

MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING HELD ON 5TH JULY 2021 REMOTELY, VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Present:	Valerie Allen	External	
	Michele Bacon	External	
	Karen Banks	External	
	Jayne Edwards	External	
	Neil McGrath	External	
	Tom McInerney	External	
	Andrew MacManus	External	
	Mary Murphy	Principal	
	Lynn Pegler	External	
	Wesley Rourke	External	(Chair)
	Chris Sikorski	Staff	
	Susan Smith	External	
	Jessy Sodimu	Student	
Ryan Turner	Staff		
In Attendance:	Ben Barton	Deputy Head of Cronton Campus	
	Thalia Bell	Deputy Principal (Curriculum)	
	Leeann Bellfield	Assistant Principal	
	Alan Brown	Assistant Principal	
	Julie Holland	Deputy Principal (Finance & Resources)	
	Lesley Venables	Clerk to the Governors	

PART ONE

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

260 Apologies for absence were received from Sherroll Martin.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

261 There were no declarations of interest.

UPDATE ON STRATEGIC ISSUES

262 Governors received a comprehensive briefing on progress against the strategic objectives, the COVID-19 pandemic and information on sector developments.

263 The Principal reported that the College was finalising its plans relating to the easing of COVID-19 restrictions and that specific guidance for schools and colleges was anticipated over the next few days, which would inform this process.

264 Since 7th June there had been a significant increase in the number of positive COVID-19 cases, the majority of which were amongst students based at the Cronton Campus. A robust “track and trace” system was in place and a total of 14.5k lateral flow tests had been carried out, however, it was noted that student compliance levels varied considerably.

265 The Health & Safety Executive had recently undertaken a desk-based check on compliance with COVID-19 regulations, with no issues highlighted. Since mid-May the national guidance stated that students and staff could remove face coverings in classrooms but should continue to wear them in communal areas. This guidance may change if cases increased.

266 The College’s plans for Year 10 Sampling events (taster sessions) and New Students Days had been amended following the whole of the Liverpool City Region being classified as an ‘enhanced provision’ area and an increase in the number of positive cases of the Delta variant amongst the local population. Staff continued to work closely with partners at Public Health England, the NHS and Halton Borough Council to provide a co-ordinated approach to the pandemic.

267 The Principal advised that it was likely that the College would need to reinstate onsite testing facilities at the start of the new academic year. Further guidance on this was awaited from the Department of Health & Social Care.

268 The AoC had recently issued its “Rebuild Strategy” document. This set out proposals for future areas of delivery by further education colleges, including an increase in full-time places for 16-25 year olds, “catch-up” classes for Year 11 students and adults who would need retraining due to redundancy.

269 The Skills and Post 16 Education Bill had been introduced in Parliament in January 2021 and was currently at the second hearing stage. This set out planned reforms for further education, including Local Skills Improvement Plans, strengthened intervention powers for the Education Secretary (where there had been a failure to “meet local needs” and to direct structural change such as mergers in order secure improvement) and a flexible lifelong loans system (“Lifelong Loan Entitlement”) to encourage more modular provision and part-time study.

270 The 16-19 COVID Tuition Fund would be expanded as part of a £1.4bn package to support education recovery through small group tutoring for disadvantaged students aged 16 to 19 and those who may need to repeat Year 13 of their studies. The FE sector felt that this amount was insufficient to be effective. In 2019/2020 Riverside College had received £400k and this should be replicated for the next 2 years.

271 A number of capital bids had been prepared in response to recent ESFA funding initiatives. As approved by the Board at its March 2021 meeting, an application had been made to the Capital Transformation Fund for a new teaching block at the Kingsway Campus to facilitate specialist green technology and to accommodate growth in Engineering and Construction courses (estimated cost £3m - £1.5m grant, £1.5m from College funds). The second project was to overclad the main building, the estimated cost of which was £6m (£4.5m grant, £1.5m College). The Board noted that the fund had been over-subscribed and no decision had yet been made on the successful bidders.

272 The College would be submitting the bid for the new teaching block at Kingsway (outlined above) under the ESFA’s Post-16 Capacity Fund, as there was no guarantee that the current FECTF bid would be successful. Management felt that the new building at Kingsway was vital given the current high levels of space utilisation and sought approval from the Board for this to be financed from College reserves, if the capital funding bids were rejected

by the ESFA. The project was affordable and had been incorporated into the Three Year Financial Forecast.

