

WQE & Regent College Group

Corporation Meeting 24 January 2024, 17:00, Room G01, University Road Campus

Members of the Corporation in attendance:

Philip Parkinson (Chair), Orhan Ahmed, Tia Brookes, Joyce Black, Sofie Dadge, Shamir Ghumra, Bernadette Green, Nikki O'Brien, Alison Stone, Paul Wilson, & Jimmy Zachariah

Other attendees:

Carolyn Davies, Andrew Jackson, Rachel Middleton, Tim Rogers, Peter Ryder (Observer, Rockborn), Donna Trusler

Apologies:

Frances Bettsworth, Neil McGhee, Sarah Oldfield, Julia Pastuszak, Jim Phillips, Sarah Thomson,

MINUTES

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Frances Bettsworth, Neil McGhee, Sarah Oldfield, Julia Pastuszak, Jim Phillips, Sarah Thomson.

Ibrahim Fadiga, incoming Student Governor was absent from the meeting and his appointment will be ratified at the next meeting.

Julia Pastuszak was absent from her last Corporation meeting as a Student Governor. A certificate of appreciation is being sent to her address.

The Chair welcomed Peter Ryder from Rockborn who was in attendance to observe the Corporation meeting as one of two external reviewers undertaking the Corporation's External Review of Governance. Peter had also observed the Governance & Search Committee immediately prior to the Corporation meeting. Peter and his colleague Melissa Drayson, who is a Governance Professional herself, are the Corporation's review team and have already been working with the Clerk and Chair of Governance & Search Committee as the Corporation's leads on the College's review. Peter will be observing a number of meetings in the coming months and will also attend the Governor/ELT induction session as well as the Governor Conference on 28th February 2024.

Melissa will provide headlines on the outcome of the ERG at the May Corporation meeting and Peter will provide the full report and outline the outcome and any recommendations from the review at the June meeting.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes and matters arising– Paper 001

A Governor queried one of the points in the meeting minutes but following clarification, the Part 1 meeting minutes from the Corporation meeting held on 13 December 2023 were approved as a correct record.

The Corporation reviewed the action list.

The following actions were completed during the intervening period between meetings:

- Update the Corporation on whether there is a need to replace a Director for the dormant QED (Leicester) Ltd. Company
- Issue full SAR and QIP to Governors and submit queries to Tim Rogers ahead of external submission deadline
- Amended - NMcG to contact Carolyn Davies to support College work on decarbonisation

4. Minutes from the closed Part 2 meeting of the Corporation on 13

December 2023– (Circulated to eligible Governors in advance) - *For approval*

The minutes of the closed meeting (Part 2) were approved as an accurate record of proceedings.

The Chair invited the student representative from the Student Executive to cover agenda item 15 at this point. For ease of reference, the minute relating to item 15 remains in numerical order in the minutes below.

OVERSIGHT OF STRATEGIC DIRECTION

5. Principal's Update - Presentation– *For information and questions*

Paul Wilson

The Principal provided an update which included a comprehensive presentation outlining some of the strategic challenges faced by the College over the next few years. Governors considered the challenges and were invited beyond the meeting to complete a questionnaire to confirm which of the strategic priorities they would like to explore at the forthcoming Governor Conference.

The themes outlined were:

Action PW to draft a questionnaire for imminent distribution and completion.

Other highlights focused on:

- the rise in student attendance figures – up to 93%
- the very strong performance in English and Maths GCSEs in November 2023
- Estates – C Block project update
- A refresher of the themes considered by the Corporation on the lead-up to the Governor Conference last year.

Governors asked questions about the difference in achievement rates between English and Maths. The Principal confirmed that teachers analyse performance in English and Maths GCSE during the November series and then tailor teaching and learning, having identified any trends. Class sizes are 6 or 7 pupils to support further re-sits where necessary.

Governors asked whether there was any correlation between attendance and results at GCSE.

Action TR: evaluate data and present findings for discussion at the February Student Outcomes Task & Finish Group meeting

6. Post-16 Capacity Project Update - Presentation - *For information and approval*

Carolyn Davies

Carolyn provided the Corporation with a presentation covering the following matters:

- Planning permission and listed building consent received 29 December 2023
- Programme, design and cost challenges
- Ongoing negotiation with DfE – parameters to retain grant funding
- Phase 3 artist impressions
- Summary of current funds secured/committed
- Indicative projects costs following returned tender – c. £1m higher than proposed budget
- Key challenges and pressures
- Suggested next steps

Carolyn reported on a number of challenges faced in securing planning permission around the heritage assessment and resultant design changes and impact on costs. Carolyn outlined to the Corporation the specifics underpinning the projected rise in costs.

