

Riverside College

Widnes & Runcorn

MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 27TH MARCH 2023 AT 4.30PM AT THE KINGSWAY CAMPUS

Present:	Karen Banks	External Governor (<i>remote attendance</i>)
	David Copeland	Staff Governor
	Jayne Edwards	External Governor
	Andrew MacManus	External Governor
	Neil McGrath (<i>Chair</i>)	External Governor (<i>remote attendance</i>)
	Mary Murphy	Principal
	Wesley Rourke	External Governor
	Chris Sikorski	Staff Governor
	Susan Smith	External Governor
In Attendance:	Ben Barton	Assistant Principal
	Thalia Bell	Deputy Principal (Curriculum)
	Alan Brown	Assistant Principal
	Julie Holland	Deputy Principal (Finance & Resources)
	Catherine Shaw	Clerk to Governors

PART ONE

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received and accepted for Michele Bacon, Megan Burns, Tom McInerney and Sarah Worsley. The meeting was declared quorate.

2. DECLARATIONS ON INTEREST

Interests were declared as followed and **noted**:

- Wesley Rourke – agenda item 7.4
- Neil McGrath – agenda item 10.2

3. APPOINTMENT OF STAFF GOVERNOR (*previously circulated*)

The Clerk provided an overview of the election process which had recently taken place and drew the Board's attention to the relevance of agenda item 10.6 in connection with this.

Resolved: The Board re-appointed Chris Sikorski as the staff governor to continue to serve for a further two-year term of office and remain a member of the Finance & Resources Committee.

4. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair provided the following update on activity since the Board Meeting held on 12th December 2022:

- Regular meetings had taken place with the Principal and Clerk to Governors
- Introductory meetings had taken place with the two Student Governors 2022/2023 and also the new Teaching Staff Governor
- Attendance at the Apprentice Award Evening in February 2023 which was a huge success

- Attendance at the Board Strategy Event in February 2023 together with fellow Board Members

Resolved: The Board **noted** the contents of the Chair's activity report.

5. UPDATE ON STRATEGIC ISSUES (*previously circulated*)

The Principal referred to the comprehensive written report which had previously been circulated. The Principal delivered a presentation and highlighted key updates since the last Board meeting. Questions were invited at regular intervals. The Board was advised that the main areas of focus related to (i) the pay dispute with the National Education Union (NEU) which had been resolved with an average pay award for 2022/2023 being 8.5%, with a further non-consolidated payment having been made with Board approval in March 2023, (ii) there was a significant increase in the number of 16-18 applications received comparative to this point last year, and (iii) the College was on track to meet or exceed all of its major funding and achievement targets. During her presentation, the Principal informed the Board on the various issues relating to:

- External Factors – including changes to funding for 16-18 year olds, correspondence that had been sent to the Skills Minister regarding the Level 3 qualification reforms and associated concerns, update on the Accountability Agreement which was on track for submission by 31st May 2023, the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan and the Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE).
- Local Environment – updates relating to the Local Improvement Plans (LSIPs) and the Strategic Development Fund (SDF), Halton Learning Alliance (HLA), Halton Inclusion Partnerships (HIP) and the 'Mind the Skills Gap' event hosted by the Association of Liverpool City Region Colleges (AoLCRC)
- College Priorities – incorporated updates relating to safeguarding and wellbeing, QEG (quality, efficiency and growth) and quality of teaching learning and assessment (TLA). The QEG headline data was presented in detail and linked to the College's Strategic Plan.
- College Activities and Staff/Student Achievements – an overview of numerous celebratory events was provided alongside a selection of photographs.

In line with usual practice, upon receipt of their supporting documentation Governors had been offered the opportunity to raise any questions in advance of the meeting. Where applicable, the Principal had incorporated responses within her presentation.

A discussion took place with additional questions being raised and responded to. A Governor requested clarification regarding paragraph 3.2.5 of the Strategic Report which referenced the 'Have Your Say – Student Survey' and the percentage of students who had agreed with the statement of feeling well prepared for tests and exams. The Principal confirmed that anonymised results had been analysed and followed up with students in their tutorial sessions. The question was to be re-worded on the next survey to avoid any ambiguity, together with a free text comment box for any additional commentary to be made.

In conclusion the Principal informed the Board that the College remained in a very stable position and was well placed to continue to meet the challenges and opportunities in the current climate. The Principal thanked Governors for their continued support.

