

West Thames College Further Education Corporation

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporation

held at 6.00pm on Wednesday 22 March 2023
at the College

Present:	Mr S McGeoch (SM)	Chair
	Ms T Aust (TA)	Principal
	Mr A Barke (AB)	
	Mr A Smith (AS)	
	Ms B Sandhu (BS)	
	Mr S Taylor (ST)	
	Ms A Cornish (AC)	
	Mr B Armstrong (BA)	
	Mr A Alimohamed (AA)	
	Mr J Bryant (JB)	
Apologies:	Mr A Rides (AR)	
	Ms C Callinan (CC)	
	Mr L McBirney (LM)	
	Ms T Kaur (TK)	
	Mr S Wilcox (SW)	
In Attendance:	Mr J Bolt (JB)	Associate Member
	Ms C Ajit Singh (CS)	Associate Member
	Ms K Frost (KF)	Head of Governance
	Mr M Michaelides (MM)	Executive Director Resources and Student Experience
	Mr M Cooper (MC)	Executive Director Finance, HR and Development
	Ms M Gajewska-Kopczyk (MGK)	Vice Principal, Curriculum and Quality
Ms S Louisy (SL)	Head of Student Experience	

10/23 **Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly ST who was attending his first meeting. JB, AA and AB were attending the meeting virtually. Apologies for absence were received and accepted from AR, TK, LM, SW and CC.

KF confirmed the meeting was quorate.

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

11/23 **Student Support Services Presentation**

SL attended the meeting to give a presentation about the student experience at the College covering the wrap around services that supported students including:

- Student Voice
- Enrichment
- Student Learning Advisors
- Safeguarding
- Counselling
- Finance and Welfare

Governors asked who judged whether students met the criteria for financial support. SL explained the College made assessments against Government criteria. Governors asked whether there was a complaint process for students to follow if they were dissatisfied with the outcome. SL said there was a process in place and discretions were made if a student wasn't eligible for support but other factors were at play.

Governors asked if there was a waiting list for the counselling services. SL said there was always a waiting list but students were assessed regularly and moved up the waiting list if needed. Governors asked how many counsellors the College had and noted there were two. Governors asked what the demand was relative to the number of counsellors. SL said two wasn't enough with the increased demand the College was experiencing particularly around unaccompanied minors, mental health issues and domestic violence. The College was working with local mental health services.

Governors asked how the College judged the relationship between students and the police. SL said there had been no negative responses from students towards the police. Governors asked whether the College received good support from the police. SL said the College had good interaction with the police.

Governors said during a recent link governor visit they had spoken to about 12 students who had said they didn't take part in any enrichment activities due to the workloads they had. Governors asked what the College did to promote the importance of a work/life balance. SL said it had been a challenge as the focus of students had changed. As a result of the cost of living crisis, students had to work and contribute to the household. The College continued to regularly promote the enrichment opportunities that were available.

Governors asked how many students a Student Learning Advisor would have responsibility for. SL explained one Student Learning Advisor would have responsibility for 11 groups, depending on the number in each group.

Governors asked which area of her portfolio of work SL was most proud of and which caused most challenges. SL said she was most proud of the SLAs and the tutorial which she had introduced. The most challenging area was ensuring all students who needed it received support with their mental health.

12/23 **Apprenticeships Update**

MC gave an update about apprenticeships. The College had recently been through a period of transition with apprenticeships which were now based on Apprenticeship Standards. The College was delivering construction, digital, logistics and business apprenticeships which were in line with the local skills priorities. In total, there were just over 60 apprentices at the College and challenging targets had been set in terms of growth. There was extensive employer engagement and marketing campaigns.

In terms of achievement, the College had seen a considerable improvement in achievement rates until COVID which had a huge impact on apprenticeships and achievement rates had declined as a result. Last year the achievement rate was 64%, this year the projected achievement was 45% which was short of the target set.

The risks relating to the delivery of apprenticeships included:

- Retention: Some of the courses were very long so it was difficult retaining students until the end of the course.
- Cost of living crisis: Apprentices were leaving due to the cost of living crisis which meant they needed to secure employment on a higher wage.
- Cost of delivery: The College needed to ensure the apprenticeships could be delivered as cost effectively as possible.

