

**Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Corporation held on
Tuesday, 09 February 2021 at 5:00pm via Teams Conferencing**

Present:

John Barnett
Derek Cogle
Jill Colbert
Tom Crompton
Pamela Dawson
Louise Doyle
Louise Farthing
Sue Houston
Alison Shaw
Jeff Hope
Jacqueline Steed
Lyndsey O'Leary
Rob Lawson (Chair) (present at Bede Campus)
Paul McEldon
Iesha Heads, SU President
Susan Pollard
Ellen Thinnesen, Chief Executive

In Attendance:

Louise Bradford, Governor – Sunderland Local Governing Board (items 69 & 70)
David Howells, Chief Operating Officer
Nigel Harrett, Principal Northumberland College
Judith Quinn, Interim Deputy Principal Curriculum
Vikkie Morton, Vice Principal Student Services and Registry
Iain Nixon, Vice Principal Partnerships and Commercial
Lee Lister, Vice Principal Quality and Curriculum
Jane Thompson
Christine Stretesky, Head of Corporate Governance and Policy (present at Bede Campus)

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting asking the group to engage in an exercise to think differently.

Bd/20-21/61 Apologies and consent for absence and declarations of interest

No apologies were received.

No declarations of interest were made.

Bd/20-21/62 Minutes of the meeting held on 15 December 2020 and Matters Arising

The minutes were approved as an accurate reflection of the 15 December 2020 meeting subject to the inclusion of Governor O'Leary's attendance and minor changes in the recording of the CEO's Report.

The Head of Corporate Governance & Policy noted the following matters arising:

Bd/20-21/40 CEO Report:

Head of Corporate Governance & Policy (HOCG&P) to deliver paper to Governance Committee on the Dame Mary Ney Report: this has been completed with an outcome of individualised training plans for each governor to be produced.

The Interim Deputy Principal Curriculum to add HE specific targets to the KPIs – this has been completed.

Bd/20-21/41 Risk Register Review:

Risk 5: the COO and Governor Steed are to meet to discuss splitting of the risk. This has not occurred due to the availability of Governor Steed.

Risk 6: Interim Deputy Principal Curriculum to add HE partners to the risk which has been completed.

The Chair stated that at the last National Leaders of Governance meeting, the FE White paper was discussed and a good one-sheet paper was provided. The Chair asked the HOCG&P to share the paper with members. (ACTION: HOCG&P)

Bd/20-21/63 Minutes of the Joint Meeting held on 26 January 2021

The minutes were approved as an accurate reflection of the 26 January 2021 Joint Meeting of the Board of Corporation and Finance, Resources and Projects Committee subject to the inclusion of Governor O'Leary's attendance.

This item was taken out of order to allow for sufficient time to discuss

Bd/20-21/79 Any Other Business: SU President Report

The Chief Executive (CE) stated that this is the first time a Students' Union president is delivering student feedback from college surveys stating her hope to have students presenting student feedback as it is important for governors to hear directly from the students. She noted that senior leaders will continue to deliver reports providing breakdowns of the data and actions arising therefrom.

The SU President started her presentation sharing her screen to present the results of the recent QDP survey and other student feedback highlighting:

- The Students' Union logos have been created and are being used
- The approach undertaken to receive student feedback includes the QDP Survey (21 questions), focus groups, walks and talks, and student council meetings
- From the QDP, the areas the students report the College is doing well includes guidance, knowing where to go for help with problems, feeling safe whilst at college, use of digital

learning materials, teaching on course, learning paced correctly, satisfaction with course, and feedback

- Further input from students showing areas of student satisfaction include guidance, friendly staff, resources and help with UCAS applications
- From the QDP, the areas the students have reported the College needs to improve include ease of enrolment, awareness of health and safety procedures, timetables, and achieving goals
- Further input from students around areas to improve include clearer messages around the use of face masks, communication from lecturers around progress and what is needed to improve grades

The SU President reported that in response to the student feedback she has produced videos reinforcing the COVID measures in place at College, invited the Director of Health and Safety to student council meetings, co-designed a Next Step activity with Careers Advisors, invited the Learning Innovation team to meetings to review how students are supported in remote learning and meeting with a Senior Manager from City Campus to discuss concerns from those students.