273 The ESFA had introduced an Annual Strategic Conversation (ASC) process which had taken place on 21st June and attended by members of SMT, the Chair and Chair Designate. This formed one of the recommendations of the Ney Report and was designed to improve the relationship between the ESFA and individual colleges, offering support rather than intervention and, where colleges have outstanding quality and finances, encouraging them to share good practice. Governors received a copy of the follow-up letter, which detailed a number of strengths and possible areas for future consideration by the Board.

274 The Skills for Jobs White Paper set out the Government's blueprint for reforming the technical skills system to better support the needs of the local labour market and wider economy. The Skills Accelerator prospectus was released in April to support this and consists of two parts. Firstly, the Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) Trailblazers, which had to be led by an Employer Representative Body (ERB), not mayoral combined authorities or Local Enterprise Partnerships. Local Chambers of Commerce were taking this forward, with St Helens Chamber leading the LCR bid.

275 The second strand was the Strategic Development Fund (SDF), which combined additional capital resources and revenue funding to enable colleges and providers to meet the skills needs identified in the LSIPs. The initiative expected a high level of collaboration between colleges and the lead college submitted the bid on behalf of the others. The Merseyside Colleges' Association bid was led by Wirral Metropolitan College and was submitted on 25th May. Governors noted that this would build on existing work by the MCA to identify technical skills gaps at Levels 4 and 5.

276 The LCR Growth Platform had identified 5 areas for development: CreaTech & Digital, Advanced Manufacturing, Health & Life Sciences, Energy and Built Environment. The Government had also recently conferred Freeport status on Liverpool.

277 The College was a key partner in the Halton Teaching Alliance, the aim of which was to create a learning community for every phase of education. Meetings had also taken place recently with education officials from the Knowsley Borough regarding A Levels, due to political pressure to overturn a previous decision to withdraw from this provision. The Principal had emphasised the quality and breadth of the offer available at the Cronton Campus, together with the length of time it would take to establish A Level programmes, and a site visit would be arranged as soon as COVID-19 restrictions permit.

278 Governors were advised that the outcome of the Towns Fund application to establish a health and education hub in Runcorn town centre, in partnership with the NHS and Halton Borough Council, had not yet been announced.

279 Performance against each of the three elements of the College's Strategy (Quality-Efficiency-Growth) was good and all other targets were on track to be met by the end of the academic year.

280 In response to a recent national Ofsted report which highlighted a 'normalised' culture of sexual assault and sexual harassment in schools and colleges, the College was currently planning how it would challenge this statement in 2021/2022. This included the adaption of tutorial programmes and the calendar of wellbeing events to ensure that students are aware of acceptable behavioural standards and how to access support and/or advice if they experience any form of sexual assault or harassment. The staff training programme would also incorporate sessions on how students have been affected by trauma, exploitation (including sexual harassment and assault) and the pandemic.

281 Following a lengthy and robust internal process, all Teacher Assessed Grades had now been uploaded to the awarding bodies' portals. Samples of supporting evidence had already been requested in some curriculum areas. The overall results for A Level, vocational BTECs and GCSEs were in line with those for 2019/2020 and a full report would be presented to the October Board meeting.

282 The College had recently been reaccredited for the Matrix award for advice and guidance to students. The report highlighted a list of strengths, including significant praise for the staff response to the challenges of the pandemic and the adaptation of their working practices to ensure the minimum impact on existing and prospective students.

283 The internal Leadership Development Programme had been put on hold throughout the pandemic, but would be relaunched in September 2021 with 16 members of the College Management Team taking part. A similar programme for Aspiring Programme Area Leaders and Support Team Leaders would also start in the new academic year.

284 Governors were advised that bids had recently been invited from curriculum areas to improve digital facilities even further. A new 'student app' was under development to enable students to track their own progress, attendance, timetable and pastoral notes on their mobile phones. Microsoft Teams was now firmly embedded within the College's practices with most meetings still taking place virtually. Management was considering the introduction of remote working weeks for 2021/2022 to support the Green Agenda and to ensure that staff digital skills continued to improve.

