



West Thames College Further Education Corporation

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporation

held at 6.00pm on Wednesday 20 March 2024
at the College

Present:	Mr S McGeoch (SM)	Chair
	Ms T Aust (TA)	CEO
	Mr S Taylor (ST)	
	Ms R Turner (RT)	
	Mr P Sullivan (PS)	
	Ms A Cornish (AC)	
	Mr T Hayhoe (TH)	
	Mr G Casley (GC)	
	Mr A Smith (AS)	
	Mr A Rides (AR)	
Apologies:	Ms A Colville (AC)	
	Mr A Barke (AB)	
	Mr B Armstrong (BA)	Associate Member
	Ms T Kaur (TK)	
	Mr A Alimohamed (AA)	
In Attendance:	Mr J Bolt (JB)	Associate Member
	Ms C Ajit Singh (CS)	Associate Member
	Ms K Frost (KF)	Head of Governance
	Mr T Stevens (TS)	Executive Director
	Mr M Cooper (MC)	Executive Director
	Ms M Gajewska-Kopczyk (MGK)	Vice Principal

5/24 **Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies for absence were received and accepted from AC, AB, TK, AA and BA.

There were no declarations of interest concerning items on the agenda.

It was confirmed that the meeting was quorate.

6/24 **Minutes of the Last Meeting**

a) **Minutes from the Last Meeting (13 December 2023)**

Minutes from the meeting of the Corporation held on 13 December 2023 (Paper 1a) were received in advance of the meeting. IT WAS DECIDED they were a true record of the meeting and they were approved.

Signed:

Date:.....

55/23: It was noted that the student survey had been completed. The results from the survey would be included in this year's Self-Assessment Report.

61/23: MC would circulate the reasons why some internal audits had been given 'substantial' opinion rather than strong.

Action: MC

b) **Minutes from the Last Meeting (17 January 2024)**

Minutes from the meeting of the Corporation held on 17 January 2024 (Paper 1b) were received in advance of the meeting. IT WAS DECIDED they were a true record of the meeting and they were approved.

c) **Matters Arising**

The 'Summary Action List' was received in advance of the meeting (Paper 1c) and progress made towards the actions agreed was noted. The following matters arising were discussed:

59/23: The CQSE Committee would discuss the College's progress towards offering an outstanding learning experience at their next meeting.

7/24 **Risk Management**

A revised Risk Register (Paper 2) was received in advance of the meeting. The Committee Chairs gave a report from the risk discussions that had taken place at each of the committee meetings during the Spring term.

CQSE Committee

The Committee had reduced the Ofsted rating because at this moment in time, and with the recent results, the Committee felt the College was a 'Good' College. The staff recruitment rating had been increased due to the differential between school and college teacher pay and the concerns about recruiting Maths teachers. The Committee had a query about whether Risk 7 should be monitored by the FRCP Committee. The top risk on the Committee list was T Levels, followed by Insufficient Demand.

The Committee had suggested adding a column to the risk register that related to the impact of each risk on the student experience. Student experience needed to be at the heart of the risk management process. MC suggested replacing reputational impact with stakeholder impact which would incorporate student experience. This was supported by governors. It was agreed MC would make this amendment.

Action: MC

Governors asked whether there would be a change in the approach to T Levels if there was a change of Government. The CEO said there was cross party support for T Levels but there was a risk around the level of curriculum reform. It was agreed the CQSE Committee would consider whether to change the name of the T Level Risk to Curriculum Reform.

Action: CQSE Committee

FRCP Committee

The Committee had made some minor amendments to scores and considered consistency of grade and financial impact of risks. It was agreed to add a risk to the register about Regulatory Risk.

Action: MC

Signed:

Date:.....

GSS Committee

The Committee had reduced the likelihood of the merger risk but would continue to watch the political environment in case the position changed.

Audit Committee

The Committee had changed the name of Risk 17 to Fraud risk and had suggested adding a column to the risk register that showed the lead member of staff for each risk. There had been a discussion about the need for some departments to maintain their own risk registers.

The Internal Auditor had raised concerns about the rating for the ONS risk. Having spent time working in Scotland he had suggested the ONS risk should be a higher risk due to the impact re-classification had on colleges in Scotland. MC said the College had taken advice and based on the advice he believed the risk was low level at this stage. There was no indication that the concerns raised by the Internal Auditor would come to fruition in England.

