

Riverside College

Widnes & Runcorn

MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 18TH MARCH 2024 AT 4.30PM AT THE KINGSWAY CAMPUS

Present:	Michele Bacon	External Governor
	Karen Banks	External Governor
	David Copeland	Staff Governor
	Andrew MacManus	External Governor
	Neil McGrath	External Governor, Chair
	Tom McInerney	External Governor
	Mary Murphy	Principal & Chief Executive
	Rachael Owen	External Governor
	Chris Sikorski	Staff Governor
	Susan Smith	External Governor
	Sarah Worsley	Student Governor
	Stephen Young	External Governor

In Attendance:	Ben Barton	Assistant Principal
	Leeann Bellfield	Assistant Principal
	Thalia Bell	Deputy Principal (Curriculum)
	Alan Brown	Assistant Principal
	Julie Holland	Deputy Principal (Finance & Resources)
	Chris Jones	External Board Reviewer
	Catherine Shaw	Clerk to Governors

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received and accepted for Katie Anderson, Jayne Edwards and Lucy White.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Stephen Young and Sarah Worsley declared an interest in agenda item 3.1.

Resolved: Declarations of interest were **noted** by the Board.

3. CHAIR'S UPDATE

3.1 Chair's Action

The Clerk advised that the College had been approached by Halton Borough Council on 7th February 2024, seeking the College's support in the Council's bid for site enabling works in respect of the land opposite Riverside College. She referred the Board to specific detail contained within the briefing paper and the letter signed by the Principal and Board Chair in support of the Council's bid.

Resolved: The Board **ratified** the Chair's Action as detailed in the report and in compliance with Standing Orders 69 and 70.

3.2 Activity Report

The Chair provided a summary of his activity since the last Board meeting in December 2023 which included:

- The Chair's continued attendance at regular three-weekly meetings with the Principal and Clerk.
- Attendance at the A Level Awards Evening.
- Attendance at the Apprenticeship Awards Evening.
- Official Opening of the Sports and Wellbeing Centre at Cronton College.

Resolved: The Board **noted** the Chair's update.

4. **PRINCIPAL'S STRATEGIC REPORT** (*previously circulated*)

The Principal presented her strategic report and highlighted the following aspects:

External Factors

- Key performance indicators suggested that the College was on track to achieve or exceed its agreed targets.
- The Liverpool City Region (LCR) Mayoral Election was to take place in May 2024 with the UK General Election to take place by January 2025, date to be confirmed.
- Within the sector there were national challenges relating to (i) English and Maths resits and the imposition of minimum teaching hours from August 2024, (ii) staff recruitment and retention, (iii) curriculum reform and its potential impact and (iv) T Level enrolment rates.
- Funding rates for 16-19 were to increase by £90 per student.
- Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) – the specific strand for the College was to meet the skills demand of Green Energy and Net Zero by 2040. The Principal expanded on the potential opportunities currently under discussion relating to the hydrogen courses/rig provision at the College.
- Halton Inclusion Partnership (HIP) and Local Area Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) – there were five priority areas of provision and the College was supporting secondary schools in the Borough as part of the HIP.

College Priorities

- Spring Termly Conversation with the Department for Education (DfE) – a productive meeting had taken place on 5th March 2024.
- Safeguarding and Wellbeing – the number of referrals had increased significantly compared to the last academic year. In the recent 'Have Your Say' student survey, 99.9% of learners reported they felt safe in College. Governors received assurance that the very small minority of students who reported not feeling safe had been contacted and supported.
- Quality objectives linked to the College's Strategic Plan
 - Teaching, Learning and Assessment – the College was (i) classified as being an Expert Provider for DfE Apprenticeships and (ii) part of the Teachermatic pilot group relating to Artificial Intelligence (AI)
- Efficiency objectives linked to the College's Strategic Plan
 - The forecast surplus 2023/2024 had increased as a result of the increased funding rate for the 16-19 cohort of learners
 - Property Strategy – official opening of the Hydrogen Skills Centre took place on 1st March 2024 which had been hugely successful.
- Growth objectives linked to the College's Strategic Plan
 - 16-19 – a high number of applications had been received for 2024/2025 and subsequent offers made

