

WQE & Regent College Group

Corporation Meeting 15 December 2021, 17:00 via Teams

Members of the Corporation in attendance:

Stuart Dawkins (Chair), Wayne Allsopp, Joyce Black, Alistair Lockhart-Smith, Jash Maadhavji, Neil McGhee, Nisar Navsariwala, Ing'utu Palmer, Philip Parkinson, Jim Phillips, Allfaz Samnani, , Paul Wilson, Aaron Winterton

Other attendees:

Carolyn Davies, Andrew Jackson, Sarah Oldfield, Tim Rogers, Rachel Middleton, Gareth Jones (RSM)

Apologies:

Joanne Cooke, Bernadette Green, Amrik Singh, Jimmy Zachariah

MINUTES

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting, extended a special welcome to Gareth Jones from RSM, the College's external auditors.

Apologies were received from Joanne Cooke, Bernadette Green, Amrik Singh and Jimmy Zachariah.

The Chair confirmed that the meeting was two-part, with all Governors present for the first part of the meeting, followed by a closed meeting for External and Parent Governors only to discuss the recommendations of the Remuneration Committee relating to the performance and pay of the Principal and Clerk to Corporation.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

OVERSIGHT OF FINANCE, RESOURCES & ASSETS

3. 2020-2021 End of Year financial matters

Gareth Jones, RSM

Emerging Findings Report from Auditors – Paper 001

Gareth thanked the Corporation for the invitation to present on the Emerging Findings Report: a cross-sectoral report based on horizon scanning and forecasting issues for Corporations to have on their watch list. He reminded Governors about the requirement for external auditors to now speak to Corporations as well as their Audit & Risk Committees, as outlined in the 2021 iteration of the Post-16 Audit Code of Practice.

Gareth highlighted a number of issues within the report:

- ESFA good practice guide for colleges in respect of management accounts – although the College has no weaknesses in this area
- A new standard relating to sub-contracting
- Sub-contracting due diligence checks
- Apprenticeships – accountability

- Flexible apprenticeships
- Skills Bill amendments
- A revised Code of Good Governance
- Learner digital experience insights survey 2020/21

Governors discussed the new role attributed to the Principal of ensuring an environmental sustainability policy is in place.

The Chair affirmed that discussion had already taken place and a paper would be coming to the May Corporation meeting for discussion. This is a substantive piece of College-wide work and therefore requires significant lead time. Neil McGhee offered support to feed in from his LEP contacts information about any collective initiatives relating to the Green Agenda which the College may wish to join.

Papers recommended to the Corporation from the 30 November Audit & Risk Committee

Philip Parkinson

- i. WQE statutory accounts – Paper 002
The Committee approved and adopted the statutory accounts.
- ii. QED (Leicester) Ltd. Annual Report and Financial Statements – Paper 003
The Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee confirmed that the accounts had been approved earlier the same day by the Board of Directors of the limited company. These accounts form part of the WQE & Regent College Group accounts.
The limited company has been dormant since 31 August 2021 but remains an option should the College wish to deploy it in the future. No audit of the accounts will be required ongoing during the period of dormancy.
The Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee, who is a Director of QED, confirmed he would sign off the accounts on behalf of the Board of Directors.
- iii. Audit Findings Report – Paper 004
The external audit work is now complete.
No adjustments were made to management figures meaning Governors can have faith in the figures presented to them by the College. There were two low level recommendations only, which is far more positive than for most of the auditors' clients.
- iv. Internal Controls Annual Report - Paper 005
The Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee reminded Governors that this report is the assurance report provided by the Chief Accounting Officer affirming that all internal controls are in place.
- v. External assurance updates – Paper 006a and Paper 006b
These were noted by the Corporation.
- vi. Funding Audit Update Report – Paper 007
This was noted by the Corporation.
- vii. H&S Annual Report for 2020/21 – Paper 008
This was noted by the Corporation and reference was made to how well embedded health and safety practice is within the College. The management of the Covid response within College and its impact was noted by the Corporation.
- viii. Headline Risk Register and Plan – Paper 009
The Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee highlighted that there had been some change in the risk register around risks 33 and 34. The Corporation noted that the College was proactively monitoring the conversion of other Sixth Form Colleges towards academization and that this

would be reported on at ongoing Corporation meetings. Another matter where the College was focusing was on reducing and monitoring the potential for adverse publicity for the College in relation to bullying and harassment, reflecting increased focus and high-profile developments in this area nationally.

- ix. Audit Committee Annual Report – Paper 010
The Corporation approved the report, which will now be submitted to the ESFA.

4. Letters of representation from Auditors

Carolyn Davies

Carolyn reminded Governors that these letters were a series of assurances confirming there would not be breaches in best practice. These are the College's statements to the external auditors.