Resolved: The Board

- (i) **noted** the contents of the Principal's update on strategic issues, and

- (ii) **approved** the Quality, Economy and Growth (QEG) update relating to the performance of the Strategic Plan.

6. HE STUDENT VOICE *(previously circulated)*

The Clerk to Governors presented this report in the absence of the HE Student Governor.

Resolved: The Board

- (i) **noted** the report, and
- (ii) **agreed** that the Student Voice agenda item at the July Board meeting was to report on the outcomes from the 'Have Your Say' student survey scheduled for circulation and completion in May 2023.

7. FINANCE & RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING– 15TH MARCH 2023

7.1 To receive for information a report on the Finance & Resources Committee meeting held on 15th March 2023 *(previously circulated)*

Susan Smith (Committee Chair) provided a summary to the Board and highlighted the following aspects within her report:

Human Resources Update

Short term staff absence had decreased in comparison to the same reporting period in the previous academic year; returning to levels reported pre-Covid. Long term absence had reduced significantly compared to the previous year and was below levels that were reported pre-Covid.

Partnership Update

Reference was made to the Education and Skills Funding Agency's (ESFA) general stance on colleges reducing the number of sub-contracting providers. In line with this direction the College provision had been reduced to two sub-contractors. Quality of performance had been scrutinised by the Committee and some quality issues relating to one provider had been identified and was subject to closer monitoring. This was being balanced against a backdrop of some external challenges beyond the provider's control and were discussed in detail.

The Principal informed the Board that the ESFA required Colleges to be audited against the new Subcontracting Standard by the end of the 2022/2023 academic year. Governors received assurance that the College was currently completing a self-assessment against the criteria and was to arrange for independent auditors to complete the review in the summer term, with the outcomes to be reported to the Audit Committee.

Resolved: The Board

- (i) **noted** the contents of the report, and
- (ii) **accepted** the recommendation made by the Finance & Resources Committee and **approved** the total increase in contract to Power in Partnership of an additional £57,975 for 16-18 year olds and £12,000 in respect of 19+.

7.2 Finance Forecast Update 2022/2024 including In-Year Financial Monitoring Update *(previously circulated)*

The Chair of the Finance & Resources Committee advised that a comprehensive report had been considered by the Committee and had been circulated to Board Members for information purposes. Table 5 within the appended report was highlighted and focussed on 'updates to assumptions relating to income and expenditure.' The Board received assurance that a stringent sensitivity analysis had taken place with the worst-case scenario having been modelled. Identified concerns

included the volatility of student recruitment, staff pay, catch-up learning, fee income, inflation and increasing costs – with contingencies built into the planning process to ensure the College had the flexibility to respond to any rapid and demanding changes as the country recovers from the current economic situation.

A discussion took place. In response to a question raised by a Governor, the Deputy Principal (Finance & Resources) clarified the position relating to non-pay and the contingency line of 8% that had been built in for appropriate allocation should the need arise.

Resolved: The Board

- (i) **noted** the contents of the report, and
- (ii) accepted the recommendation made by the Finance & Resources Committee and **approved** the updated budget for 2022/2023.

7.3 **Health and Safety Update** (*previously circulated*)

The Chair of the Finance & Resources Committee highlighted the following aspects from the health and safety update report that had been addressed at the recent Committee meeting:

- Statistics relating to accidents, incidents and near misses. The importance of recording near misses had been reinforced by the Committee to ensure that a safe and efficient workplace was maintained.
- RIDDOR reportable incidents related to slips/trips/falls; these had been fully investigated resulting in no further action to be taken.
- Health & Safety Executive (HSE) Update – urgent guidance had been issued by the Wood Safety Group and was applicable to all sectors who used woodworking machinery. Governors were advised that any person who worked or used joinery workshop equipment must wear a suitable respiratory mask; this had particular relevance to the College's Construction Department.

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

7.4 **Property Strategy** (*previously circulated*)

The Board noted the report provided and welcomed the simplified update relating to the property strategy which had been provided within the Principal's Update on Strategic Matters at agenda item 5. A discussion took place.

The Chair of the Finance and Resources Committee commended the work of the College's Senior Management Team on its efficient management of a highly complex and challenging area. She advised that the Committee received comprehensive reports relating to every building project; this included updates on the preparation of bid submissions, contingency plans in the event of a bid being unsuccessful and the impact of on-going escalating costs given the current economic climate. During the subsequent discussion, a Governor commented on the significant investment made by the College for the benefit of all learners and the communities in which it served; all of which was a cause for celebration. The Principal advised that there was to be an official opening of the new facilities for Health and Care, Digital, Business and Maths at Cronton College in June 2023 by Steve Rotherham, Metro Mayor for the Liverpool City Region and further information would follow in due course.