285 In terms of efficiency, the College was now projecting an operating surplus of £1.7m (compared to the budgeted figure of £0.7m). There had been substantial growth in 16-18 student numbers and income levels for HE, adults and apprenticeships had not been as affected by the pandemic as negatively as anticipated. The College remained in 'outstanding' financial health.

286 Offers for 2021/2022 had increased by 378 for 16-18 year olds, which would lead to higher income levels in 2022/2023. Year 10 sampling would be undertaken through a 'tour' of local schools, which had been gratefully received by headteachers. All Year 11 transition meetings had now been completed.

287 A total of 224 apprentices were currently on programme, with a further 35 matched to existing vacancies. Applications for higher education courses were similar to 2020/2021 and a new course in Media Make-up had been introduced at HNC level to facilitate progression routes.

288 The College had met the thresholds established by the ESFA and the LCR for achievement of the Adult Education Budget contract.

289 The Principal thanked governors for their support during this difficult year, which had enabled the College to achieve even greater levels of success.

STRATEGIC PLAN

290 The Principal presented the draft Strategic Plan for 2021/2022, which had been updated since the March Board meeting. It was agreed that the main pillars of the Plan should remain as Safeguarding, Quality, Efficiency and Growth.

291 Targets for each element of the Plan would be submitted for approval at the Board's

- Anti-Money Laundering

QUALITY & STANDARDS COMMITTEE

302 The Chair of the Quality & Standards Committee provided a verbal update on discussions at its meeting on 22nd June 2021.

303 The Committee received a presentation from Head of Engineering at Cronton on the College's curriculum in relation to the Green economy and sustainability agenda. It was noted how the strategy aligned well with the FE Skills White Paper and the priorities of the Liverpool City Region and the LEP.

304 Information had been received on the current number of cases of COVID-19, where there had been 17 students and 2 staff since 7th June. All students and staff were being strongly encouraged to continue to take Lateral Flow Tests twice weekly.

305 The Committee was Informed of the complex and robust processes that had been used for Teacher Assessed Grades for 2020/2021. Management had commented that it had been extremely challenging and had placed a significant burden on teachers, who had performed well throughout.

306 A detailed curriculum report was discussed by governors. Targets (both learner numbers and financial) for all areas of provision had been met or were on track to be achieved by the year end. There had been high levels of satisfaction with their course amongst HE students.

307 There had been a significant increase in the number of applications from High Needs Learners for 2021/2022, which had resourcing implications.

308 The total number of safeguarding cases had decreased by approximately 25%, which was felt to be due to students not being in College and it being more difficult for staff to identify any potential issues.

309 Growth in applications for 16-18 year olds, particularly at Cronton, was noted. Management was reviewing the space requirements and additional accommodation may be sought to accommodate the increase in the student cohort.

310 The outcome of the recent Internal Audit review on Curriculum Planning was noted, grading the College's processes as providing a 'substantial' level of assurance, with no recommendations highlighted.

311 A revised curriculum plan had been developed to take account of national strategic developments, including the introduction of T Levels in Early Years, Health & Science, Business and Built Environment, Engineering Maintenance & Operations. The College was part of a pilot Test & Learn programme for 3 courses linked to sustainability.

312 There had been a total of 7 complaints compared to 19 in 2019/2020, all of which had been resolved.

313 Detailed equality and diversity information was provided on performance against the protected characteristics and vulnerable groups of learners.

314 Updated policies on Equality & Diversity, Student Discipline & Suspension, Complaints, HE Bursaries and Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults had been recommended for approval by the full Board.

315 It had been agreed that, as there was a large gap until the next meeting, the Committee would receive a mid-term update from the Chair, in discussion with the Deputy Principal and the Clerk.

316 **Resolved -** That the following policies be approved:

Equality & Diversity
Student Discipline & Suspension
Complaints
HE Bursaries
Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults

FINANCE & RESOURCES COMMITTEE

317 Governors received a verbal report from the Finance & Resources Committee chair on the meeting held on 23rd June 2021.

318 A comprehensive report on key human resources data had been discussed by the Committee. Absence levels (short and long-term) had decreased by 0.88% compared to last year and information was received on the number of COVID-19 cases since March and staff who were self-isolating. Governors were reassured of the robustness of the College's 'track & trace' systems and for improving well-being amongst staff.