Governors asked if apprentices always took something away at the end of their courses. MC said they did. Students were assessed to ensure they had achieved the necessary standards. The skills and knowledge gained were transferable. Apprentices also developed softer skills during the course which were also transferable.

Governors asked whether apprentices still needed a good level of Maths and English. MC said they did.

Governors asked what the proportion of Level 2 and 3 apprenticeships were. MC said 75% of apprenticeships were Level 3.

Governors asked where apprenticeships would fit into the Local Skills Improvement Plans. The Principal said apprenticeships would remain as an option.

Governors asked about the destinations of apprentices. The Principal said the College tracked destination data, some apprentices remained with the employer, some went onto a higher apprenticeship level and some moved to a role with a higher salary.

13/23 Minutes of the Last Meeting

Minutes from the meeting of the Corporation held on 14 December 2022 (Papers 1 and 1b) were received in advance of the meeting. IT WAS DECIDED they were a true record of the meeting and they were approved.

Minutes from the meeting of the Corporation Strategy Day held on 8 February 2023 (Papers 2, 2a and 2b) were received in advance of the meeting. IT WAS DECIDED they were a true record of the meeting and they were approved.

14/23 Summary Action List and Matters Arising

The 'Summary Action List' was received (Paper 3). The following updates were made available against each outstanding action point from previous meetings:

No.	Action	Lead	Target Date	Status
16 23/3/22	In the longer term the aim is to agree on a framework for future pay awards and to delegate to the Executive the authority to operate the framework as agreed. Any deviation to the agreed framework would then be reported to the Corporation for review and approval.	TA	Jul 23	MC is preparing a paper on this for Finance, Resources and Capital Projects Committee in March and there will be a recommendation coming out of this that can be shared with Corporation.
38/22	Ensure KPIs and the Data Dashboard are directly related	Executive Team	July 23	Please see dashboard recommendation coming

	back to the Strategic Plan. Update the finance section of the Strategic Plan to include information about the impact of the energy costs.			out of Corporation Strategy session on 8 th Feb. ET to put forward a proposal to Corporation for developments to the dashboard including which aspects of the 3 year plan are covered.
41/22	Arrange a curriculum link visit for the spring term via the Head of Governance.	All Governors	Jan 23	In progress.
51/22	Create a link governor role for Careers.	GSS Committee	Jan 23	A role description has been created for the Careers link role. Further discussion would take place at the GSS committee about the link with skills.
56/22	Add the ONS reclassification to the strategic risk register.	MC	Jan 23	This has been added and will be shared at Finance, Resources and Capital Projects Committee. This risk will be under review in this transition period.
57/22	Take forward suggestions from the Student Governor report including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Checking that the new food menu was being served at the Skills Centre. • Following up on the idea to introduce a Breakfast Club although it was acknowledged that students who couldn't afford to eat at home could access a bursary which would cover the cost of breakfast. • Looking into the possibility of introducing more enrichment activities at the Skills and Logistics Centre such as trade clubs. • Looking at whether more could be done in terms of provision of mental health activities at the Skills and Logistics Centre. This was particularly relevant for the students there as males in the construction industry had a higher rate of suicide. 	MM	Mar 23	A detailed update on actions taken was received in advance of the meeting.
58/22	Check to see whether a change of wording is needed in the core	TA	Mar 23	Minor changes were made to the College SAR and this has now been submitted to Ofsted. A

	text of the College SAR to reflect issues with attendance.			new format for the College SAR is currently work in progress.
58/22a	Review the SAR validation process including the role of governors in the process.	BA/JB/MGK	July 23	An initial discussion with BA/JB/MGK has already taken place and the process and format are both under review. MGK will continue to liaise with BA/JB on the development of this process.

57/22: BS reported that she had recently attended a Student Voice session. Students had said how impressed they were with the changes made to the catering provision. They also appreciated the new Grab and Go Menu.

Governors said this was a real success for Student Voice. A student governor had raised concerns about the catering provision and action had been taken which had brought about an improvement.

Governors said Hounslow Friends of Faith had recently been involved in a project about suicide. Details would be shared with MM who would take this forward for the College.

Action: MM

15/23 Review of Key Risks

A paper detailing the status of key risks to the College was received in advance of the meeting. (Paper 4). MC highlighted key changes in the risk register since the last meeting of the Corporation

The Chair reported that following on from the recent Corporation Strategy Day, the risk register was being revised and would be presented at the next Corporation Meeting.