Resolved: The Board

- (i) **noted** the contents of the report
- (ii) **approved** the capital investment and summer works progress for 2022/2023, as recommended by the Finance & Resources Committee

- Approval of Policies** (*previously circulated*)
- 7.5 Environmental Sustainability
 - 7.6 Fees 2023/2024
 - 7.7 Apprenticeship Fees and Charges
 - 7.8 HE Fees and Compensation 2023/2024

The Board considered the recommendations made by the Finance & Resources Committee.

Resolved: The Board **approved** all policies under agenda items 7.5 to 7.8 (inc).

8. QUALITY & STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING – 13TH March 2023

8.1 To receive for information a report on the Quality & Standards Committee meeting held on 13th March 2023 (*previously circulated*)

In the absence of the Committee Chair, the Clerk provided a summary to the Board and highlighted the following aspects within this report:

- A curriculum presentation was delivered by Jennie Roe, Head of pre-advanced English and Maths. This agenda item focussed on the delivery, challenges and achievements relating to the pre-advanced Maths which encompassed Entry Level and GCSE studies.
- Closer monitoring reports were presented and discussed. These related to a small number of curriculum areas that were subject to additional monitoring to improve achievement rates. It was pleasing to report that progress had been evidenced in all areas, with one curriculum area having been removed from the process as a result of satisfactory progress having been made.
- A summary of the ASPIRE week experience that took place in November 2022. The Student Governor provided an account of her ASPIRE week experience and its many benefits.
- Equality and Diversity – an update in respect of retention data relating to specific cohorts of learners.

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

8.2 Safeguarding Update (*previously circulated*)

The Deputy Principal (Curriculum) provided a summary of this report that had previously been considered by the Quality & Standards Committee and the salient points had also been presented within the Principal's Strategic Report at agenda item 5. The Deputy Principal (Curriculum) drew the Board's attention to the following aspects:

- Statistical data relating to the number of (i) health and wellbeing referrals and (ii) safeguarding referrals, together with comparative data for the same timeframe in the preceding academic year.
- Additional complexities for some learners post-Covid continued to present themselves. In response to a question raised by a Governor, the Deputy Principal advised that there were no signs of abatement and this situation may continue for some years to come.
- At the request of the Department for Education (DfE) the College had participated in a meeting with the Senior Policy Advisor for the Prevent Policy and Delivery Unit to review a case that the College was involved in last year that resulted in criminal charges. The meeting had been described as 'helpful, informative and much appreciated.' As a result, College Managers had been

asked to meet with the wider Prevent Policy and Delivery Unit Team to share the College's good practice.

A discussion took place. A Governor referred to the achievement and retention rates of young carers and enquired as to whether any support could be offered by the Health and Wellbeing Team to assist this cohort of learners. In response, the Deputy Principal (Curriculum) confirmed that support continued to be provided, though in some situations highly complex issues had been evident. This included circumstances whereby learners were required to contribute financially at home which meant they needed to earn an income by seeking employment.

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

8.3 **To receive a curriculum report** (*previously circulated*)

The Deputy Principal (Curriculum) presented this report and updated the Board on matters relating to:

- Student attendance rates
- Student retention rates
- Curriculum planning updates
- Additional Learning Support and High Needs Update
- January Enrolment for Adults
- Apprenticeships Update
- Higher Education Update
- GCSE Re-Sits

A discussion took place with concerns being expressed relating to curriculum planning for the 2023/2024 academic year and in particular the estimated number of students who may be adversely affected by the changes arising from the Level 3 reform. A copy of the letter sent by the Principal to Robert Halfon (Skills Minister), the AoC and local MP Derek Twigg outlining the scope and scale of concerns had been referred to in the Principal's Strategic Update within agenda item 5. This correspondence addressed the serious concerns regarding the Government changes and the defunding of some Level 3 programmes of study. The Committee shared the College's concerns regarding the reforms and recommended to the Board that it also formally put its concerns in writing to the Skills Minister regarding this matter.

Resolved: The Board

- (i) **noted** the contents of the report, and
- (ii) **approved** that a letter is sent to the Skills Minister signed by Chair on behalf of the Board to express its serious concerns in respect of the Level 3 reforms.