- Apprenticeships – the number of starts had increased by 38 this year to date
- Adult Education - £200k growth bid had been successful in December 2023
- Higher Education (HE) – plans to create another Centre of Excellence

A discussion took place and concern was expressed regarding the escalating number of safeguarding referrals. The Deputy Principal (Curriculum) referred to the local demographics and national rise in reported mental health issues. In response to a question raised, she re-iterated that whilst safeguarding was everyone's responsibility, the specific department that followed up identified concerns consisted of eight staff members. The Deputy Principal advised that the increase in safeguarding matters was being replicated across colleges nationally. In response to another question raised, she provided additional information relating to the impact resulting from economic inactivity, domestic abuse and child exploitation.

In conclusion to her report, the Principal evidenced the decade of progress that had been made at the College in terms of growth relating to:

- Turnover – 94% growth
- 16-18 students – 67%
- Apprenticeships – 54%
- HE – 13%
- Quality (Ofsted) – from good to outstanding
- Finances (ESFA) – from good to outstanding

Resolved: The Board

- **Noted** the contents of the Principal's Strategic Report
- **Approved** the quality, efficiency and growth (QEG) update on performance as at February 2024 linked to the Strategic Plan

5. FINANCE AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING

5.1 To receive for information a report on the Finance and Resources Committee meeting held on 6th March 2024 (*previously circulated*)

The Committee Chair provided an overview of the business addressed at the recent meeting relating to updates on the following:

- Human Resources
- Health and Safety
- Property Strategy
- Partnership / Sub-Contracting

Questions were raised regarding (i) an analysis of the gender pay report and (ii) reasons for the increase in 'near miss' data. The Committee Chair advised that these had been addressed in detail at the meeting and in response provided an explanation to both questions.

Resolved: The Board **noted** the contents of the report.

5.2 Financial Forecast Update 2023/2026 including In-Year Financial Monitoring Update 2023/2024 (*previously circulated*)

The Committee Chair advised that further developments had taken place since the report was presented in respect of (i) increased national funding rates for 16-19 year olds and (ii) minimum teaching hours for GCSE English and Maths re-sits with effect

from August 2024. The Board was advised that the Committee had focussed on:

- The increased operating surplus
- Growth in the adult education budget
- Increased funding in respect of SEND
- Capital programme which included the numerous projects that were currently being managed
- Pay contingencies
- Cash balances
- Reduction in non-pay costs

A Governor raised a query relating to capital grant receipt assumptions and the position was clarified by the Deputy Principal (Finance & Resources).

During discussions a Governor commended the College on its excellent financial management which had been sustained over a significant period of time and was forecast to continue.

Resolved: The Board

- **Noted** the contents of the report
- Accepted the recommendation made by the Finance & Resources Committee and **approved** the updated budget for 2023/2024
- Placed on record the outstanding work being undertaken by the Finance Department and **requested** that its appreciation be conveyed to staff

5.3 **Policies** (*previously circulated*)

5.3.1 **Environmental Sustainability**

5.3.2 **Fees 2024/2025**

5.3.3 **Apprenticeship Fees and Charges**

5.3.4 **Higher Education Fees and Compensation 2024/2025**

The Board considered the policies and recommendations made.

Resolved: The Board accepted the recommendations made by the Finance and Resources Committee and **approved** the policies contained within agenda items 5.3.1 to 5.3.4 (inc).

6. **QUALITY AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING**

6.1 **To receive for information a report on the Quality & Standards Committee meeting held on 27th February 2024** (*previously circulated*)

The Committee Chair provided an overview of the business addressed at the recent meeting which included:

Safeguarding Update

The increased number of concerns reported had been discussed in detail by the Committee and addressed earlier in the meeting within the Principal's Strategic Report at agenda item 4. The effective use of resources was commended. A number of successful events had taken place to promote health and wellbeing.

