2024
2.1 Public Minutes

The minutes from the previous meeting were approved.

3. Matters Arising, Written Resolutions & Action Points

The Clerk confirmed that most action points had been addressed, updates on the skills audit remain pending, with further progress anticipated before the next meeting.

4. Safeguarding Update & Refresher Training

The Head of Student Services presented an in-depth **safeguarding update**, highlighting key areas:

- **Enhanced Early Help Focus**: Staff are encouraged to adopt a proactive approach to identifying and addressing safeguarding concerns at an earlier stage, fostering a

safer environment. A training video was shared with governors, illustrating best practices for early intervention and the importance of professional curiosity.

- **Mandatory Training Completion**: A total of 570 staff members completed updated safeguarding training, which included modules addressing new risks and challenges. Statistics showed a 25% increase in safeguarding referrals, reflecting heightened awareness and proactive reporting by staff.
- **Key Updates from Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE)**: Recent changes include expanded definitions of child-on-child abuse, a stronger focus on mental health support, and guidelines for managing allegations against staff. These updates have been integrated into training and policy reviews.
- **Updated Definitions**: Safeguarding protocols now include contextual safeguarding, emphasising the impact of students' external environments on their safety and well-being.
- **Persistent Absences**: Absenteeism is being monitored closely as a potential indicator of safeguarding concerns, enabling swift interventions through early help teams.
- **Complex Challenges**: Emerging issues such as domestic abuse, sextortion, and technology-facilitated abuse require ongoing vigilance and targeted responses. Enhanced staff training has been delivered to address these areas effectively.

The Board commended the update and reiterated the importance of safeguarding as a priority area. The presentation and training video will be circulated to governors for further review and action.

5. Principal's report

The Principal presented a summary of the report, highlighting key items, including an update on the recruitment of young people, noting that 16–18 enrolments have reached 2,221, marking a third consecutive year of growth.

The challenges associated with this growth, such as an increasing number of students with complex needs, require operational adjustments to ensure adequate support.

An update on recent policy changes included the paused defunding of Level 3 qualifications, allowing colleges to maintain broader offerings. Decisions regarding Level 2 qualifications are still pending.

- **What was the feel at AoC regarding FE's role under the Government's 5 missions?**
  - The AoC is confident that Further Education will be recognised as essential, though progressing this to the Treasury is acknowledged as a challenge.
- **With an increase in SEN students, what measures are being taken to support students with complex needs?**
  - The college is increasing investment in pastoral care, employing additional support staff, and enhancing teacher training to manage diverse classroom requirements.
- **Regarding the Youth Guarantee, what is the level of NEET locally?**
  - Traditionally low, but it has been increasing. However, it is not expected to become a significant area of provision for the college.

The Board noted the report.

Curriculum, Quality and Students

6.1 CQS Committee Update

The CQS Committee Chair provided an update following the recent meeting, noting key points, including an overview of the construction faculty and approval of the Student Disciplinary Policy. An update on the curriculum developments was also provided to the committee, including the ongoing progress of Level 3 qualifications and the recruitment for new qualifications in both T Levels and HTQs.

The committee also reviewed the FE and HE Self-Assessment Reports (SAR) and Quality Improvement Plans (QIP), recommending both for approval at the Board during this meeting. The Student Report was also received by the committee, with reassuring results from the NSS survey.

The committee noted the verbal update.

6.2 Annual Equalities Report

The Deputy Principal presented the annual report, providing a detailed analysis of the college's performance in promoting equality and diversity.

Key findings from the report included an update on student demographics, with the college continuing to reflect the diversity of the local community and increased enrolments from minority ethnic groups. However, achievement gaps remain a concern for adult learners, particularly those entering at lower skill levels.

Information on staff representation was also shared, noting that efforts to improve representation among teaching and leadership staff have been moderately successful. Satisfaction surveys indicate progress in fostering an inclusive culture, though further work is needed to address concerns raised by male staff and LGBTQ+ employees.

Next steps outlined include strategies to close achievement gaps, improve data collection, and enhance the representation of minority groups in leadership roles.

Governors approved the report and commended the progress made over the past year.

6.3 Student Engagement Feedback – 28th November

Governors who attended the recent student engagement session provided feedback to the Board, commenting that the session offered valuable insights into the student experience.