Governor Barnett, as Health & Safety Lead Governor invited the SU President to join he and the Director of Health & Safety at their next meeting to ensure that measures are in place to help make students feel safe at college. The CE recommended focusing on City Campus noting the high numbers of students at that campus.

The SU President stated that she will need to consult with the Student Council in response to a question from the Board on which areas/actions the students would like prioritised. The Board continued, requesting that students be asked their opinion on how they are progressing equality and diversity issues with all of the limitations currently being experienced.

The Board asked how the COVID video was shared with the wider student body. The SU President responded that it was shared on all social media pages.

The Board asked for confirmation that the named member of staff praised in the feedback is aware that the students have expressed their appreciation. The VP Student Services & Registry stated that she would ensure they were made aware.

The Board noted concern with the feedback on enrolment agreeing that action must be taken.

The VP SS&R provided an overview of the response from senior management to the student feedback including convening an Enrolment Steering Group to focus on in-person enrolment and which courses are best to enrol online, reviewing timetabling guidance to ensure best student experience, reinforcing COVID key messages, hosting Meet & Exceed weeks and reviewing ways to best provide catch up support using the small grant funds designated for that support. Local Boards get the feedback broken down for each college, 16-18, HE and apprenticeships.

The Board asked if it was clear that the College has access to the Government catch-up funding. The VP SS&R responded that the College has received in the region of £500k for catch up funding and detailed plans are in place for each curriculum area.

AGREED: to note the content of the update

Bd/20-21/64 CEO Report

This item was determined confidential with separate minutes maintained.

Bd/20-21/65 COVID Student Support and Examinations

The VP Student Services and Registry (VP SS&R) presented the update highlighting:

- The College has identified 639 students that meet the Government's criteria for vulnerable students of which 103 are attending college regularly for face to face support
- Students on site are being supported through access to Learning Centre facilities, support with academic work, activities for breaks and downtime, and enhanced pastoral support
- Enhanced pastoral support is in place for those learning remotely
- Counselling team continue to provide counselling support
- Those students eligible for free school meals are receiving weekly payments to their bank accounts
- The Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy has been revised to accommodate changes required due to lockdown
- The College has allocated 289 devices to students from College resources and has recently received the first round of Chromebooks and laptops from the Government
- We received 604 devices on Friday and the first set will be going to NC and out to students starting on Thursday and Friday
- The exams that were cancelled in January and the plan to continue with undertaking those practical exams and assessments which are required to demonstrate occupational competence for employment and apprenticeships such as AAT, Functional English Skills, and VetSkills with safety measures in place
- The College submitted a response to the Government's consultation on examinations

The Board asked with big telecom companies offering free data to disadvantaged students up to Year 11 if there was anything available for students in FE provision. The VP SS&R responded that Vodafone has sent a large number of data cards which will be distributed to students and the Group has used bursary funding to help students pay for data and internet.

The Board requested a comparison to the number of students currently receiving counselling services compared to this time last year. The VP SS&R responded that it is marginally higher this year but assured the Board that there is no waiting list and all students needing counselling are receiving it. She continued that the attendance rate for online counselling sessions is higher than what was found with face to face sessions. The Board noted that there are practices being used due to lockdown that should be carried forward.

The Board sought assurance that the Group is taking steps to increase ventilation in buildings being used for activities on campus. The VP SS&R stated that staff and students are encouraged to open windows in rooms and building management systems have been modified in a number of ways including turning ventilation systems on earlier in the day.

The Board challenged senior leaders on the number of students considered vulnerable and eligible to attend college on site and whether enough was being done to encourage on site attendance. The VP SS&R explained that staff rang every student to let them know that they can attend on site.

She continued that some parents did not want the students to come onto campus because of their or a family members vulnerability to COVID. Young carers were identified as another group that could not come onto campus and the VP SS&R stated that those students were prioritised to ensure that they had access to devices and internet to be able to learn remotely and enhanced support for those vulnerable students not on site has been put in place.