8.4 **Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy**

To accept the recommendation made by the Quality and Standards Committee and approve the policy.

The Board considered the policy as recommended for approval by the Quality & Standards Committee at its meeting on 13th March 2023.

Resolved: The Board accepted the recommendations made by the Quality & Standards Committee and **approved** the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy.

9. **AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING – 14TH MARCH 2023**

9.1 **To receive for information a report on the Audit Committee meeting held on 14th March 2023 (previously circulated)**

Karen Banks (Committee Chair) provided a summary to the Board and highlighted the following aspects within her report:

Governors' Training Schedule - Matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting and associated action log

The Committee noted the update presented by the Clerk and whilst some progress had been made relating to historical training action points, the importance of continued training and development for governors was discussed amongst members and remained a high priority.

HR and Payroll - Internal Audit Report

A review had been undertaken of the College's controls in respect of its payroll system; payroll being the College's largest expenditure. The Internal Auditor provided College Management and the Audit Committee with substantial assurance that the areas of the control environment tested during the audit were designed and operated effectively with no significant weaknesses. As a result of the audit, ICCA had not identified any areas for improvement.

Key Financial Controls – Internal Audit Report

A high-level review of the systems, processes, and controls established to effectively control the College's main financial systems had been undertaken. The internal auditors provided management and the Audit Committee with substantial assurance that the areas of the control environment tested during the audit were designed and operated effectively with no significant weaknesses. One recommendation of a low-level nature was accepted by College Management.

Annual Schedule of Business 2022/2023

This was approved subject to a relatively minor addition and subject to Board approval as to whether additional Search & Governance Committee meetings ought to be convened in light of the imminent external review of governance, or alternatively the implementation of a Working Group.

ESFA Sector Update – 'College Corporation Financial Management and Good Practice Guides – the scope of work of audit committees and internal auditors in college corporations.'

The Committee noted that the ESFA had enhanced sections on (i) risk management, (ii) placed greater emphasis on the importance of learner data, (iii) cyber security risks and introduced new sections on value for money and committee papers. Following a discussion the Committee was satisfied in terms of its compliance to the good practice guide.

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

9.2 **Risk Management**

The Chair of the Audit Committee reported that the Committee had been advised of the revisions made by the Risk Management Group relating to the higher risk scores and RAG ratings based upon several factors, which included matters such as the reclassification of colleges to public sector, the increasing number of learners classed as 'not in education, employment or training' (NEETs) compared to the preceding academic year and the introduction of sub-contracting assurance audits. Strategic key risks 1 and 3 were being closely monitored and assurance had been provided that the Disaster Management and Business Continuity Plan had been reviewed. The Board was also advised in the report that the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP)

recommendations had been updated following agreement of the Self Assessment Review (SAR) and QIP 2022/2023. This enabled Governors to monitor progress effectively against specific actions and obtain the required assurance that the Risk Management Action Plan (RMAP) covered any risk associated with the Further Education and Skills Inspection Framework.

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

9.3 **Bribery Act Guidelines for Staff**

The Board considered the recommendation made by the Audit Committee.

Resolved: The Board **approved** the Bribery Act Guidelines for Staff.

10. **SEARCH & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE MEETING – 13TH MARCH 2023**

10.1 **To receive for information a report on the Search & Governance Committee meeting held on 13th March 2023 (previously circulated)**

The Chair of the Search & Governance Committee provided updates to the Board relating to:

- The analysis of the Board's Skills Audit in December 2022.
- The approval of the format to enable equality and diversity data collection which was required to (i) inform the Board for recruitment activity purposes and (ii) comply with the DfE annual return requirements submitted by the Clerk - FE Workforce (including Board) Collection Data¹
- The satisfactory progress that had been made in respect of compliance with the AoC Code of Good Governance for English Colleges and resulting action plan approved at the end of the 2021/2022 academic year.
- Training Schedule 2022/2023 and link to agenda item 9.1.

A discussion took place. In response to a query raised by the Clerk, Governors confirmed their preference to receive the planned unconscious bias training via a hybrid approach with an online module followed up with a face-to-face session to consolidate the learning.

Resolved: The Board **noted** the report and received assurance that the previously identified training relating to (i) risk management, and (ii) unconscious bias training remained on schedule for delivery by the end of the 2022/2023 academic year.

