

# WQE & Regent College Group

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**Minutes of the Corporation Meeting held virtually via Zoom on 16 December 2020 at 17:00**

**Members of the Corporation present:** Stuart Dawkins, Chair, Jasmine Andean, Joyce Black, Bernadette Green, Jash Maadhavji, Neil McGhee, Nisar Navsariwala, Ing'utu Palmer, Philip Parkinson, Jim Phillips, Amrik Singh, Paul Wilson, Aaron Winterton & Jimmy Zachariah

**In attendance:** Tim Cullinan, Carolyn Davies, Andrew Jackson, Kate O'Farrell, Sarah Oldfield, Donna Trusler & Rachel Middleton

**Apologies for absence:** Wayne Allsopp, Jo Cooke, Alistair Lockhart-Smith

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## **1. Welcome and apologies for absence**

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting. Apologies were received from Wayne Allsopp, Jo Cooke and Alistair Lockhart-Smith.

## **2. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **3. Minutes and matters arising– Paper 001**

The minutes of the meeting on 11 November were approved as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair will sign the minutes at the next available face to face meeting.

The following actions were completed between Corporation meetings:

- Sign the Provider Review
- Strengthen the Curriculum Policy's reference to student employability
- To inform Governors about opportunities to engage with the website
- To pursue opportunities for live Governor chat on the new website
- To promote opportunities for teaching staff to join support staff on the Well-being Group
- Provide periodic updates on the work of the staff well-being group through the Principal's Update, in order to keep Governors apprised
- Ofsted Report– the impact of Covid-19 on education - cascade on to Governors
- Issue details on the virtual performances to Governors: Studio 79 and LCPA virtual shows for Christmas
- Ask the Governor candidate to submit a statement of interest. Discuss process with the Chair
- Feedback to Chair on Principal's performance
- Feedback to Chair on Clerk to the Corporation's performance

Subject to the two-week policy approval process following the last Corporation meeting, these policies have now been approved:

- Contemplation & Prayer Policy

- Pay Policy

The following actions were addressed through discussion of tabled agenda items during the meeting and subsequently removed from the action list:

- Report to the Corporation on student employability (covered under agenda item 4)
- Update the Corporation on the Institute of Technology Bid (covered under agenda item 5)

## **GOVERNOR BRIEFING**

### **4. The Gatsby Benchmarks and Careers**

Andrew Jackson and Kate O'Farrell (Head of Careers)– Presentation

Kate provided background on the research work conducted by Sir John Holman and academics from the University of Derby which led to the Good Careers Guidance report and the eight Gatsby Benchmarks. The benchmarks outline a range of things which should be in place for careers education and guidance to happen effectively. The benchmarks were adopted in the government's careers strategy in 2017. All schools and colleges are required to use the benchmarks.

Kate confirmed the benchmarks are used at WQE to inform all planning. The tool used to evaluate progress in meeting the benchmarks is called Compass. The latest use of the tool was 11 December 2020.

Kate confirmed the College's careers programme is available to view on the website.

WQE are Members of the local careers hub – a strategic partnership of local schools and colleges. The College is also supported by an Enterprise Adviser.

The latest use of the evaluation tool indicated that the College is making progress against all of the Gatsby Benchmarks.

Despite the pandemic, the College has managed to deliver almost all of what is normally delivered physically, through virtual means.

Kate confirmed the benchmarks which were most difficult to meet and outlined the ways in which the College is using IT packages such as KUDOS to highlight Labour Market Information (LMI) to students. Students are also using the LEP's World of Work resources. Kate will be looking at the use of social media to drip feed LMI out to students. Some LMI will also feature in students PPM sessions. There is an intention to target parents to support awareness of labour market information.

There will be a future focus on linking the curriculum to careers. This will be referenced in the College SAR. Resources will be made available to all curriculum teams.

Experiences of the workplace:

The College has invested in Connect software. Numbers undertaking work experience were increasing. Pre -lockdown there were 442 students due to go out on work experience in spring and 783 in the summer – these were the biggest cohorts ever but work experience couldn't happen due to lockdown.

The College is planning to address this through the purchase of a programme which supports virtual work experience. Students will have a weekly timetable that they will work through with some pre-

recorded and some live content. At the end of a week they will upload a presentation to LinkedIn, outlining what they have learnt from the work experience week and what their reflections are.

Governors thanked Kate and her team for their work.