The Board noting the length of the current lockdown and noting that large numbers of these students are on EHCPs, asked whether it would be beneficial to have another contact to persuade them to come onsite. The VP SS&R reassured the Board that those that are the most vulnerable are attending onsite; it is those students with EHCPs in mainstream programmes that are staying off site but agreed to reconnect with families after half term.

The Board asked whether the number of laptops available for students reflected in the report includes those provided from the Department for Education. The VP SS&R stated that the Group has more laptops than what is reported as we have recently received the DfE devices. The devices are being delivered to campuses in Northumberland and distribution to students has started. In response to a question from the Board around the number of students left without access to a device once all devices are distributed, the VP SS&R stated that all students needing equipment for remote learning will have access to equipment. The Board extended its thanks to the IT Team for their work in distributing equipment to students.

The Board asked for the number of students affected by the technical and vocational education and training exams that will be held and the number of students opting out of sitting exams. The VP SS&R reminded the Board that the January exams were cancelled, though there are 31 exams scheduled affecting a total of 149 students. Seven have taken place so far and we expected 69 students with 65 attending.

AGREED: to note the content of the report

Bd/20-21/66 Continuation of HE Teaching and Learning in Lockdown Report

The Interim Deputy Principal Curriculum delivered the report highlighting:

- The purpose of the report is to provide Governors assurance of the additional steps taken across the Group around HE teaching to ensure ongoing compliance with Office for Students requirements in relation to consumer protection law
- The Group have continued quality reviews of the student experience through remote learning since March 2020; which provide evidence that the Group can offer quality remote teaching and learning
- HE teaching and learning has been provided through remote delivery since January 2021
- EPNE must inform students about their options for refunds or other forms of redress where it has not been possible to provide what was promised; students were encouraged to take any issue up with their lead first, but failing that the complaints and compliments procedure has been supplemented with lockdown specific information and made available on the College VLEs and through a faculty programme letter sent to each HE student
- Since January a compliance review has been taking place against each HE programme to reduce the risk of students requesting redress or refunds due to the pandemic lockdown
- No major risks have been identified and no formal complaints received due to remote teaching

- The Group continues to meet compliance with consumer protection law and will continue to monitor that. review risks and put in appropriate mitigation

Noting the formal quality review mechanisms described in the paper, the Bard asked for information on the less formal mechanisms in place to determine quality and impact to the student. The Interim Deputy Principal described the informal mechanisms as students being encouraged to speak with lecturers and programme leads holding conversations at the programme level to hear both positive and negative feedback. She continued that the virtual learning walks include conversations with students and that students are invited to provide written feedback.

AGREED: to note the content of the report

Bd/20-21/67 Modern Slavery Act Statement

The Head of Corporate Governance & Policy (HOCG&P) noted that the Modern Slavery Statement is an annual statement reflecting the Group's commitment and practices around preventing acts of modern slavery. The statement has been updated from last year to include the appropriate figures for number of employees and annual income.

AGREED: to approve the Modern Slavery Statement 2021 for Chief Executive signature and publication on the Group website

Bd/20-21/68 Affirmations and Recommendations

The HOCG&P reminded members of the decisions recently made via electronic mail stating this item is to affirm those decisions.

Noting that it was great to see a recognition for the need for BAME representation amongst members, the Board asked if there were any plans to broaden representation on the Northumberland Local Board or is there a believe that representation is adequate.

The HOCG&P responded that there are no plans to increase the membership of the Northumberland Local Board but that should a vacancy occur, consideration will be given by the Governance Committee on candidates with diverse backgrounds as well as a stronger position of inclusion, seeking a person representing underrepresented groups within the local community. She continued that when we recruit the Chair this year, the recruitment agency selected will be tasked with widening the reach of their efforts to bring forward a diverse group of candidates, just as they were asked with the last two rounds of governor recruitment. (ACTION: discuss BAME representation on NC at Governance Committee)

The Board affirmed the following decisions:

- Appointment of Toni Rhodes as Sunderland Principal
- RE-appointment of K Ramanathas (Ram) as Sunderland Local Board member

AGREED: to affirm the Board decisions previously made via electronic mail

Bd/20-21/69 Strategic Partnerships Update

This item was determined confidential with separate minutes maintained.