Carolyn confirmed that if the College were to withdraw from Phase 3 then the DfE representative had verbally indicated that there would be no requirement for repayment of grant funds received up to the point of starting the significant change process with them in January, as early communication of risks had been timely and appropriate, with the College having acted in good faith. She highlighted that additional costs incurred from this point to agreeing any significant change or withdrawing were at the College's risk.

On behalf of the ELT, Carolyn recommended that at this stage it would be prudent to consider the demolition of the outbuildings having secured planning consents, subject to the appropriate advice, which could secure the future of those consents irrespective of the timing of the project or any subsequent variations requested.

The Corporation considered whether it could authorise the ELT to proceed to an early works demolition contract should this be required and appropriate based on professional advice. The Corporation clarified whether commitment to this spending meant the College was committed to further spending. Carolyn confirmed an early works package would not be entered into should this be the case.

The Corporation committed to the demolition works.

Carolyn outlined the need to consider options to revise the project and/or to value engineer it before considering whether it was appropriate to proceed, something that could incur further advisor costs in order to inform a task and finish group of the

options available. Governors were asked to consider ongoing commitment to the building project given the rise in cost. Governors confirmed they would like to receive financial forecasts outlining the impact on the College's reserves. Carolyn confirmed that this would be most appropriately covered through the Estates & Finance Task & Finish Group and the Corporation agreed to convene this at an appropriate point in the near future.

Governors noted that there were significant decisions and a commitment to be made and they would have preferred to receive information in advance of the Corporation meeting if this had been possible, noting that a detailed verbal presentation had been received in the context of the very recent new circumstances that had developed. This would support careful consideration of the ramifications of an increased spending commitment and of any mitigations of risks which had already been explored by the College leadership. For future meetings they requested that this become standard practice where the changes of circumstance were not so recent as to allow this. The Corporation asked for a detailed breakdown to be presented at an Estates & Finance Task & Finish Group meeting, to convene prior to the March 2024 Corporation meeting. **Action RM** to arrange.

OVERSIGHT OF FINANCE, RESOURCES & ASSETS

7. **Monthly management accounts - November 2023** – Paper 002 - *To note*
Carolyn Davies

The Corporation noted the monthly management accounts.

8. **Tuition Fees Policy 2024/25** – Paper 003 – *For approval*
Carolyn Davies

The Chair reminded Governors that this policy comes to the Corporation annually for approval.

For context the Chair reminded the Corporation that the 2023-24 iteration of the policy which came to the Corporation last January and was approved, included an increase of 10% to

the fees payable by overseas students which reflected the inflationary rate applied by the College to other costs, and also factored in the additional 40 hours of tuition for all students, stipulated by government.

The 2024/25 Tuition Fees Policy was approved by the Corporation.

PAY AND CONDITIONS OF SERVICE

9. **Pay Policy** – Paper 004 – *For approval*
Paul Wilson

Paul confirmed this iteration of the policy had been consulted on with staff and unions. This iteration gives the College increased flexibility to appoint staff above the bottom of a given pay spine.

The Corporation approved the policy.

OVERSIGHT OF STUDENT OUTCOMES & EXPERIENCES

10. **Student Attendance Monitoring Report** - Paper 005- *For information and questions*

Donna Trusler

Donna highlighted the fact that there had been an increase in the attendance figures for Level 2 students as well as students following vocational courses. Mentoring has been implemented where students' attendance is dropping.

Governors queried whether improved attendance was a result of the attendance monitoring package deployed by the College. Donna confirmed this played a role as well as students now being required to provide reasons for any absences and continued liaison with students' parents/carers. Curriculum leaders are also monitoring attendance rates within their subject areas and actively pursuing reasons for any absence. The College's PPM team now has greater stability in terms of recruitment and PPM processes, improved data, and face to face sessions are becoming an increasingly effective means of raising absence matters with individual students.

11. **Retention and Progress In-Year Monitoring Report** - Paper 006 - *For information and questions*

Tim Rogers

Tim confirmed that overall retention rates are improving from an already positive level, relative to past years of comparison.

He confirmed that the next cut of Year 2 progress data was due imminently and would inform future reporting.

Curriculum team leaders are using the student progress dashboard to target resource appropriately to any students who may be falling behind.