Governors were eager to deploy parents' experiences of the world of work to develop a focus on careers of the future.

Governors asked whether there were plans in place to support students into careers where they were not intending to go to university. Staff confirmed that there was work underway to identify these students and to support them appropriately. In addition, work was planned to encourage first generation HE applicants into university. The Principal confirmed the College had undertaken an analysis of the boroughs where students live and looked at data relating to progression to HE within individual areas. This data has been shared with the Careers department to assist in the offer of a more tailored careers education and guidance programme.

**Action KO'F and AJ:** Update the Board at the same time next year on disadvantaged students and careers

Kate confirmed the careers service had moved fully online in September 2020. To date, colleagues had delivered:

643 careers appointment

33 Teams sessions – which were a combination of drop- ins, personal statements surgeries, and apprenticeships or UCAS- focused sessions.

A pilot session with medical students from the University of Sheffield had been offered to students interested in the medical profession.

The Spring term's focus for the careers team will be on supporting student progression.

There will be intensive support provided to ESOL students.

The virtual work experience programme will commence in January 2021.

Governors asked how they could support the careers department. Kate confirmed they were looking to build employer contacts and to refer these on to her. **Action all Governors**

In terms of offering practical support, Kate confirmed there would be the opportunity to conduct mock interviews in March. These will be run virtually.

Virtual work experience platform – Governors could be involved in assessing presentations which students post on to Linked in, they could be involved in panels or running masterclasses.

Nisar confirmed he would like to help with interview techniques.

**Action governors:** to engage with Kate to offer support

Amrik left the meeting at 17:40.

One of the Staff Governors suggested there could be the opportunity to ask parents to come into College and share information about their roles to boost students' learning about job roles within the local area. Kate is keen to take this idea forward.

## OVERSIGHT OF STRATEGIC DIRECTION

### 5. Principal's Update

Paul Wilson – Presentation

The Principal provided an update on the background to and progress with the Institute of Technology bid, including an overview of the lead organisation and the nature of the support which the College could offer. He confirmed that there were new partners on board covering a greater geographical area and which represented the FE College sector. The main focus and opportunity for the College will be on creating pathways to higher level vocational and technical courses, should the bid be successful.

The Principal confirmed that two other regional bids had been submitted. Feedback on the outcome of the bid will be in early Spring.

Governors queried the pros and cons of being involved in the bid.

Pros:

- an opportunity for the College to be engaged with the employer landscape within the city and county
- Prospect of the College being able to focus on the needs of the local community
- Ability to engage directly with training and skills providers to support local progression
- Ability to feed into the local driver to retain those with Level 4 and 5 skills working locally

Cons:

- There may be a competitor dimension to the work, for example where FE Colleges are offering T levels, however involvement in terms of benefits for the College's learners and the capacity for the College to play an influencing role off-sets any major risk
- There is a resource implication for all core partners in terms of the time they contribute to the work

#### **Student Outcomes Task & Finish Group:**

The T&F group has identified priority student groups, as well as individual courses on which to focus over the coming year.

Headlines since last year:

- Noted improvements in performance of white British disadvantaged students
- Significant improvements in performance and retention on courses identified as being of concern last year
- Performance in sport-based qualifications remains in focus for this second year
- Work is underway to embed support for specific identified student groups at both the curriculum and whole-College level

#### **Estates & Finance Task & Finish Group:**

This T&F group will meet in early January 2021.

The Principal confirmed that the strategic elements of the Estates Strategy do not meet criteria for Condition Improvement Fund (CIF) bids, but that there were elements relating to maintenance and improvement which could be undertaken dependent on receipt of CIF funding.

Options for funding the Estates Strategy will come to the T&F group for pre-approval prior to the meeting of the Corporation on 27 January.

The College can afford to do the initial phases of strategic development (Phase 1A) from its own reserves. The Principal confirmed he was seeking Board approval to commence work on design and development work and that the spend was at the margins of senior leader spending authorisation.

Governors considered the request and agreed to the commitment of up to £150k of College funds in relation to

- i) Any contribution which would be required should the CIF bid for maintenance work be successful.
- ii) Initial expenditures needed to progress the design work to underpin the Estates Strategy.

#### **Pay discussions:**

National teachers' trade unions are asking for a 7% pay award. The SFCA has put forward a proposal amounting to 3.02%, but that hadn't been accepted. Governors will be updated on this as national negotiations progress and should be aware that there was now a risk of a reasonable settlement not being reached.