These are standard letters.

All three letters were approved by the Corporation.

Action PW and SD to sign the letters.

- i. WQE Audit Letter of representation – Paper 011
- ii. WQE Audit Regulatory Assurance Letter – Paper 012
- iii. QED (Leicester) Ltd Letter of representation – Paper 013

The Chair thanked Carolyn and her team for a smooth audit and thanked Gareth for his procedural work and for talking the Corporation through the procedure. Gareth subsequently left the meeting.

5. Monthly management accounts (Oct 2021)

Carolyn Davies- Paper 014

Carolyn highlighted two matters:

- The executive summary referencing key performance indicators. All KPIs are being met or are not measured monthly and are therefore not reportable at this meeting.
- Treasury management – AIB is withdrawing from commercial lending. This will cease in March 2022. They will be selling their portfolio to ALICA Bank. The College loan affected by this will be fully repaid in 2024.

Governors queried whether the new bank would change the terms of the loan and what impact that may have on the College as a result. Carolyn confirmed that there was such a small amount outstanding that there would be no material impact on the College. Governors also considered whether there was merit in repaying the loan in full at this juncture. The College would prefer to retain its cash balances but this could be reviewed if necessary.

6. Revised 2021/2022 Budget - Paper 015

Carolyn Davies

The revised budget for the year ending 31 July 2022 shows an operating deficit of £1,547k for the year, compared to an operating deficit in the original budget of £1,188k. This reflects the following key factors:

- Pay costs, including the cost of living settlement for 2021/22, increased employer NI contributions and increased FRS 102 charges (£212k).
- The revenue/capital allocation for Phase 1A increasing the proportion of the project considered to be revenue costs (£135k), noting that the project as a whole was within budget.
- Impact of the unsuccessful Post 16 Capacity Fund bid (£229k) for Phase 1B works, assumed to be successful in the original budget.
- Additional support for students impacted by the Covid pandemic in addition to the support funded through the ESFA's 16-18 tuition fund (90k).
- Savings in pay and operating costs of up to £200k to be identified and generated as the year progresses.

Key points for consideration are:

- The projected cash position at 31 July 2022 is improved compared to that projected in the original budget. This reflects the improved outturn for 2020/21 compared to forecast both from a cash and an accounting perspective
- The underlying operational position shows a small surplus, after adjusting for FRS102 charges, the investment in the estates' masterplan projects and exceptional costs. The impact of lagged funding means that in 2021/22 the College currently has some 50 unfunded students. When these students are funded, this will have a positive impact on the reported surplus.

The original and revised budgets both include significant assumptions in relation to maintenance and refurbishment costs, mostly assumed to be incurred in summer 2022, relating to the completion of Phase 1A, the commencement of Phase 1B and other projects to improve the safety and security of the College's campuses. Work is ongoing to develop these potential projects and assess affordability. Updated 5-year plans will be brought to the Corporation for approval in the Spring term as part of our usual financial planning cycles.

Governors discussed the three elements of financial health: solvency, EBITDA and borrowing and their aspiration to report at least 'Good' financial health. Governors noted that the delivery of in-year savings, of c£170k would reduce the likelihood of a financial health grade of 'Requires Improvement' but also noted the importance of continuing to invest in the College's infrastructure. Past performance suggests the College can be confident that the in-year savings are deliverable and careful monitoring will continue by both the ELT and the Corporation through the monthly latest forecasts for 2021/22, to ensure investment decisions are taken with regard to the latest financial information. The Corporation noted that some areas had required extraordinary spend, including agency cover for teaching and support staff, and personnel deployed to work on the continued Covid response across the College's campuses.

Governors discussed funding and how this should feature as a discussion point with the ESFA in the annual strategic conversation, in particular relating to the lack of capital funding available to Sixth Form Colleges and the need to spend from the College's own reserves – which in turn has an immediate impact on the Financial Health measure.

The Chair confirmed that updated in-year forecasts would be contained in the ongoing monthly management accounts tabled at Corporation meetings, through which Governors would be able to monitor the control of spending.

The Corporation approved and adopted the revised budget.

Allfaz Samnani joined the meeting at 17:40.

STANDARD ITEMS

7. Minutes and matters arising – Paper 016

To approve the minutes of the Corporation meeting held on 10 November 2021 as a correct record. To review the matters arising captured in the action list.

The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting. The action list was updated accordingly.

All Governors were prompted to complete the safeguarding and PREVENT training online. The sexual harassment action plan was due to be tabled at a forthcoming Corporation meeting and was therefore removed from the action plan.