Apprenticeship Presentation – Delivered by Alison Barker, Programme Manager

The slide deck had been circulated to all Governors via GovernorHub. Key Information included:

- College achievement rate 2022/2023 was 63.5%, against a national average of 48.5%
- Current retention rate was 80.2%

- Number of current apprenticeships was 460
- Growth had been evidenced across the whole of the apprenticeship offer
- Introduction of new standards for 2023/2024 included (i) Level 2 Beauty, (ii) Level 2 Autocare and (iii) Level 2 Welding

The Committee had commended the College in meeting the criteria to become an expert training provider and this was endorsed by the Board. The Committee had been informed of national challenges, some of which were the long and complex processes being experienced by small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in respect of enrolment, creating/maintaining online accounts and end point assessment processes.

Student Attendance and Retention

- 16-19 attendance data stood at 89% which was in an increase of 1% compared to this point in time in 2022/2023
- Retention data stood at 94.8% which represented an increase of 1.6% compared to the previous academic year
- As part of the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) the Committee continued to monitor retention data and had received an informative presentation from the Assistant Principal. This had included an analysis of reasons for withdrawing from courses in 2022/2023 and subsequent actions to address the issues.

Student Voice – Have Your Say Survey

As previously addressed within the Principal's Strategic Report at agenda item 4, the completion rate and overall report demonstrated consistently positive outcomes across all provisions.

Resolved: The Board **noted** the contents of the report

- 6.2 **Accountability Agreement 2024/2025 and Duty To Review** (*previously circulated*)
The key elements contained within the report were discussed at length at the Quality and Standards Committee meeting held on 27th February 2024.

Resolved: the Board **noted** the report.

- 6.3 **Policies**
To accept the recommendation made by the Quality and Standards Committee

- 6.3.1 **Learner Involvement Policy** (*previously circulated*)
The Board considered the policy and recommendation.

Resolved: The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Quality and Standards Committee and **approved** the Learner Involvement Policy.

7. AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING

- 7.1 **To receive for information a report from the Audit Committee meeting held on 4th March 2024** (*previously circulated*)

The Chair of the Audit Committee provided a summary of the meeting held on 4th March 2024 and highlighted the following:

16-18 Student Journey From Enquiry to Enrolment – Internal Audit Report

This comprehensive and very pleasing report had been presented by ICCA, the College's internal audit provider. The audit reviewed the student journey and had focussed on the systems that captured enquiries, interview and assessment processes, application process and enrolment for the 16-18 age group of students.

The objective was to provide an independent assurance opinion that the College had in place efficient and effective processes which supported the College in maximising and achieving its recruitment targets. The Committee received substantial assurance from ICCA that the areas of the control environment tested during the audit were designed and operated effectively with no significant weaknesses. No recommendations had been made to improve the current processes in place. The report had also been circulated to members of the Quality and Standards Committee.

Interim Update on the Internal Audit Plan 2023/2024

The update was discussed and the Committee was satisfied that there was no cause to deviate from the plan previously approved by the Board at its meeting in July 2023.

Risk Management

The Board was advised that the main changes related to:

- Key Strategic Risk 4, Information and Business Critical Systems – the RAG rating had been reduced to amber, as all related systems had been upgraded.
- Key Strategic Risk 6, Compliance with Legislative/Regulatory Framework – the RAG rating had moved to green, as the publication of the new Colleges Financial Handbook was imminent following the reclassification of colleges to the public sector by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in November 2022.

Resolved: The Board **noted** the report.

8. SEARCH AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE MEETING

8.1 To receive for information a report from the Search & Governance Committee meeting held on 11th March 2024 (previously circulated)

The Chair of the Search and Governance Committee provided a summary of the meeting held on 11th March 2024 and highlighted the following aspects:

- Board Diversity Profile and its relevance to agenda item 8.2
- Chair & Vice Chair(s) Election Process 2024/2025 – it was noted that the formal process for election had to be adopted for 2024/2025, in accordance with the Board's Standing Orders.
- External Board Review – the Committee had noted the work undertaken to date in accordance with the terms of reference and agreed plan.
- Board Portal – the Committee recommended that the Board approve a further subscription to GovernorHub for 12 months.
- FE Sector Governance Updates – the Committee considered the competency frameworks that had been published by the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) and agreed to incorporate their use into the annual governor review meetings, namely frameworks relating to (i) Governors and (ii) Board Chairs.