Bd/20-21/70 Lead Governor Update: Reputation and Engagement

The Chair welcomed Governor Bradford to the meeting.

Governor Bradford described her areas of focus as Lead Governor noting that work around business to consumer has been done really well lately. She stated that she is working with the VP P&C, his staff and the Interim Director of Marketing to ensure that marketing is aligned with the Partnership strategic goals and that communications are developed to drive relationships. She noted that business development staff have conducted audits on strengths and development areas and the next step is to get together to discuss those and where we can use communications to effect improvement.

The Board thanked Governor Bradford for her update and work as Lead Governor.

Bd/20-21/71 Management Accounts

The Chief Operating Officer (COO) presented the accounts through December 2020 stating they have not been to Finance, Resources and Projects Committee due to timing and highlighting the following:

- The Group actual Educational EBITDA for the period is £1,859k (9.1%)
- Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) 16-18 learners enrolled on the ILR at the time of writing the accounts are approximately 4,643, which is 92 learners down on the funded total (of 4,735) for the year and equates to 98.1%
- The December Balance Sheet shows a decrease in cash and creditors as a result of the ESFA funding profile
- The cash position for the College is improved from the initial forecast, due to the impact of ESFA capital grant receipts and timings of capital expenditure
- Focusing on the Income and Expenditure lines: 16-19 income shows 79 fewer learners in October with senior leaders reviewing to establish where they have moved on to and looking to ensure that the reduction does not get any bigger
- Apprenticeships are being monitored closely
- AEB is accruing to budget
- Adult Learner Loans is at target; ESFA has been asked for an uplift to that allocation and it is expected to be received
- Pay expenditure is slightly higher than budget which is owed to the timing of the savings made; these are phased and some of the timings of staff coming and going are uncertain
- Costs in pay is coming down
- Other operating costs is underspent at the moment but noted agreements with large suppliers to reduce costs in a fair and transparent way due to reduced services
- Balance sheet and cash flow: no amendments to cash flow projections in this account
- Bank covenants test remain the same

The SU President asked for clarification on the report around the Budget to December and Total Budget columns. The COO responded that the Budget to December column represents the funds spent to date and the total is the total allocated or forecasted in the budget. He agreed that the columns could be headed differently to be clearer.

AGREED: to note the content of the report

Bd/20-21/72 Confidential minutes of the meeting held on 15 December 2020 and Matters Arising

This item was determined confidential with separate minutes maintained.

Bd/20-21/73 Confidential minutes of the Joint Meeting held on 26 January 2021

This item was determined confidential with separate minutes maintained.

Bd/20-21/74 T Level Grant: Strategy, Project Review and Financial Update

This item was determined confidential with separate minutes maintained.

Bd/20-21/75 Apprenticeship Performance Summary

This item was determined confidential with separate minutes maintained.

Bd/20-21/76 Maths and English Performance Report

This item was determined confidential with separate minutes maintained.

The next two items were taken out of order to accommodate the confidential nature of item 77

Bd/20-21/78 Draft Minutes of the following Committees

- Sunderland Local Governing Board (19 January 2021)
- Northumberland Local Governing Board (21 January 2021)

AGREED: to note receipt of the draft minutes

The staff and student governors were asked to leave due to the nature of the AOB (Governor Pollard and Governor Heads left the meeting at this time)

Bd/20-21/79 Any Other Business

This item was determined confidential subject to limited circulation; separate minutes have been maintained.

This item was taken out of order due to the confidential nature of item 77

Noting this item is to review senior post holder salaries, the Chair asked all staff to leave the meeting allowing only the CE to remain.

Bd/20-21/77 Senior Post Holder Salary Review

This item was determined confidential subject to limited circulation; separate minutes have been maintained.

The Chair asked the CE to leave the meeting as the final item under Any Other Business related to her salary.

Bd/20-21/79 Any Other Business

This item was determined confidential subject to limited circulation; separate minutes have been maintained.

Bd/20-21/80 Date, time and venue of next meeting

27 April 2021, 5:00pm, Teams Conference

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 20:10.