#### **Exams 2021:**

Government has now committed to build infrastructure around exams which will be happening in Summer 2021 with the likelihood the of the College now needing to consider planning for contingencies around additional July exams.

**Ofsted:** – No general inspections are taking place presently. The plan is to resume full and graded inspections from Easter. The College is now in its third year since merger and can inspect an Ofsted inspection when normal service resumes. Planning is underway in this regard.

**Staff fora:** The Principal has run sessions with staff sharing aspirations around estates, finances etc.

**Staff and student attendance:** The Principal updated Governors on staff and student attendance and reported that absence was lower at the College than the national average. Student attendance has improved to be more consistently at the higher end of the current daily range of 88-91%.

#### **6. Covid-19 Risk Register update – Paper 002**

Paul Wilson

The Principal reported there were a few changes to the last iteration of the Risk Register.

Changes:

- Government has decided the College can test its students. There is no detail at present and the expectation is that teachers' professional associations will be seeking clarity on this, to cascade on to their members.
- Two College staff have taken on responsibility for the College's internal track and trace work.

There has been an investment in time and support for staff who are extremely clinically vulnerable.

### **7. SAR Headlines and Process – Paper 003**

Sarah Oldfield

The SAR is reviewed ongoing. The paperwork is almost complete for the whole SAR and Quality Improvement Plan for the year. There will be a termly review ongoing and Sarah will update Governors at meetings.

The paperwork will be circulated for Governor awareness and comment prior to the next Corporation meeting. The Chair asked Governors to look at the paperwork and feed back to Sarah on this in a timely manner once dispatched. **Action SO/RM and Governors**

## **OVERSIGHT OF STUDENT OUTCOMES & EXPERIENCES**

### **8. Two-year Course Retention Monitoring Report – Paper 004**

Tim Cullinan

Tim confirmed that the target to achieve above 90% retention overall has been exceeded and that this marks the third year in a row where there has been an upward trend.

### **9. Early Weeks Survey – Paper 005**

Sarah Oldfield

The survey focused on the cohort which was new to the College. This year, there has been the opportunity to compare this year's data to last year. Overall, this presents a positive picture. The areas where the responses were not as positive could be anticipated. In most cases there have been an increase in the numbers of 'agree' and 'strongly agree' responses.

Two areas to note:

- Welcome to WQE Day - This impacts on the choice of whether students choose to come to WQE. This year it had to be virtual. Normally students would have been on campus for this getting a richer experience. Only 48% said it had impacted on their choice to join WQE, which the College felt was a more positive response than anticipated during the pandemic.
- Being prepared for the amount of work at College – College staff normally talk prospective students through this during the Welcome to WQE Day but there was not the capacity to undertake this this year.

Two new questions were posed this year:

- Balance of face to face and online work – Students were less content about this. The survey was undertaken taken before and after half term. There are a number of possible reasons for dissatisfaction with this. E.g., science hadn't done any practicals by that point due to social distancing and safety reasons. The experience is likely to have improved since then. Getting to grips with teaching online and via Teams has been a learning journey for teachers. Tim and Sarah have both witnessed innovative teaching using Teams. Overall, Sarah feels confident about what is now being offered to students across the curriculum.

- How safe do you feel in College? Whilst there was improvement in this measure and it was reassuringly positive in the context of inevitable anxieties about Covid- 19, further exploration is still planned by Donna and her team to look at the reasons why a small percentage of students expressed that they do not feel safe, and to determine whether the issues relate to the current Covid-19 context or other reasons such as safeguarding/bullying issues. This further work is planned.

Sarah confirmed to Governors that 94% of respondents stated that they would recommend the College to a friend.

Governors confirmed they were pleased that feeling safe in College was going to be further investigated.

Sarah confirmed the next survey would take place in February and that would take into consideration the views of the full student body. Additionally, at the end of the academic year a further survey will be undertaken which drills down to satisfaction levels at course level.

Donna's team will be working on the outcomes of surveys to prepare for next year's intake and think through the format and content of the Welcome to WQE Day.

Donna confirmed that the new online platform gives the opportunity to make significant changes to the way in which student recruitment takes place next year, for example virtual events can take place at any point in a year. The Admissions team is already planning for a range of events. Donna reiterated the need to be proactive with technology and communications to engage prospective students ongoing.