Following a query raised by a Governor concerning the diversity profile of the Board a discussion took place regarding focussed attempts made throughout recruitment campaigns to increase diversity of the Board's membership and that this focus continued.

Resolved: The Board

- **Noted** the contents of the report.

- Accepted the recommendation made by the Search and Governance Committee and **approved** the subscription to GovernorHub for a further 12 months.

8.2 **Board Membership and Succession Planning** *(previously circulated)*

The Committee had considered its responsibilities in line with the FE Governance Guide and Principle 6 of the AoC Code of Good Governance relating to Board and organisational effectiveness. The Board was advised that two external governor vacancies were anticipated at the end of the current academic year and a recruitment strategy agreed, subject to Board approval.

Resolved: The Board

- **Accepted** the recommendation made by the Search and Governance Committee to progress the application received from Stephen Parkinson to the next stage of the process in accordance with the Board's Standing Orders.
- **Agreed** to promote governor recruitment and seek expressions of interest via the College links with hydrogen firms and NHS Trusts.

8.3 **Board Self-Assessment Review (SAR) 2022/2023 and resulting action plan 2023/2024** *(previously circulated)*

The Board considered the draft SAR accompanied by the action plan, as recommended for approval by the Search & Governance Committee.

Resolved: The Board **approved** the SAR 2022/2023 and action plan 2023/2024.

8.4 **Training Schedule 2023/2024** *(previously circulated)*

The Board considered the training schedule 2023/2024, as recommended for approval by the Search and Governance Committee.

Resolved: The Board **approved** the training schedule 2023/2024

8.5 **Meeting Schedule 2024/2025** *(previously circulated)*

The Board considered the draft meeting schedule.

Resolved: The Board **approved** the meeting schedule for 2024/2025.

8.6 **Policies**

To accept the recommendation made by the Search and Governance Committee

8.6.1 **Governor Expenses Policy** *(previously circulated)*

The Board considered the policy and recommendation.

Resolved: The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Search and Governance Committee and **approved** the Governor Expenses Policy.

9. **WRITTEN RESOLUTIONS**

9.1 **To ratify the written resolution circulated on 13th December 2023** *(previously circulated)*

The Clerk referred to the Instrument of Government whereby it permitted written resolutions to enable more efficient decision-making and avoid the need to convene a special Board meeting at short notice. She advised that on 13th December 2023 this mechanism was invoked and approval was granted in respect of:

- Repayment in full of the outstanding loan with Barclays Bank, in respect of Cronton Estates
- AAP (project management consultants) to advise Hightown of the outcome from the tender process in respect of Kingsway (Green Technology Build) Estates

Resolved: The Board **ratified** its decision made by written resolution on 13th December 2023.

9.2 **To ratify the written resolution circulated on 1st February 2024 (previously circulated)**

The Clerk advised that on 1st February 2024 the written resolution method was invoked and approval was granted in respect of agreement for AAP to advise Whitfield & Brown (Developments) Ltd of the outcome of the tender process and engagement in the project, relating to the Cronton Teaching Block and Music Hub Extension Estates.

Resolved: The Board

- **ratified** its decision made by written resolution on 1st February 2024
- **noted** that further developments had taken place since the approval of the written resolution and these were to be addressed within Part Two confidential section of the meeting due to commercial sensitivity.

10. **MINUTES (previously circulated)**

10.1 **To approve the draft minutes (Part One) of the Board Meeting held on 11th December 2023**

The Board reviewed the minutes from the previous meeting.

Resolved – The Board **approved** the minutes as a correct record of the meeting.

10.2 **To receive a progress report on any matters arising from the previous meeting**
Governors received a progress report on the sole action contained within the action log which had now been completed.

Resolved – The Board **noted** the report.

11. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There were no matters of urgent business to address that were not on the agenda.

12. **DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

These were **noted** as follows:

- External Board Review Meeting – 26th April 2024 at 2pm
- Board – 8th July 2024 at 4:30pm

The Chair thanked all attendees for their participation and he closed the meeting at 5.40pm.

Signed: ...Office copy signed by Neil McGrath....

Chair

Date:8th July 2024.....