319 There had been a significant reduction in staff leaving the College, mainly due to the impact of COVID-19, a desire for stability and fewer jobs advertised outside the organisation. The high level of staff utilisation had been maintained and was currently 99%.

320 Comparative data was received on the Gender Pay Gap. The mean was 7.6%, which was lower than the sample of other institutions identified and the median was 18.6%, which was higher than some peer organisations but lower than others. The comparisons would be checked again in October when further information will be available.

321 It was noted that the College's Environmental & Sustainability framework addressed all aspects of the Association of Colleges' Climate Change Roadmap.

322 There had been a total of 26 accidents, compared to 16 for the same point in 2019/2020, with 19 near misses and no RIDDOR reportable incidents. Governors felt that this was commendable against the background of extensive capital works.

323 Information was provided on COVID-19 testing, which indicated that 4612 student home tests and 8241 staff tests had been undertaken to date.

324 The Committee had scrutinised the draft Budget for 2021/2022 and 3 Year Financial Forecast, which were recommended for approval by the Board. As reported earlier, these indicated a substantial surplus and 'outstanding' financial health throughout, whilst enabling the College to continue to pursue its capital investment strategy. The Management accounts to April 2021 were also received and discussed.

325 The Deputy Principal had reported on progress against current Partnership Provision Contracts and a number of amendments had been recommended for 2021/2022. The Committee was also advised of new ESFA regulations on sub-contracting arrangements and received an analysis of the College's level of compliance against each of these.

326 Progress against each of the College's capital projects was discussed, including the Health & Well-being Building at the Cronton Campus. The Committee also debated the affordability of future projects and was reassured that, even if the recent bids to the ESFA's capital funds were unsuccessful, there were sufficient reserves to cover the cost of the Green Technology Hub at the Kingsway Campus (£3m).

327 A number of policies and the Financial Regulations were recommended for approval.

- 328 **Resolved -**
- 1 That £1.5m expenditure on the Summer Works programme for 2020/2021 be approved
 - 2 That expenditure of £3m from the College's reserves on the Green Technology Hub at the Kingsway Campus be approved, if the College's bids for grant funding to the ESFA's Capital Transformation Fund and Post-16 Capacity Fund were unsuccessful
 - 3 That payment be approved of the full value of partnership provision contracts to sub-contractors, as long as the 90% delivery target was met
 - 4 That the initial proposals for partnership provision in 2021/2022 be approved,

FINANCIAL FORECAST 2020 TO 2023

329 The Deputy Principal (Finance & Resources) presented the Financial Forecast for 2020 to 2023 and the draft budget for 2021/2022, which had been prepared following recent guidance issued by the Education & Skills Funding Agency. The Financial Forecast was an update of the Plan that had been submitted to the ESFA in January 2021.

330 Governors noted that the assumptions in the Forecast represented a worst-case scenario, based on current thinking and information. Further contingency funding had been included for both pay and non-pay expenditure to mitigate any amendments to funding methodologies, should these arise.

331 The income predictions were more favourable than projected in the January forecast following a positive recruitment period for all streams, particularly 16-18, HE and Apprenticeships. The impact of the lockdowns had not been as severe as anticipated and, although it remained challenging, the ESFA and LCR Adult reconciliation targets had been met for 2020/2021.

332 The outturn operating surplus for 2020/2021 was predicted to be £1.7m, compared to the budget of £673k, which was attributable to in-year growth and additional funding received from a number of income streams. All funding and learner number targets had been met.

333 The College would retain its financial health grading of 'outstanding' for the current year and throughout the period of the Forecast. Contingencies that had been held in the

accounts for transport and COVID-19 costs had now been released. Overall cash balances were £13.7m at the year end.

334 The capital programme included current projects, those where the grant had already approved and the bid to the ESFA capital initiatives for £9m, £3m of which would be paid from the College's reserves.

335 The pay budget for 2020/2021 and future years was slightly less favourable than the original forecast, due to the growth in student numbers for 2021/2022, for which the associated staffing costs would apply in 2020/2021. Pay contingencies of 4% had been included, together with non-pay contingencies of at least £1m annually. This would provide further mitigation for any future impacts associated with the pandemic during the economy's recovery.