A Staff Governor asked about engagement with Spring Pod at department level. Donna confirmed that the best engagement was where departments signposted students/parents on to the live chat function following video sessions. Online chat for Admissions was busy. Welfare and Skills will move to using video chat next time.

## **EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE**

### **10. Governors' impact**

Stuart Dawkins

- Noted that Search Committee would give some thought as to how the impact Governors have on the College could be captured, and how that impact can be maintained – in particular during lockdown when things such as Link Visits are not possible.

**Action Governance & Search Committee:** to retain a watching brief over Governors' involvement in this.

### **11. Governor training and development needs**

Rachel Middleton

The SFCA webinar series continues to run. Governors have engaged with this live or through recordings. Jash has completed his induction, having received a session from Carolyn on College finances. Thank you to both parties for efforts with this. Jash is piloting a Student Governor support programme called Unloc. The new Student Governor profile has been submitted to the Student Executive for them to be better informed about the role and to support one of the students to self-nominate. Thanks to Joyce and Stuart for feeding back on the initial draft.

## **OVERSIGHT OF FINANCE, RESOURCES & ASSETS**

### **12. Monthly management accounts (Oct 2020) – Paper 006**

Carolyn Davies

Accounts have been presented according to the original budget approved by the Board in June 2020. Variances have been incorporated into the revised budget.

Governors noted the accounts and the Chair thanked the team for compiling these.

### **13. Revised 2020/2021 Budget**

Carolyn Davies

Carolyn confirmed that the ESFA is monitoring College cashflow more regularly than previously. This is now on a quarterly basis.

The paper incorporates the rest of this year plus the beginning of the next academic year.

#### **i. Commentary for revised budget & updated cashflow forecast – Paper 007a**

This paper addresses a series of questions which had to be answered. It focuses on the variance between July predictions for cashflow balances and then the picture 3 months later.

Clarification - Bursary funds don't belong to College but sit in the bank account at the start of a year prior to allocation.

Material assumptions – pg. 2:

ESFA grant funding for 2021/22. Made changes to forecast based on less high student recruitment numbers.

Made assumptions on progressing summer 2021 estates changes. This will impact on two financial years.

Increase in deficit – a significant factor- there have been additional costs creating a Covid-secure environment.

The report sets out a series of revisions and assumptions – e.g. teacher pensions contributions, where confirmation of the figures will fall in next year instead. As a result, a small impact may be felt in the current year. Carolyn confirmed that a set of 5-year financial forecasts will go to the Estates and Finance Task & Finish Group and then to the 27 Jan Corporation meeting.

#### **ii. ESFA Report – Paper 007b**

Carolyn Davies

Governors approved the budget.

### **14. 2019-2020 End of Year financial matters**

**Papers recommended to the Corporation from the 29 September Audit & Risk**

**Committee**

Philip Parkinson

**i. Audit & Risk Committee Annual Report – Paper 008 – Philip Parkinson**

This report outlines what has been done and areas of coverage. It concludes by stating that the Committee and the College has fulfilled its obligations under the Audit Code of Practice.

**ii. Regulatory Audit Return self-assessment questionnaire – Paper 009 – Carolyn Davies**

Carolyn confirmed that the questions and answers change every year. The questionnaire was interrogated at the Committee.

**iii. Supplementary Audit Return – COVID Annex – Carolyn Davies – Paper 010**

This focused on the pandemic and is a summation of the responses to the various questions and consistent with the Risk Register.

**iv. External assurance 2020 -2021 – Carolyn Davies – Paper 011**

This report is the future plan for Board assurance.

Governors queried whether simulations of risk should take place termly.

The Audit committee discussed assessing the risks of an IT attack. Carolyn plans to report back to the Committee on this matter.

**Action CD:** to cascade on the paper and discussion outcomes from the Committee to a future Corporation meeting.

**v. On-site Covid Risk Management Review – Carolyn Davies – Paper 012**

Hettle Andrews came into College and reviewed Covid security. This was their report on risk management measures.

**vi. WQE Action Plan in response to On-site Covid Risk Management Review –**

Carolyn Davies – Paper 013

This report is an outline of which actions had been addressed by the College. Outstanding actions have then been added and amended on the master Risk Register.

Papers from the 29 September Audit & Risk Committee were recommended to the Corporation to approve. Governors approved the papers.

