

**Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Corporation held on
Tuesday, 06 October 2020 at 5:00pm via Teams Conferencing**

Present:

- John Barnett
- Tom Crompton
- Pamela Dawson
- Louise Doyle
- Louise Farthing (until item 22)
- Sue Houston
- Alison Shaw
- Jeff Hope
- Jacqueline Steed (from item 13)
- Rob Lawson (Chair) (present at Bede Campus)
- Paul McEldon
- Iesha Heads, SU President
- Susan Pollard
- Ralph Saelzer
- Ellen Thinnesen, Chief Executive

In Attendance:

- Jill Colbert, Governor
- David Howells, Chief Operating Officer
- Vikkie Morton, Vice Principal Student Services and Registry
- Iain Nixon, Vice Principal Partnerships and Commercial
- Jane Thompson, Director of Apprenticeships (for item 24)
- Christine Stretesky, Head of Corporate Governance and Policy (present at Bede Campus)

The Chair described the protocol for the meeting and all agreed to proceed in that manner.

This item was taken out of order.

Bd/20-21/10 Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and noted new members joining for the first time included Iesha Heads (SU President), Pam Dawson, Sue Houston and Jacqueline Steed with Governor Jill Colbert attending as an observer. The Chair asked all to introduce themselves.

Bd/20-21/09 Apologies and consent for absence and declarations of interest

Apologies were accepted from Derek Cogle.

It was noted that Alison Shaw and Louise Doyle have a potential conflict with the item to be discussed during AOB and will leave the meeting just prior to item 32. There were no other declarations of interest made.

Bd/20-21/11 Minutes of the meeting held on 30 June 2020 and Matters Arising

The Chair asked if there were any necessary changes and hearing none the minutes were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting.

The following matter arising was discussed:

Item number Bd/19-20/114: VP Student Services and Registry to determine whether a percentage can be provided on the short courses or qualifications that were cut during curriculum planning.

The VP Student Services and Registry stated that for all colleges, 91 courses that were offered in the previous academic year have been removed with 41 removed from Sunderland College, 7 removed from Hartlepool Sixth Form and 43 removed from Northumberland College.

Bd/20-21/12 Minutes of the meeting held on 28 July 2020 and Matters Arising

The Chair asked if there were any necessary changes to the minutes; a couple minor changes were suggested with the minutes accepted as an accurate record of the meeting.

The following matter arising was discussed:

Item number Bd/20-21/002: The AP Resources and Legal Services and Head of Corporate Governance & Policy (H CG&P) to discuss removal of additional characteristics to remove as they appear to be related to students and this was a staff facing policy.

The H CG&P stated the two met to discuss and decided that as some of the characteristics would be useful to know from a staff perspective (such as carers) there is no merit in removing them from the table contained in policies and procedures. Further, staff developing policy/procedures should not pick and choose which characteristics to keep or delete as the EIA is an opportunity to really think about who is affected by a policy and sometimes students may be (positively or negatively) indirectly affected by a policy that would be considered staff facing.

Governor Steed joined the meeting at this time

Bd/20-21/13 COVID Risk and Recovery Strategy Update Report

The Chief Executive (CE) delivered the update, first providing a summary of the Group's response to lockdown. The CE continued highlighting the four operational models senior leadership use to guide operations at different stages and the use of the comprehensive risk assessment framework to ensure safety for students and staff. The CE stated that Government has requested completed contingency plans from all colleges and Group leadership are working to complete those plans. This work will allow senior leaders to report on the IT and other resource demands on the Group during this time.

The CE described the work being done with students regarding the importance to safe practices such as mask wearing and social distancing. The CE continued stating that bubbles are created in classrooms, with teaching staff 2m away from students noting it was not possible to have each student 2m apart but classrooms are set up to comply with Government guidelines.

Providing up to date figures on live cases, the CE stated that she and the Vice Principal Student Services & Registry are leading on communications with Public Health England and local authorities.

The Board asked whether teaching is affected by lecturers calling in absent due to needing to self-isolate. The CE stated that there is an impact on lecturer numbers and where a lecturer notifies the Group they are isolating senior and middle managers need to quickly mobilise and make a risk-based decision on how to proceed with learning. She continued stating that it is a challenge and information around this is being shared with the ESFA.

The Board challenged the Group promoting staff to use face visors in light of recent studies saying visors are not effective. The CE stated that senior leaders have debated this issue and have discussed the guidance from the DfE, Scottish government and Public Health England. Staff are able to make the decision for themselves, though they are expected to maintain 2m between themselves and the student bubbles. For staff working with SEND students where 2m cannot be achieved, staff are required to comply with DfE guidelines.