16/23 Monitoring of College Performance – Data Dashboard Review

i) Data Dashboard

The Corporation reviewed progress towards the KPIs in the Data Dashboard:

- Learning walks were continuing. There had been no change since the last report to the Curriculum, Quality and Standards Committee.
- Attendance: The current attendance rate was 85% compared to the target of 88%. The focus with attendance was to minimise the impact on the qualification so that students were still able to achieve. Attendance had been impacted by the cost of living crisis. The recent teacher strikes had caused disruption for the adult provision but tutors had offered remote lessons so there was no impact on learning.
- Achievement: There had been no change since the last report. A slight improvement on last year was predicted.
- Deep Dives: The deep dives had been scheduled according to risk. Some areas were now coming though as green.
- Financial Health: The financial health score at year end was predicted to be 220 which would be at the top end of 'Good'. The improved picture was largely due to

increased support from the Government with energy costs, savings made by the College in terms of energy usage and an increase in income.

- Sickness absence levels remained high at 6% which was above target and high in relation to the AoC benchmarking data, although this was lagging some years.
- There had been no changes in terms of staff ethnicity.
- Staff utilisation had increased to 91.5% which was below the target of 94%. Work was still underway to improve the figure.
- Staff turnover was on track to achieve the target for the year.
- The first draft of the sustainability dashboard was live. There had been a 13% reduction in energy use since September 2022. The College was on track to hit the target of 15%.

Governors asked what actions the College was taking regarding sickness absence. MC said the key driver of the high absence figure was long term sickness. Regular conversations were held with the members of staff concerned, the College used phased return and occupational health where needed. In terms of shorter timer sickness absence, action was taken via line management.

i) **Development Plan 2022-23**

The Corporation received the 'Development Plan 2022-23 – March 2023 Update' (Paper 5) in advance of the meeting.

Governors asked about objective 1.4. Achievement rates seemed to be lower for GCSE English and Maths. MGK explained that it related to the high grades. The predictions had been conservative and the College was expecting the final results to be higher. The next round of predictive grade updates was ongoing.

Governors asked about objective 2.2 and whether the Student Voice videos were available. MM said the Student Voice videos were available on the College website.

Governors asked about objective 2.3 and whether the College tracked application conversion rates. MM said the College tracked conversion rates from application to enrolment. The analysis helped inform the marketing methods used.

Governors asked how data protection requirements were handled with the online applications. MM said the College followed GDPR guidelines in all they did and only captured the bare minimum of data needed. The system informed applicants of what information was being captured and what the College was going to do with it. Staff were made aware of the requirements and received training. The Audit Committee had recently discussed the risks around cyber security.

Governors asked about objective 2.5 (Curriculum Update) which was amber. They asked what action the College was taking. MC explained the current situation. Some of the funding was ring fenced. The curriculum planning process that had been undertaken this year had identified provision for next year's curriculum offer in those areas.

Governors asked how prepared the College was in relation to T levels. MGK said the College was on track to deliver T Levels in September. She was confident the College would be ready but there were confidence & awareness issues with students and parents which might impact the number of applications received.

Governors asked for a presentation about the College marketing process and the approach to Cyber Security/Data Protection to be added to a future agenda.

17/23 **Strategic Matters**

i) **Executive Report**

The 'Executive Team Report – March 2023' was received in advance of the meeting (Paper 6). The Principal highlighted some key areas in the report.

The College was actively involved with the Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIP). Further details would be shared at the next strategic planning day.

The Chair reported that a Shared Governance Event had recently been held. Part of the event had included a presentation from Business London about the initial draft of the LSIP.

ii) **ESFA Annual Strategic Conversation**

The ESFA Annual Strategic Conversation was held on 24 February 2023. The Chair said the meeting had gone well. One area the ESFA had been particularly interested in was the College's approach to Behaviour and Attitudes which was at the better end of the scale and something they wanted to learn about to share with other Colleges. The summary letter from ESFA on the conversation would be circulated to governors.

Action: KF

18/23 **Student Voice**

A 'Student Governor Report' (Paper 8) was received in advance of the meeting. The report had been reviewed by the Curriculum, Quality and Standards Committee who would follow through on the points raised.