336 The cashflow forecasts had been updated and the minimum cash balance throughout the Plan would be £10.6m, which was well within the bank's covenants.

337 Governors noted that at 31st July 2020 the net pension liability for the Local Government Pension Scheme was valued at £9.62m. This Plan would increase the pension liability by approx. £1m per year. The value of assets in the scheme may be significantly impacted by changes in investment values due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The College would continue to monitor the situation and would advise the Board if there was any change.

338 The ESFA had requested a further document to be submitted by the end of July 2021, known as the College Financial Forecasting Return (CFFR), which was presented to the Committee for information. The intention of this process was to enable the ESFA to assess whether colleges were likely to experience cashflow difficulties.

339 The Deputy Principal advised that the CFFR indicated that the College remained in outstanding financial health for the next 3 years. Governors were advised that the CFFR indicated that the College remained in outstanding financial health for the next 3 years. The College met or exceeded each of the sector average ratios within the CFFR, including cash days in hand, operating surplus as a percentage of income and profitability as a percentage of revenue.

- 340 Resolved - 1 That the revised Financial Forecast for 2020 to 2023, which includes the Budget for 2021/2022, be approved
- 2 That the CCFR be approved and submitted to the ESFA

FINANCIAL REGULATIONS & POLICIES

341 The Deputy Principal presented a revised set of Financial Regulations and associated policies, which had recently been reviewed by the Clerk.

342 The proposed changes were designed to align the content to recent legislation/regulatory requirements and were based on best practice within the further education and wider public sectors.

343 A new policy on Anti-Modern Slavery had been prepared by the Clerk, which reflected the College's ethos and values.

- 344 **Resolved** - 1 That the Financial Regulations for 2021/2022 be approved
- 2 That the following policies be approved:

Fees 2021/2022
Environmental Sustainability
Higher Education Fees 2021/2022
Anti-Modern Slavery
Treasury Management
Procurement

GOVERNANCE ISSUES

Appointment of Chair & Vice-Chairs

345 Governors were reminded that at the March Board meeting it had been agreed to operate a formal process for the nomination and appointment of the Chair and two Vice-Chairs. This had been concluded in May and the Board had been informed of the nominees for these posts.

- 346 **Resolved -**
- 1 That Neil McGrath be appointed as Chair for the 2021/2022 academic year
 - 2 That Michele Bacon and Karen Banks be appointed as Vice-Chairs for the 2021/2022 academic year.

Committee Memberships

347 The Clerk presented a revised schedule of committee memberships, which had been amended to reflect the new chair and vice-chair appointments outlined above. This would be kept under review and any further changes would be submitted for approval at the October Board meeting.

- 348 **Resolved -** That the updated schedule of committee memberships for 2021/2022 be approved

Format of Meetings

349 It was noted that attendance levels had improved recently, as a result of holding meetings remotely. The Clerk reported that, as part of the annual governor review process, views would be sought as to how meetings should be conducted in future, particularly against a background of continued social distancing.

Written Resolution

350 Governors were reminded that recently approval was given via a written resolution for the appointment of Beever & Struthers as the College's Financial Statements Auditors. Under the Board's Standing Orders and Instrument of Government, this decision was required to be noted at the next available meeting.

- 351 **Resolved -** That the outcome of the written resolution to appoint Beever & Struthers as Financial Statements Auditors be noted

MINUTES

352 **Resolved -** That the minutes of the meetings held on 15th March 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair

MATTERS ARISING

353 Governors received a progress report on the actions identified at the previous meeting. It was noted that all of these issues were either in progress, had been completed or were featured on the agenda.

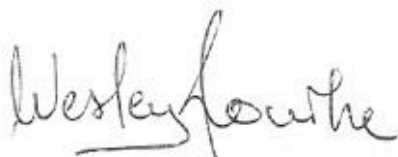
RETIREMENT OF GOVERNORS

354 On behalf of the Board, the Chair Designate thanked Wesley Rourke and Valerie Allen for their contributions as Chair and Vice-Chair respectively. Both individuals would remain on the Board until the end of their current term of office.

355 The student governors were also thanked for their input during the year.

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

27 th September 2021	Audit Committee
4 th October 2021	Search & Governance Committee
11 th October 2021	Board



Signed:

Chair of Board of Governors

Date: 19.10.21.
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