The Board asked how senior leaders and staff are coping with the new academic year and workloads. The CE stated that senior leaders wax and wane at certain points but are very resilient. She stated they are very good about picking up work of others that need the help, but also are able to recharge over the weekends. With regard to teaching and support staff, she stated that you can see when they are feeling especially taxed and there have been some that were very anxious about returning to site. She noted the incredible challenges support services have had with exam results issues which was then followed by enrolment. Senior leaders have ensured that support is in place through occupational health, coffee chats and posts on WorkPlace.

The Board asked whether Governors are discouraged from coming onto sites. The CE stated that the Group have very rigorous protocols for visitors and we are being careful with onsite visits and are encouraging virtual engaging.

AGREED: to note the content of the report

Bd/20-21/14 Ofsted Visit

The Chair noted the change in the agenda with the removal of the item regarding KPIs to be replaced with this item on the Ofsted visit.

The CE stated that Ofsted inspectors will be arriving at the Group tomorrow and will spend two days with Group staff and students. She stated that this is not an inspection, but a visit which will focus on three themes all around actions senior leaders are taking to ensure the curriculum is appropriate, how we are building skills and knowledge appropriate to the needs of learners and the risks around online learning. The CE described the specific areas to be of focus in detail including business continuity, the current state of curriculum implementation, subcontracting arrangements, and COVID protocols and procedures. She concluded by saying senior leaders are confident and looking forward to having the inspectors here to share with them the Group's journey.

AFREED: to note the information presented in the update

Bd/20-21/15 Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy

The Vice Principal Student Services and Registry (VP SS&R) presented the updated policy highlighting:

- Governors are required to review the policy on an annual basis
- Safeguarding in Education was updated in September 2020 and is reflected within the presented policy
- Prof Pam Dawson has taken on lead governor role for Safeguarding

The SU President asked whether a tab for Safeguarding could be developed for the various student used virtual learning environments to provide students with information on who to contact with concerns. The VP SS&R stated that that can be done.

Noting the data provided within the report, the Board asked for context. The VP SS&R explained the reporting cycle for Safeguarding data and the trend over the last three years of an increase in concerns around mental health. As the report provides information on bullying incidents, in response to the increase in issues at Kirkley Hall an action plan has been put in place.

The Board requested the next report to include a year on year comparison to help members understand the journey the Group has been on. Governor Barnett noted that it is very difficult to see trends with safeguarding data and it is more important to understand what the current numbers indicate rather than whether they have increased or decreased from the previous year.

The Chair thanked Governor Dawson for taking on the role of lead governor for Safeguarding.

AGREED: to approve changes to the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy

Bd/20-21/16 Management Accounts

The Chief Operating Officer (COO) presented the accounts noting that they have previously been to the Finance, Resources and Projects Committee. Stating that he assumes all to have read, the COO asked if there were any questions.

The Board noted the comprehensiveness of the report and its accessibility and queried how senior leaders share with the Board the action plans to deal with improving the financial position of the Group. The COO responded by describing the number of submissions made during the financial year to the ESFA that are first presented to the Board along with the workshops on those submissions for members.

The Board challenged the reference to HE loan fee activity under the narrative around advance learner loans and why that is mentioned. The COO explained that that is a legacy issue from the merger as the Group made certain assumptions with regard to Northumberland College planned targets. As this was the first full year after the merger, the COO stated this will not be seen in future management accounts.

AGREED: to note the content of the report

Bd/20-21/17 Students' Union Report

The SU President reported that whilst in post she has been busy making posters to recruit for student governors and student council members, and posters to raise awareness of the students' union and student council. She also reported that she is developing leaflets and booklets on mental health for students.

The Board noted that importance of information on mental health at this time.

AGREED: to note the content of the report

Bd/20-21/18 Special Education Needs and Disabilities Report

The VP SS&R delivered the report stating it provides an overview of where we are in the beginning of the new academic year and highlighting:

- The Group has increased to 81 high needs students (an increase of 11% from last year) which equates to £1,108,200 of funding
- The Group has 298 students with Education Health Care Plans which is a 60% increase from last year with a higher percentage of males than females and predominantly white background
- There are 1,316 declarations of learners with learning disabilities or difficulties; this figure will likely increase during the academic year
- There are currently 470 students (16-18/19+) identified for support; this figure will continue to increase over the academic year
- There is a 15% increase in funding to the College from last year

The VP SS&R provided information on the strategic agreement with Prosper Learning Trust and announced that the new SEND centre at Kirkley Hall will open in January. She also noted the planned development of a new independent skills hub at Bede Campus.