Tim confirmed that Level 3 Year 2 vocational course retention had not dropped since the end of last year, noting that the lower retention in some of these programmes was a carry forward factor from conclusion of Year 1. Significant support has been put in place to encourage progression to Year 2, to identify any potential barriers early and retain these students in Year 2. As such, Tim highlighted that these courses remain a risk due to the baseline from Year 1 creating limited scope for further drops in Year 2.

Governors asked for greater clarity in the presentation of the data, particularly the headings in tables, to ensure easy reading and to help consistency in making comparisons. **Action TR**

Governors requested an analysis of data looking at reasons why students leave at the end of Year 1 and do not progress into their second year of study. This should be presented to the Student Outcomes Task & Finish Group in February 2024. **Action TR**

12. Destinations and Progression Report – Paper 007– *For information and questions*

Andrew Jackson

Andrew drew Governors' attention to the bulleted highlights of the report on the front page.

He confirmed a 5% increase in the number of students progressing on to Sutton Trust universities, which are 'known to improve life chances' and impact positively on social mobility.

Governors queried the College's approach to marketing success factors such as progression to university considering how overtly the local competition celebrates its successes publicly. Andrew confirmed that this would be part of a combined message about students' high achievement at the College.

Oxbridge has been engaging more proactively with the College, in a bid to encourage more applicants.

Governors queried why students were not highly successful at securing places on dentistry, veterinary science and medicine. Andrew confirmed these were highly competitive, oversubscribed courses nationally. In 2022 only 2 students secured places to study Medicine. This year the figure is at 11 which is more in line with normal years. Further work is being planned to boost applications, including support from the University of Leicester Medical School.

Governors noted the trend for students to stay local when choosing university courses which may explain a lower application rate to Sutton Trust universities.

The Support Staff Governor requested a list of Sutton Trust universities to aid the support which PPMs could offer students. **Action AJ** to pass to PPM team

13. Update on Accountability Statement and meeting local needs

– Paper 008 – *For information and questions*

Andrew Jackson

Andrew reminded Governors of the requirements for articulating an accountability statement as part of the government's skills agenda.

Last year was the first year in which the College generated an accountability statement. This was written last year before the publication of the Local Skills Improvement Plan and has now been updated in light of this.

A new accountability statement will be drafted in Spring/early Summer 2024 and will be tabled at a Corporation meeting.

Andrew highlighted the swing in students taking up places at HEIs rather than apprenticeships. Governors queried whether students were actively informed about higher level apprenticeships. Andrew confirmed that the Careers Manager had contacts with local providers and a conversation with Aston University about degree-

level apprenticeships was imminent.

Governors asked about any alternative plans proposed as Career Ready have exceeded their capacity to support colleges and are yet to take on WQE in partnership. Andrew confirmed approaches were being made to a couple of providers offering similar student opportunities.

The Clerk advised the Chair that due to the numbers of Governors present with one Governor having left after the last item and one wishing to leave imminently, that there needed to be some re-ordering of the agenda to enable matters requiring a decision to move higher up the agenda before the meeting became inquorate. The Governor wishing to leave early was asked to stay for agenda item 17.

14. Work experience and employability Update - Paper 009 – *For information and questions*

Andrew Jackson

Governors noted the update.

15. Student Voice - Student Executive report and financial statement

– Paper 010- *For noting*

Donna Trusler and Noah Mawby (Charity & Events Officer, Student Executive 23/24) The Corporation noted the report and invited Noah to outline the highlights from his experience as an Officer on the Student Executive. He highlighted the fundraising activities he had been involved with, as well as the provision to College students of water fountains on campus. He enjoyed the Student Executive meeting discussions and events organisation, as well as the Culture Day.

Governors queried whether a handover from the prior year's Student Executive would have meant that activity momentum could have been maintained from one committee to the next. A handover has been implemented this year in readiness for the Jan 2024 - Jan2025 to take over.

The Student Governor suggested that the College could promote student events by using computer desktop advertising so that this was prominent every time a student logged in. **Action DT and Student Executive**

16. Complaints Report – Paper 011 – *For information and questions*

Tim Rogers

Tim reported that the number of complaints had decreased.

The Corporation noted the paper.

EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT GOVERNANCE

17. Feedback and recommendations from the Governance & Search Committee meeting 24.01.24

Joyce Black

Joyce highlighted the fact that Neil McGhee has agreed to an appointment as Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee. He had temporarily assumed the chairing role at the 28th

November Audit & Risk Committee meeting and had subsequently been approached to consider assuming this role ongoing.

As Neil was absent from the Corporation meeting there was no need for him to leave the room for discussion about his appointment. The Corporation approved his appointment.