The Internal Auditor had also raised concerns about the complexity of the risk scoring system and made suggestions to improve the risk register including the use of a matrix presentation and the inclusion of risk appetite. These suggestions would be considered by the Audit Committee at their next meeting.

8/24 **Strategic Report**

a) **Executive Report**

The 'Executive Report' (Paper 3) was received in advance of the meeting. The CEO drew attention to some key points in the report:

- The Annual ESFA Strategic Conversation had been held. The conversation had been positive with no immediate outcomes.
- Changes to the conditions of funding would have potential implications for the College, in particular for staff recruitment.
- Curriculum reform was underway and would need to be monitored.

The Corporation reviewed the summary of partnerships that had been included in the Executive Report.

Governors asked whether there had been any recognition from MPs about the slow uptake of apprenticeships. The CEO said there was recognition but there were also possible opportunities that could be explored.

Governors asked what the likelihood was of Woodbridge Park Education Centre moving out of the Skills and Logistics Centre and what impact it would have. The CEO said an alternative provision review was being carried out which might bring further changes. Woodbridge Park were unlikely to move from the Skills and Logistics Centre. Even if they did move, it would have minimal impact.

Governors asked how the College intended to monitor the change in funding conditions. The CEO explained the College knew which changes were coming and there was a period of time during which the College could either implement the changes partially or fully. It had been decided to implement the changes fully from September 2024. As part of this, work was underway on identifying staffing needs and this included internal strategies for recruitment. Modelling was underway as part of curriculum planning for next academic year.

Signed:

Date:.....

Governors asked how the College determined whether partnerships were effective. The CEO said the College had devised a checklist for partnerships which was reviewed by the ET+ Employer Engagement Group. Consideration was given to whether to continue with each partnership and/or whether there was scope for growth. A range of factors were used to assess this.

Governors said there was a lot of change happening and asked how they could support the College with this. The CEO thanked governors and said governors would be able to support with the work with employers and through discussions at committee level.

Governors asked whether there were any recommendations from the ESFA strategic conversation. The CEO said there hadn't been any recommendations but the College had attended a follow up meeting on the topic of apprenticeship provision to look at whether there was any good practice at other colleges that could be taken forward.

Governors asked how the College would ensure there was enough staffing for English and Maths courses. The CEO said this was being considered as part of curriculum planning along with whether any changes were needed to staffing and staffing structures.

Governors asked about the Foundation Degree in Early Years and whether that might be an area of possible expansion. The CEO said growth was planned in that area as part of the curriculum strategy but not specifically in the Foundation Degree. New provision had been planned for September.

b) **Employer Links**

An update about employer links (Paper 4) was received in advance of the meeting.

Governors asked for a traffic light system to be included in the report, at an appropriate level of granularity, to show the quality of employer links across different departments in the college.

Action: TA

Governors asked which areas in the College were strong for employer links and where more development was needed. MGK said the strongest department for employer links was the Creative Department. Some areas had been more challenging to develop employer links including: Science, NHS, Travel/Sport/Public Services and Motor Vehicle. There had been some progress made with the NHS. Work that was happening around LSIP and logistics would bring some partnerships for Motor Vehicle.

Governors said it was an impressive list of employers but were surprised that employers like Ocado, Thames Water and Buzzacott were not on the list. They asked who owned the list and what the process was for approaching new employers. The CEO said the lists were updated through the curriculum team, careers team and apprentices team. The ET+ Employer Engagement Group considered co-ordination throughout the College. The College had recently been in contact with Thames Water. Once the gaps had been identified, it might be some additional resource would be needed to support with targeting certain places.

The CEO reported that the College had held the annual Aspire Careers event on 20 March 2024 which had been attended by 60 employers. The event had been very successful.

Signed:

Date:.....

Governors were asked to look through the list of employers and pass on any ideas to fill any gaps to MGK.

9/24 Curriculum, Quality and Student Experience Committee Report

a) Committee Report

Minutes from the Committee meeting held on 28 February 2024 were received in advance of the meeting (Paper 5). The Chair of the Committee gave a verbal report from the meeting:

- The Committee had discussed student voice because there had been an over reliance on student survey results in the SARs. Assurance had been given to the Committee that there were a multitude of ways that student voice was heard. The College would develop a way of recording this in the SARs.
- There had been a discussion about whether it would be helpful to have a definition of what West Thames considered to be an outstanding student learning experience. This would be taken forward by the CQSE Committee.