19/23 **Governance and Policy Approval**

a) **Scheme of Delegation and Committee Terms of Reference**

The updated 'Scheme of Delegation and Committee Terms of Reference' (Paper 9a) had been received in advance of the meeting. After making an amendment to the terms of reference for the Curriculum, Quality and Student Experience Committee IT WAS DECIDED to approve the Scheme of Delegation and Committee Terms of Reference.

b) **Policy Approval**

The 'Whistleblowing Policy (Paper 9b), the Fraud Policy and Procedure (Paper 9c) and the Anti-Bribery Policy and Procedure (Paper 9c) had been received in advance of the meeting. The policies had been reviewed by the Audit Committee who were recommending approval to the Corporation.

IT WAS DECIDED to approve the Whistleblowing Policy, Fraud Policy and Procedure and the Anti-Bribery Policy and Procedure.

20/23 **Report from the Curriculum, Quality and Standards Committee**

i) **Committee Report**

The report from the committee (Paper 10) was received and acknowledged. The Board agreed no further action was required.

The Chair of the Committee reported that the Committee had received a comprehensive report on higher education provision. The provision would be streamlined to suit the student intake. A new regional agreement was in place between local Higher Education and Further Education institutions which would be a positive move.

- ii) **Minutes from the Curriculum, Quality and Standards Committee**
The minutes from the meeting of the committee held on 22 February 2023 (Paper 11) was received and acknowledged. The Board agreed no further action was required.

21/23 **Report from the Finance, Resources and Capital Projects Committee**

- i) **Committee Report**
The report from the committee (Paper 12) was received and acknowledged. The Board agreed no further action was required.

MC reported that the Committee had reviewed indicative funding allocations for next year along with planning parameters.

- ii) **Minutes from the Committee Meeting**
The minutes from the meeting of the committee held on 1 March 2023 (Paper 13) were received and acknowledged. The Board agreed no further action was required.

22/23 **Report from the Governance, Search and Strategy Committee**

- i) **Committee Report**
The report from the committee (Paper 14) was received and acknowledged. The Board agreed no further action was required.

The Chair reported that the Committee had engaged Nurole to support with the recruitment of new governors.

Governors were reminded to arrange visits for their link roles.

Rather than an annual self-assessment for governors, an External Review of Governance had been arranged. This would take place over the next few months with a final report presented to the Corporation in October 2023. Governors could expect to be contacted by Fiona Chalk in coming weeks.

- ii) **Minutes from the Committee Meeting**
The minutes from the meeting of the committee held on 1 February 2023 (Paper 15) were received and acknowledged. The Board agreed no further action was required.

23/23 **Report from the Audit Committee**

- i) **Committee Report**
The report from the committee (Paper 16) was received and acknowledged. The Board agreed no further action was required.

- ii) **Minutes from the Committee Meeting**
The minutes from the meeting of the committee held on 15 March 2023 (Paper 17) were received and acknowledged.

24/23 **Any Other Urgent Business**

There was no other urgent business to be discussed.

25/23 **Items for the Next Agenda**

- Apprenticeships – opportunity to meet the apprenticeship lead and focus on what the apprenticeship experience looks like from the apprentice’s point of view.

- Risk register.

26/23 **Date of the Next Meeting**

The dates of the next meetings of the Corporation were:

- Corporation Strategy: Wednesday 10 May 2023. 2.00pm to 6.00pm.
- Corporation Meeting: Wednesday 5 July 2023. 6.00pm.

Corporation meeting dates for academic year 2023-24 were received in advance of the meeting (Paper 18) and were agreed.

Summary of Actions

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38/22	Ensure KPIs and the Data Dashboard are directly related back to the Strategic Plan. Update the finance section of the Strategic Plan to include information about the impact of the energy costs.	Executive Team	Jul 23
41/22	Arrange a curriculum link visit for the spring term via the Head of Governance.	All Governors	Jan 23
51/22	Create a link governor role for Careers.	GSS Committee	July 23
58/22a	Review the SAR validation process including the role of governors in the process.	BA/JB/MGK	July 23
14/23	Contact CAS about the Hounslow Friends of Faith project about suicide to see whether this would be of benefit for the College.	MM	July 23
17/23	Circulate the letter from the ESFA Strategic Conversation.	KF	July 23