Students highlighted several areas requiring improvement, including timetabling conflicts, resource shortages in construction, and the need for improvements to performing arts facilities. Concerns were also raised about outdated technology and a lack of space in some specialised classrooms. SMT members welcomed this feedback and confirmed that these issues had already been identified as priorities by the college.

Students also expressed appreciation for the accessibility of staff, the feeling of safety on campus, and the wide range of extracurricular activities available. Many students praised the sense of community and the opportunities for engagement in governance discussions.

The Governors who attended were grateful for the opportunity to meet with students and valued the session. The next session is being arranged for 25 February at the Common Leys Campus.

The Board noted the verbal update.

6.4 Further Education SAR & QIP Cover Paper
6.4.1 Further Education Self-assessment report & Quality Improvement Plan
6.4.2 SAR Workshop Notes

The Chair introduced this item, welcoming comments from those who attended the SAR workshop and acknowledging that the document had been further reviewed by the CQS Committee, which recommended it for Board approval.

The Vice Principal for Curriculum and Quality provided a brief overview of the Self-Assessment Report (SAR) and Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) previously presented at the SAR workshop. The SAR reflected an overall "Good" grading, with several departments demonstrating "Outstanding" characteristics. The QIP outlined targeted actions to address identified gaps, with key priorities including:

- Improving teaching quality in underperforming areas.
- Increasing student retention in Level 2 courses.
- Enhancing employer engagement in curriculum design.

Governors commended the comprehensive approach outlined in the QIP and appreciated the SAR workshop, which allowed time to work through the document with SMT members. It was also noted that the recent Ofsted review had been particularly helpful in informing and reflecting outcomes within the SAR.

The Board approved the SAR and QIP.

6.5 Higher Education SAR & QIP Cover Paper
6.5.1 Higher Education Self-assessment report
6.5.2 Higher Education Quality improvement plan

Following the FE SAR and QIP, the Chair acknowledged that these reports had been reviewed in detail by the CQS Committee and had been recommended to the Board for approval.

The Vice Principal for Curriculum and Innovation presented the Higher Education (HE) Self-Assessment Report (SAR) and Quality Improvement Plan (QIP), summarising key findings and actions. Strong outcomes were noted in student satisfaction and graduate employment rates, while areas for improvement included feedback turnaround times and the consistency of academic support across courses.

It was explained that the QIP focuses on improving academic support frameworks, enhancing teaching quality, and addressing disparities in student outcomes, particularly for mature and part-time learners. The plan also addresses workload distribution among academic staff and feedback raised in student surveys.

- **Land-based attendance seems low. Why is this?**
    - This has been included in the QIP for monitoring.
- **How is the college supporting mature and part-time students to improve outcomes?**

- o Tailored interventions include flexible scheduling, additional evening tutorials, and personalised learning plans. Enhanced access to online resources has also been prioritised.

Governors praised the comprehensive nature of the HE QIP and its alignment with the strategic priorities of the college.

The Board approved the HE SAR and QIP.

6.6 Annual report on quality-related student and employer complaints (FE and HE)
The Deputy Principal presented the report on student complaints related to quality of provision, noting that while there was a small increase compared to the previous year, the report remained brief, with only 14 formal complaints received during the year, primarily within the Technology faculty. As previously reported to the committee, many of these complaints were anticipated due to challenges in this curriculum area, including a high volume of students and staff recruitment difficulties.

Informal complaints were also tracked and regularly reviewed by the Senior Management Team (SMT) to identify underlying trends. Proactive engagement by middle management was noted as a key factor in preventing issues from escalating to formal complaints. The committee emphasised the importance of understanding the broader student experience beyond formal quality complaints.

An early indication of Term 1 was also provided, with no identified themes emerging at this stage.

The Board noted the report.

Financial Statements
7.0 Financial Statements to 31 July 2024
       7.1 External Auditor's Findings report (AFR) 2024
       7.2 External Auditor's Letter of representation
       7.3 Draft self-assessment of Financial propriety and regulatory 23/24
       7.4 Internal Auditors' Annual report
       7.5 Audit Committee Annual Report
       7.6 Board Assessment of Fraud Risk
       7.7 Annual Strategic Report

The Finance Director presented an overview of the financial statements included within the Board papers, providing an explanation of the purpose and content of each item required for the statutory return.