Governors asked whether there were any Outstanding Colleges that West Thames could benchmark against. The CEO said the College was working with a College group who had recently becoming Ofsted Outstanding across the board.

- The Committee had considered the Data Dashboard KPIs and had noted the significant challenges with growing Higher Education and apprenticeships.
- There had been an increase in the number of safeguarding concerns. It was positive that concerns were being reported.
- The Committee had started to consider the journey to outstanding and would focus on this more at the next meeting.
- The effectiveness of the SAR process had been reviewed and some recommendations made about how to improve it further.

b) Data Dashboard and Development Plan

An update on progress towards the Development Plan was received in advance of the meeting (Paper 6). The Corporation reviewed the relevant KPIs in the Data Dashboard:

- Learning Walks:137 had been completed. 98 had been judged secure.
- Attendance was currently 86% which was an improvement on last year.
- Achievement: There were no concerns with achievement data at this stage.
- Deep Dives: The College was using Outstanding criteria this academic year for Deep Dives. Three areas were receiving additional support as they had been flagged as red.

Governors asked the staff governor for their view on the Deep Dive process. AS said the Deep Dive process was welcomed, it wasn't intimidating but rather gave staff the opportunity to discuss and showcase their work. MGK said she was pleased to hear it was working with the curriculum areas.

Governors said there had only been one area below Good in the SAR for 2022-23 but there were currently three areas below Good. They asked why this was. The CEO said she would not expect this to be the end of year position. The areas that had been flagged as red or amber had an improvement plan in place and would be

Signed:

Date:.....

revisited before the end of the academic year to check on progress that had been made.

Governors said it would be important to be realistic about the time it would take to move departments from Requires Improvement to Good or Outstanding.

10/24 Governance, Search and Strategy Committee Report

a) Committee Report

Minutes from the Governance, Search and Strategy Committee held on 6 March 2024 were received in advance of the meeting. (Paper 7). The Chair gave a report from the committee meeting:

- A recruitment process was underway for two new governors which was being supported by Nurole. The focus would be on improving the diversity on the Board.
- The Committee had agreed the framework for the annual governance self-assessment which would be carried out in the summer term.
- An update on progress towards the governance action plan had been given.
- A document describing the role of a Governor at West Thames College had been developed and would be circulated.
- The Committee had planned the agenda for the next Corporation Strategy Day.

b) Association of Colleges (AoC) Code of Good Governance

The 'AoC Code of Good Governance 2023' (Paper 8) was received in advance of the meeting. On the recommendation of the Governance, Search and Strategy Committee, IT WAS DECIDED to adopt the AoC Code of Good Governance 2023 from September 2024.

11/24 Finance, Resources and Capital Projects Committee Report

a) Report from Committee

Minutes from the meeting of the FRCP Committee held on 6 March 2024 (Paper 9) had been received in advance of the meeting. The Chair of the Committee gave a verbal update from the meeting.

One area of discussion had been the Skills and Logistics Centre lease which was due to expire in 2026. The Committee would discuss this again at their Autumn Term meeting to ensure any decisions were made in time for the expiry of the lease.

b) Dashboard Review

The Corporation reviewed relevant KPIs in the Data Dashboard and items in the Development Plan that were allocated to the Committee.

Finance

The Financial Health Grade projection for the end of the financial year was 'Outstanding'. The operating surplus had increased above budget. 16-19 numbers had exceeded allocation this year and would exceed for next year as well. The number of adult learners was in line with the target for the year. Internal progress was looking very positive for next year and external applications were 11% up on last year. Two areas that were underperforming were Higher Education and Apprenticeships.

Signed:

Date:.....

Human Resources

- Sickness absence was higher than the target which was driven by a high long-term sickness absence figure.
- Staff turnover was at 9% compared to a target of 17% which was comparable to last year. It was on track to achieve the target.
- The Corporation reviewed progress towards the Human Resource items in the Development Plan. The staff development objective was still underway, it was in a better position than last year.
- The Gender Pay Gap Report would be published next week. The pay gap had reduced considerably.

Health and Safety

- The number of accidents was very low, the highest number was attributed to the Nursery. There had been no reportable incidents.
- The College continued to monitor the completion of Health and Safety training. 186 training sessions had been completed in the reporting period.
- There were 38 PEEPs in place.
- The majority of risk assessments conducted were for trips and visits.

Governors asked whether there were enough people trained in Health and Safety at the Skills and Logistics Centre. TS said new hazard identification techniques had been introduced to the Skills and Logistics Centre along with some new measures to be introduced to work areas. The first action was to raise awareness of staff.