OVERSIGHT OF STRATEGIC DIRECTION

8. Principal's Update – (to follow)

Paul Wilson – Presentation

The Principal's Update covered:

- the College response to Omicron
- on-site student attendance figures
- Support Staff pay award
- A renewed focus on a number of leadership areas:
Added Value – delivering excellent 'progress for all', 'holistic development' 'with positive challenge a norm' and a culture of 'continued improvement' • Trust and local reputation - 'the respected provider of choice' / Oversubscribed • Outstanding progression and destinations – 'Connected with our locality' with 'the path to succeed at L3 and be able to reach HE &/or professional careers' • Sector leadership & innovation – 'leader of others, best practice & excellence' • Student leadership and giving students a voice – 'we are their college' • Employer of choice – people want to join us, to stay and develop their careers & their professionalism, while pursuing our mission • Curiosity and a love of learning – our people are encouraged and inspired by us and the environment we create drives learning • Resilience & social mobility – 'people are supported & overcoming barriers' • A positive, considerate & industrious community ethos – everyone 'committed and proud to be in our community', or to be connected to us • Sustainable & responsive - 'ready to serve future generations in great facilities
- Award of a £5k travel grant from Leicester City Council
- Student Christmas card competition
- Staff Leavers

Governors asked the Principal about students' inclination towards taking up Covid vaccinations. Anecdotally students were reporting that they did not feel they were at that much risk from Covid however many students are acting in the interests of their families and friends and pursuing a vaccination in a bid to protect them.

The Chair confirmed he had taken Chair's action to approve immediate adoption of the Support Staff Pay Award, (this was also within the ELT's spending limits) with the objective of getting the awards into Christmas pay packets.

The Principal highlighted the importance of continued discussion about curriculum planning with Governors. The ELT had discussed this at their recent away day, and this was planned as a strategic conversation for the February Governor Conference.

9. Strategic Development Plan 2021-2024 context - Paper 017

Paul Wilson

The Principal thanked Neil McGhee for sending over information relating to the local skills need. This enabled the principal to add greater depth to the document. This is a live document which will be updated ongoing, and at least annually.

Updates had been made to key priority areas such as:

- significant improvements around data, curriculum, student destinations, employability and progression
- strengthening tracking, closing attainment gaps, learning recovery and VESPA mindsets
- workforce- strategic development, wellbeing, Digital Strategy and estates
- partnerships for vulnerable students, pastoral care

Action PW: remedy some of the dates outlined on page 13 of the document and then recirculate.

10. Executive summary of Self-Assessment Report (SAR) & Quality Improvement (QIP)

Paper 018

Tim Rogers

Tim confirmed to Governors that the SAR is due for completion by the end of January 2022 and is uploaded for Ofsted to view. The QIP is a document outlining where the College is making improvements.

The ELT has made the judgement collectively that the College remains a 'Good' provider. The College has high ambitions and supportive challenge is embedded as good practice across the College.

The College has a good grasp of what is working well:

- value-added scores for A Level are higher than ever before
- there is breadth and depth in the curriculum at Level 3
- the College offers a safe environment with safeguarding as a priority focus
- English and Maths are prioritised at Level 2. Outcomes are strong and improving. These are crucial gateway qualifications for young people
- there is effective, strong financial management and Governors play their role in overseeing this

The College will be developing:

- work experience and work placements (which have been hampered by the pandemic)
- the performance of students in identified groups
- wellbeing of staff

Action TR: Send to Governors the complete SAR document for reference.

11. Quality Improvement Statement and summary plan - Paper 019a and Paper 019b

Tim Rogers

Paper 019a – Tim confirmed that work had been underway since September 2021.

The following matters were highlighted:

- investment of time and resource into leadership support through engagement with a consultant
- the College wants meaningful work placements for its students. This will be of heightened importance if the College chooses to move into T Level provision.
- there are significant learning gaps due to the pandemic – there are focused interventions in place to bridge gaps.
- there are improvements to be made to student outcomes within identified sub-groups, of which the Student Outcomes Task & Finish Group are aware
- VESPA mindsets development
- development of Student Voice and its impact on the direction of the College
- how T Levels may fit into the curriculum for first delivery in 2023, if adopted

Paper 019b- Governors asked for a glossary of terms to be included to better aid Governors' learning.

Action TR

Governors affirmed that appendix A was a very helpful document in terms of outlining the volume of work being undertaken by the College. The Corporation would also like to receive information on how the College compares with other Colleges in terms of meeting the Gatsby Benchmarks. **Action TR to focus on this.**

The Quality Improvement Statement was approved by the Corporation.

Governors queried whether the early identification of issues amongst the Year 1 student population was timed early enough in October. An initial assessment is undertaken in September and ELT will be looking at the formalities of how the process works to possibly factor in identification of skills gaps and deficits.