It was explained to the Board that each document had been reviewed by the F&GP and Audit Committees, with the Chair also reviewing the documents. The statements include information from both Internal and External Auditors, who provided the necessary documentation and levels of assurance required for the submission of the annual strategic report.

The variance between the financial performance for 2023/24 previously reported and the final position was explained to the Board, following advice related to the RAAC spend at the Witney campus.

Members of the Audit and F&GP Committees expressed their support in recommending these documents to the Board.

The Board approved all the financial statements presented.

Finance & General Purposes

8.1 F&GP Committee update

The F&GP Committee Chair provided an update following the recent meeting, highlighting key points, including the review of the financial statements. Other items included updates from the regular People Services reports, outlining current recruitment and retention strategies, as well as positive outcomes from the staff survey. The committee also received updates on Estates, Capital Works, and Health and Safety.

The committee reviewed the Management Accounts to September 2024 and a revised financial forecast for 2024/25, which included the proposed pay award. All items have been recommended to the Board for approval.

- **Do other colleges manage agency staff differently? Do we have many?**
  - There is currently a slight increase in agency staff, but the Talent Acquisition Team is now working in a manner similar to an agency. This approach appears to be generating positive outcomes.

The Board noted the update.

8.2 Update on 23/24 Financial Result

The Finance Director presented a brief update on the 2023/24 financial results, explaining a small adjustment to the year-end figures following advice received during the year-end processes.

The Board acknowledged the change and agreed with the financial results as presented.

The Board approved the report.

8.3 Management Accounts to 30 September 2024

The Finance Director presented an early set of management accounts, explaining that there had been minimal movement from the previous reports received.

- **Do we have any certainty that NI employers' contributions will be covered by the government?**
  - Yes, we have received confirmation.

The Board approved the management accounts.

8.4 Update of 24/25 Financial Forecast and Pay Award

The Finance Director presented a revised financial forecast for the 2024/25 academic year, explaining to the Board this would not usually be presented this early in the year, however the report contains the pay award for approval and therefore adjustments to the previously reported forecast.

Some key areas of the report were highlighted including potential for change on the Element 3 budget assumptions for high needs income. The pay costs and Non pay cost were also explained.

The Board approved the revised financial forecast and approved the additional pay award.

Audit
9.1 Audit Committee Update
The Audit Committee Chair provided a comprehensive update on the recent Audit Committee meeting, highlighting key discussions and decisions. The committee received both the Internal and External Audit Reports, presented by their respective auditors. The reports were reviewed, and no major concerns were raised regarding the college's SICA.

An update was provided on the ILR audits and the EAS audit. The EAS findings identified four errors to be corrected by the college. It was noted that these were among the first EAS audits conducted by the ESFA.

The committee reviewed the College High-Level Risk Register, which had been recommended to the Board, alongside reports on the use of the College Seal and subcontracting arrangements.

Similar to the F&GP Committee, the Audit Committee reviewed the financial statements and received a verbal update from the Chair of F&GP on behalf of their committee. The Audit Committee recommended the statements for approval by the Board.

The Board noted the update.

9.2 High level risk register
The Finance Director presented the High-Level Risk Register, which had been reviewed by the Audit Committee and recommended to the Board for approval.

The Board approved the report.

10 Nominations, Remuneration & Governance
10.1 NRG Committee Update
The Chair of the NRG Committee provided a brief update. While the committee was not scheduled to meet during this cycle, a short meeting had taken place to discuss the recruitment process for the Clerk's role. Recruitment is now underway, with interviews expected in January.

The Board noted the update.

11 Policies
11.0 Policies Cover Sheet
      11.1 Data Protection
      11.2 Fraud Prevention Policy
      11.3 Value for Money
      11.4 Student Disciplinary Policy

The Clerk presented the policies for approval, explaining that each had been reviewed by the relevant committee and recommended to the Board for approval.

There were no further questions following the committee reviews.

The Board approved all policies presented.

12. Any Other Business

The Chair reminded Board members of the requirement for succession planning for a new Chair of the Corporation, as their term is due to end in July 2025.

The next Board meeting was scheduled for Thursday 27th March 2025 at 5pm.

N Handy

Signature *Nick Handy* …………………………………………………

16/06/2025

Envelope Details

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