Sustainability

- There had been an increase in electricity consumption due to a mechanical issue with the boilers. This was now resolved and the College was taking steps to further reduce consumption.
- The College was making good progress through the FE Sustainability Roadmap.
- The solar panel project and the category C&D works were underway.

c) Management Accounts

'Management Accounts Jan 24' (Paper 10) were received in advance of the meeting.

The Chair of the Committee reported that the Finance, Resources and Capital Projects Committee had reviewed the Management Accounts in detail at their last meeting. One particular point of note was that by the middle of next year the Barclays loan balance would be greater than the cash balance and this would need to be monitored.

It was noted that there were some sizeable variances compared to budget. Favourable variances of over £800k and adverse variances of £400k. There had been growth in terms of the number of High Needs students

The Management Accounts were noted.

d) Financial Regulations

'Draft Financial Regulations' (Paper 11) were received in advance of the meeting. On the recommendation of the FRCP Committee, IT WAS DECIDED to approve the Financial Regulations, subject to some minor amendments that would be reviewed by the Chair of the FRCP Committee.

e) Crisis Management Policy

The 'WTC Crisis Management Policy' (Paper 12) was received in advance of the meeting.

Signed:

Date:.....

Governors asked whether the College needed to do an EDI impact assessment for the policy to ensure any impact on disadvantaged groups was considered.

Action: TS

Governors suggested creating daily checklists for the senior team to use in the event of an incident. ST would send example to TS.

Action: ST

On the recommendation of the FRCP Committee IT WAS DECIDED to approve the policy.

f) **Use of the College Seal**

The Head of Governance reported that after the December Corporation meeting, the College seal was used to executive the legal charge relating to the Barclays loan.

12/24 **Audit Committee Report**

a) **Report from the Committee**

Minutes from the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 13 March 2024 (Paper 13) had been received in advance of the meeting. The Chair of the Committee gave a verbal update:

- The Committee had received reports from internal audits of Apprentices Funding which was given a 'Strong' opinion and Estates Management which was given a 'Substantial' opinion.
- There had been a discussion about whether the internal audits could be effective if they were all carried out virtually. It had been decided that there would be a blend of virtual and on site for future internal audits.
- The Internal Auditor would run a fraud training course for management. Governors would be invited to attend.
- The Committee would consider a report from the recent internal audit about risk management at their next meeting. The report would be circulated to all governors.

Action: MC

b) **Whistleblowing Policy**

The 'Whistleblowing Policy' (Paper 14) had been received in advance of the meeting.

In response to a question from governors, MC confirmed that staff had the opportunity to approach someone other than their line manager if they had a Whistleblowing concern.

IT WAS DECIDED to approve the Whistleblowing Policy.

c) **Risk Management Policy**

The 'Risk Management Policy' (Paper 15) had been received in advance of the meeting.

It was agreed further work was needed to the policy around risk appetite, risk tolerance and the impact of risks on the student experience. MC would make the changes and bring the policy back to the Audit Committee for review.

Signed:

Date:.....

Action: MC

13/24 Date of the Next Meeting

The proposed dates of meetings for next academic year were received in advance of the meeting. (Paper 16).

The date of the next meeting of the Corporation was Wednesday 3 July 2024. The Corporation Strategy Day would be held on Wednesday 8 May 2024.

Summary of Actions

No.	Action	Lead	Target Date
61/23	Circulate the reasons why some internal audits had been given a substantial opinion rather than strong.	MC	July 24
7/24	Amend reputational impact to stakeholder impact on the risk register, to include the impact on students.	MC	July 24
7/24i	Consider whether to rename the T Level Risk 'Curriculum Reform'.	MC/ CQSE	June 24
7/24ii	Add a regulatory risk to the risk register.	MC	June 24
8/24	Add a traffic light system to future employer lists to identify the quality of employer links across the college.	TA	July 24
11/24	Carry out an EDI impact assessment for the Crisis Management policy to ensure any impact on disadvantaged groups is considered.	TS	July 24
11/24i	Send examples of daily checklists that could be used by the senior team in the event of an incident to TS.	ST	July 24
12/24	Circulate the report from the internal audit of risk management to all governors.	MC	July 24
12/24i	Make amendments to the Risk Management policy concerning risk appetite, risk tolerance and the impact of each risk on the student experience.	MC	June 24

Signed:

Date:.....