OVERSIGHT OF STUDENT OUTCOMES & EXPERIENCES

12. Two-year Course Retention Monitoring Report – Paper 020

Tim Rogers

There have been significant increases in student retention sustained over the last 5 years, with an overall percentage improvement across the period of c. 20%. Alternative choices for students have not been as prevalent during the pandemic, so Covid may have positively impacted on student retention locally and nationally during these academic years.

There is a piece of work to undertake looking at the reasons why students do not progress on to the second year of vocational courses and the need to monitor these trends over a number of years.

Governors affirmed they were interested in reviewing trends in future reports.

13. Student voice

Early Weeks Questionnaire – Paper 021

Sarah Oldfield

Sarah confirmed that students complete the survey and the document tabled also has a section outlining the actions proposed in response to student feedback. Seven hundred and ten responses were received, representing 35% of the new student body.

Sarah reported an upward trend in the number of students who would recommend the College to a friend, which now stands at 96%.

One of the areas which the College wanted to unpick was in relation to the student response to a question about feeling safe in College, where the responses were less positive than last year.

Sarah and the Principal had undertaken visits to tutor groups to unpick some of the issues relating to student safety. They had 93 responses to their fact-finding sessions across Level 1-3 students.

No students reported they felt completely unsafe. They felt safe overall but Covid was having an impact on their sense of safety. They reported a heightened sense of safety within the College buildings than outside, they felt the least safe due to the behaviour of other students and due to sexual harassment incidents. Students were asked if they would be prepared to speak further about this matter to the College. Twenty-four students have volunteered to do so.

Governors queried the next steps in strengthening student safety. The Principal confirmed that more focus groups would take place in tutor groups to build a more complete picture of how students were feeling about safety. He affirmed that the College would be doing significant work with its changing narratives groups and that sexual harassment would also be part of this focus.

The Chair commended the College for the work undertaken to date. The Corporation would like to have a sense of how the ELT plans to update them on progress made and asked for this to be included in the next Principal's Update. **Action PW**

Governors asked about developments with student enrolment for the next cycle as this was not a positive experience for some students who had responded to the questionnaire with a 'strongly disagree'. Sarah confirmed that actions had been outlined

in the action list within the report to Governors and there had already been improvements to the March interviews process. This was the first year when enrolment was completely online. There were a few technical hitches around the online forms. The College's aspiration is to have more face to face interviews again for the next enrolment cycle. It is considering whether to adopt a hybrid model or a full face to face model moving forward.

The Corporation agreed that they would like to receive more reports on the student voice at future Corporation meetings.

EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

14. Annual self-review of governance 2020-2021: findings, response and action plan for 2021-2022 – Paper 022 Rachel Middleton

The Chair thanked RM for her work on preparing a comprehensive report which was for an internal audience but would also be suitable for external scrutiny. RM highlighted how she had structured the report. She asked Governors to let her know if there were any procedural matters which needed to be addressed for next year's review. She highlighted the summary of actions at the back of the report, collated in response to the comments made by Governors through the survey. RM was asked to update the Corporation on progress towards completion of actions at a timely point in the business plan. **Action RM**

ROUND-UP

15. Any Other Business

A Governor commented on the positive efforts made by the College in relation to its marketing and communications work. This was particularly evident during the recent Open Day. The Chair thanked Governors, ELT and staff for their efforts throughout the calendar year.

16. Confidentiality

Subject to discussions during the meeting, the Corporation considered there to be no confidential matters.

17. Next Meeting

Student Governors, Staff Governors and members of staff, with the exception of the Clerk are now asked to leave the meeting. A confidential agenda item relating to the recommendations of the Remuneration Committee will now follow for External and Parent Governors only.

Next meeting of the Corporation

5.00pm, Wednesday 26 January 2022, meeting mode to be reviewed, but at University Road if a blended meeting.

The meeting closed at 19:18.

Signature: Date:
Chair of the Corporation

Action List

	Actions arising from 15 December 2021 Committee meeting	Who is responsible?	Date for completion
1.	Remedy some of the dates outlined on page 13 of the Strategic Development Plan Update 2021- 2024 and then recirculate	PW	
2.	Send to Governors the complete SAR document for reference	TR	
3.	Add a glossary of terms to the QIP documentation to aid Governors' understanding	TR	
4.	In response to the QIP – provide Governors with information on how the College compares with other colleges in terms of meeting the Gatsby Benchmarks	TR	
5.	Provide an outline in the next Principal's Update on how the ELT plans to update the Corporation on work being done to strengthen student safety.	PW	26 January 2022 Corporation meeting
	Standing item	Who is responsible?	Date for completion
	To refer any matter which could be externally assured to the Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee	All Governors	
	To ensure Curriculum Policy is updated if needed once mission/values work with Governors is completed	TR	
	To update the Corporation on progress towards completion of actions within the annual self -review of governance action plan, at a timely point in the business plan	RM	