10.2 **Appointment Procedure of Chair & Vice Chairs 2023/2024 (previously circulated)**

The Board considered the options available as prescribed within the Standing Orders.

Resolved: The Board **approved** that the informal procedure be adopted in relation to the appointment of the Board Chair and Vice-Chairs 2023/2024.

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

The Chair of the Committee and the Clerk reported that in-depth discussions had taken place at the recent Search & Governance Committee meeting in respect of the Board's recruitment strategy and activity to date throughout the academic year, as detailed in the report which had previously been circulated.

The Board **resolved:**

- (i) to note the contents of the report, and

¹ [FE Workforce Data Specification Document \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

- (ii) to progress to the interview stage with an individual who had expressed an interest in becoming an External Governor and who had expertise in the apprenticeship sector
- (iii) to await a response where a direct approach had been made to an individual with the required skills set from an employer perspective
- (iv) for the Clerk to engage further with two former Cronton College students who had expressed their respective interests in becoming External Governors with the support of Ben Barton, Assistant Principal
- (v) for the Clerk to submit an application to Peridot Partners via the DfE in a further attempt to recruit a Board Member with the required skills to join the Audit Committee²

10.4 **Statutory External Governance Review** *(previously circulated)*

A progress report was presented by the Clerk to Governors. Productive meetings had taken place with two organisations who were undertaking statutory external governance reviews to ascertain details of their offer. It was also noted that an internal audit on corporate governance was scheduled to take place in the summer term and the outcome report may assist in determining the scope of the external review at the July Board meeting, though this would be subject to the Board being in receipt of the internal audit report by the end of the 2022/2023 academic year. Reference was made to agenda item 9.1 and whether it would be preferable to establish a dedicated Working Group or include additional Search & Governance Committee meetings into the Schedule of Business 2023/2024.

The AoC Code of Good Governance for English Colleges adopted by the Board was considered in conjunction with this agenda item as the Code was currently under review and subject to a consultation process.

After due consideration and discussion the Board **resolved**:

- (i) that the report be **noted**
- (ii) **agreed to delegate authority** to the Chair of the Board, Principal and Clerk to Governors to further explore the available options and a proposed framework for the review to be undertaken, with a subsequent report to be presented at the next Board meeting in July 2023.
- (iii) **agreed to delegate authority** to the Chair of the Board, Principal and Clerk to respond to the consultation on the AoC's Code of Good Governance on behalf of the Board.

10.5 **Board Self-Assessment Review (SAR) 2021/2022** *(previously circulated)*

The Board considered the draft SAR presented by the Clerk and a discussion ensued.

Resolved: The Board **approved** the SAR subject to an amended grade in relation to the specific reference to the Board's collaboration with employers as one of the key stakeholders.

10.6 **Standing Orders** *(previously circulated)*

The Clerk to Governors reported that the Search & Governance Committee had reviewed this comprehensive document in its entirety. The Board considered the summary document highlighting the recommended changes with supporting reasons for the amendments.

Resolved: The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Search &

² Further Education and Colleges Recruitment - Peridot Partners

Governance Committee and **approved** the revised Standing Orders.

10.7 **Board Portals** (*previously circulated*)

The Board considered the recent trials that had taken place in respect of two Board portals with value for money being one of the key factors under discussion.

Resolved: The Board **approved** a subscription with GovernorHub for one year at a cost of £400 + VAT.

10.8 **Meeting Schedule 2023/2024** (*previously circulated*)

The Board considered the draft meeting schedule.

Resolved: The Board **approved** the meeting schedule for 2023/2024.

For Approval:

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

The Board considered the recommendation made the Search and Governance Committee.

Resolved: The Board **approved** the Governor Expenses Policy.

11. **MINUTES** (*previously circulated*)

To approve the draft minutes (Part One) of the Board Meeting held on 12th December 2022.

11.1 The Board considered the minutes.

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

11.2 **To consider any matters arising from the minutes**

Governors received a progress report on the actions identified at the previous meeting.

Resolved – The Board **noted** that all matters were either completed, in progress or had been included on the agenda.

12. **DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

These were **noted** as follows:

Audit Committee – 19th June 2023 at 5pm

Quality & Standards Committee – 20th June 2023 at 5pm

Finance & Resources Committee – 21st June 2023 at 5pm

Board – 3rd July 2023 at 5pm

The Chair thanked all attendees for their participation, and he closed the meeting at 6.10pm.

Signed: 

Chair

Date: 3RD JULY 2023