**Papers recommended from the Corporation at the 1 December Audit & Risk Committee. - Philip Parkinson**

The Committee convened on 1 December 2020.

**vii. College Annual Report & Financial Statements – Paper 014 – Carolyn Davies**

There was a strong recommendation to Governors to read pages 4-15. Carolyn confirmed these were lodged with the DfE and available to all in the public domain. This is a good summation of how the College has performed and plans for the future.

**viii. Internal Controls Annual Report - Paper 015– Carolyn Davies**

Prepared by the leadership team, this report states their view on the extent and efficacy of their controls within the College. The Committee interrogated it and is comfortable with leadership team responses.

**ix. Audit completion Report – Paper 016a– Carolyn Davies**

The formal report from external auditors, RSM UK, which finds no errors or findings of significance. Credit to Carolyn and her team for such a clean audit report

**x. Emerging Findings Report from Auditors – Paper 016b – Carolyn Davies**

This is an emerging issues document which RSM UK prepared based on their knowledge of the sector.

**xi. QED (Leicester) Ltd. Annual Report and Financial Statements – Paper 017- Carolyn Davies**

QED (Leicester) Ltd. Is the subsidiary company through which traded income is channelled currently. The university has given notice to exit the Regent Road car parking contract. No management charges are made to the company. All profit generated is gift aided to the Corporation.

**xii. H&S Annual Report for 2019/20 – Paper 018 – Carolyn Davies**

A review of the previous year which was disrupted by College closure on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020. This covers significant health and safety matters and outlines some of the developments and progress made in relation to addressing health and safety matters.

The College does not have a history of significant health and safety incidents, and the number has further reduced due College closure

Hettle Andrews have played a significant supporting role for the College.

**Occupational health and wellbeing:** a wellbeing group was established during lockdown. This has completed significant work in the short time that it has been operating. There is a dominance of Covid in discussion, but other significant strides forward have been made on other matters.

A Governor commented that it was encouraging to see that wellbeing work had been properly embedded with the culture of the College and the College team responsible for driving this forward should be commended for their work on this.

Papers from the 1 December Audit & Risk Committee were recommended to the Corporation to approve. Governors approved the papers.

Carolyn confirmed the following papers required signatures:

Annual reports – to be signed by PW and SD

QED (Leicester) Ltd. accounts to be signed by PP.

Regulatory audit return and supplementary audit return – to be signed by PW and SD.

**Action CD/PW/SD and PP**

**15. Letters of representation from Auditors – Carolyn Davies, Paper 019a and 019b**

The series of assurances given to the auditors that work has been followed to a standard were approved by the Governors.

## ROUND-UP

### 16. Any Other Business - Confidential

Minutes of this item are not available in the public domain.

### 17. Next meeting of the Corporation

5.00pm, Wednesday 27 January 2021, virtual via Zoom.

Chair's signature: ..... Date: .....

	<b>Actions arising from 14 October Corporation Meeting</b>	<b>Who is responsible?</b>	<b>Date for completion</b>
1.	Follow up completion of Safeguarding training by Governors  Governors on sabbaticals are yet to complete the training packages and need to in Jan 2021	DT/RM	
	<b>Actions arising from 16 December Corporation Meeting</b>	<b>Who is responsible?</b>	<b>Date for completion</b>
2.	Update the Board at the same time next year on disadvantaged students and careers	KO'F and AJ	Dec 2021
3.	Governors to inform Kate O'Farrell if they have employer contacts to share	All Governors	Asap and ongoing
4.	Engage with Kate O'Farrell if interested in supporting mock interviews, panels etc.	All Governors	Before March 2021
5.	Governors to feed back to Sarah Oldfield on the SAR	All Governors	asap
6.	Following next Finance & Risk Committee cascade work on mitigating major risks to Corporation (e.g. IT attacks etc.)	CD	
7.	The following papers require signatures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Annual reports – to be signed by PW and SD</li> <li>- QED (Leicester) Ltd. accounts to be signed by PP.</li> <li>- Regulatory audit return and supplementary audit return – to be signed by PW and SD.</li> </ul>	CD/PP/SD/PW	asap
	<b>Standing item</b>	<b>Who is responsible?</b>	<b>Date for completion</b>
	Arrange a time for SD to sign the Corporation minutes	RM and SD	
	Governance & Search Committee to retain a watching brief over Governors' involvement in careers programme	G & S Committee	