The Board queried whether there was adequate funding to support those students with learning difficulties. The VP SS&R provided her opinion that there was, especially for high needs students, and noted that the Group was very good at utilising resources for learners with learning difficulties.

Concerned over the students who missed out on learning after lockdown, the Board asked whether students will be receiving one to one tuition. The VP SS&R stated that the Group are currently finalising plans for the funding received from Government to give extra tutoring and the plans are focusing on small group tuition in English and maths to be delivered across the colleges.

The Board questioned the cause of the increase in numbers of students with high needs and ENCPs asking whether it is due to improved identification of SEND needs or something about this specific cohort. The VP SS&R explained that the Group has better partnerships with the Local Authorities meaning more students are being sent to us and due to COVID some students were not able to progress and have returned to college.

The Board asked whether there are any concerns with being able to meet specific learner needs during COVID. The VP SS&R stated that individual risk assessments were conducted for each learner to ensure safety and support is in place. The Group has an increase in numbers of students with sensory needs and have brought in agency staff to help with that.

The Board noted its pleasure in seeing the estates work at both Kirkley Hall and Bede Campus. The CE reminded the Board that the Group must be ambitious for all of our learners including our most vulnerable and improving our facilities will help with that.

AGREED: to note the content of the report

Bd/20-21/19 Recommendations from Committees and Board decisions via Email

The Head of Corporate Governance & Policy presented the items to be confirmed stating that there was an additional item from the Governance Committee who recommend the reappointment of John Barnett as Governor and Chair of Sunderland Local Governing Board.

AGREED to:

Affirm the following Board decisions:

- Appointment of following Governors:
 - Pamela Dawson
 - Sue Houston
 - Jacqueline Steed
- entry of the Tait Walker contract

Governance:

- Appointment of Lyndsey O'Leary as Chair of Audit Committee and member of the Board of Corporation
- Reappointment of John Barnett as member and Chair of the Sunderland Local Governing Board

Audit:

- Terms of Reference
- Business Continuity Framework Policy
- Move 3 December meeting to 14 January

Finance, Resources and Projects:

- Terms of Reference

Sunderland Local Governing Board:

- Appointment of Jill Colbert as Vice Chair and member of the Board of Corporation

Bd/20-21/20 Confidential minutes of the meetings held on 30 June 2020 and Matters Arising

This item was determined to be confidential with separate minutes maintained.

Bd/20-21/21 Confidential minutes of the Special Meeting held 28 July 2020 and Matters Arising

This item was determined to be confidential with separate minutes maintained.

Governor Farthing left the meeting during this item

Bd/20-21/22 Gateshead College Update

This item was determined to be confidential with separate minutes maintained.

Bd/20-21/23 Carlcroft Farm - Lease

This item was determined to be confidential with separate minutes maintained.

Bd/20-21/24 Apprenticeship Performance Summary (Sub-contracted and College Provision)

This item was determined to be confidential with separate minutes maintained.

Bd/20-21/25 Enrolment Against Targets Report (EPNE) (all funding streams)

This item was determined to be confidential with separate minutes maintained.

Bd/20-21/26 Results and Appeals Update (all levels and programmes) (all levels)

This item was determined to be confidential with separate minutes maintained.

Bd/20-21/27 Estates Strategy Update

This item was determined to be confidential with separate minutes maintained.

Bd/20-21/28 Data Protection Update

This item was determined to be confidential with separate minutes maintained.

Bd/20-21/29 Farewell and Thanks to Ralph Saelzer

The Chair went through Ralph's history with the College specifically noting the many appointments on committees, his willingness to volunteer when asked, his desire to hear from students and the comradery he always displayed. Thanking him for his service, he stated it was a pleasure to have him on the Board and wished him all the best.

Governor Saelzer thanked the Chair for his kind words and stated that it has been an amazing journey. After reflecting on his time as a governor, he stated that there is a great team in place and thanked the Group for letting him be part of it.

Bd/20-21/30 Papers from Committees

From the Audit Committee the Internal Auditors' Annual Report

AGREED: to note receipt of the paper

Bd/20-21/31 Draft Minutes of the following Committees

- Finance, Resources & Projects Committee
- Audit Committee
- NC Education Quality & Innovation Committee

AGREED: to note receipt of the draft minutes

The Chair asked Governors Doyle and Shaw to leave the meeting for the next item.

Bd/20-21/32 Any Other Business

This item was determined to be confidential with limited distribution and minutes have been maintained separately.

Bd/20-21/33 Date, time and venue of next meeting

- 15 December 2020, 5:00pm, Teams Conference

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 19:42.