17.1 Governance Code for the Corporation to follow– *For discussion and approval*

i. AoC Code of Good Governance – Paper 012

Joyce confirmed that the Governance & Search Committee had considered the adoption of a new Code of Governance and that it was a formal requirement for Colleges to outline which Code they were working to. To date the College has adopted the AoC Code of Good Governance for Colleges. The last iteration is now redundant and a significant piece of consultation has been undertaken in relation to a newly proposed Code. There are three governance codes available for consideration. The Governance & Search Committee has ruled out the Charity Governance Code as it lacks the specificity the College would require. A new Corporate Governance Code has just been published following the conclusion of a consultation in September 2023. The Committee will look at whether elements of this code provide useful benchmarks in terms of the expectations and behaviours of Directors and Trustees.

Having looked at the new AoC Code of Governance Code, the Committee agreed to adopt the code following the outcomes advised by a proposed Task & Finish Group, which will look at governance codes, their application and a timeframe for making revisions to governance practice. Joyce also referenced the launch of three competency frameworks for Governors, Chairs and Governance Professionals. The task 7 finish group will also consider their use and the potential for using these to enhance role descriptions as well as developing Governor training packages.

Joyce asked the Corporation to confirm it was content to draft terms of reference for a task & finish group and to devolve responsibility to this working group before bringing any recommendations or issues back to the Corporation. The Corporation agreed.

Joyce suggested that the Corporation was likely to adopt the AoC Code from the new academic year if the conclusions of the task & finish group recommended this course of action.

ROUND-UP

18. Any Other Business

18.1 Mr. Thornton

The Chair informed the Corporation that sadly Mr. Thornton had died.

Mr. Thornton granted the College monies to support one student annually with a grant of £500. The student awarded the funds has to have progressed to a Mathematics course at university, the discipline which Mr. Thornton himself studied. The fund has successfully supported

numerous students over the years and has another three years of funds to allocate to prospective applicants. The Chair noted that the Principal wrote to Mr. Thornton last year to congratulate him on his 100th birthday.

18.2 Dates to note

- Tues 13th February 2024 - Student Outcomes Task & Finish Group (Teams) - 5:00pm
All Governors have been invited, as well as the core membership group. The Clerk has already issued invitations to this meeting and the subsequent meeting on 7th May.
- Weds 28th February 2024 – Stage 3 Governor induction with ELT – 2:00pm – 4:30pm
As well as new Governors, the session is open to existing Governors wanting a refresher. Governors are asked to inform the Clerk a week in advance of the session if they wish to attend. **Action Governors**

18.3 Governor Insight Visit completion and reporting

Governors were reminded of the completion date for visits and submission of reflection forms to the Clerk- Friday 22 March 2024.

18.4 Governor socials

The Chair, Sarah Thomson and Sofie Dudge have been considering opportunities for informal Governor gatherings, given the number of new appointments to the Corporation. Some options will be circulated to Governors to consider. **Action PP**

Donna Trusler confirmed that the Sexual Abuse Action Plan referenced in the action list would be tabled at the March 2024 Corporation meeting.

Donna also highlighted the annual PREVENT day on 7 February which all Governors were invited to. **Action Governors** to let Donna know if they wish to attend.

19. Confidentiality

The Corporation considered the presentation slides accompanying agenda item 6 to be confidential.

20. Next Corporation Meetings

- Wednesday 28th February 2024 – Governor Conference, 5:00pm, Room G01 University Road campus
- Wednesday 20th March 2024 – Corporation meeting, 5:00pm, Room G01 University Road campus

Action List

Actions arising from 24 January 2024 Corporation meeting	Who is responsible?	Date for completion
Draft and issue questionnaire relating to strategic priorities to Governors	PW	ASAP
Evaluate data and present findings for discussion at the February Student Outcomes Task & Finish Group meeting	TR	13 th February 2024 SO T&F Group meeting
Arrange date for Estates & Finance Task & Finish Group to convene ahead of March Corporation meeting	RM in conjunction with CD	Before 20 th March 2024 Corporation meeting
Improve format of tables in reports for readability	TR	From next meeting onwards
Provide an analysis of data looking at reasons why some students leave at the end of Year 1 and do not progress into their second year of study- Present to the Student Outcomes Task & Finish Group in February 2024		Present to SO T&F Group meeting on 13 th February 2024
Cascade on to PPM team the list of Sutton Trust universities	AJ	ASAP
Promote student engagement opportunities run by the Student Executive via student desktops	DT and Student Executive	
Inform the Clerk if experienced Governors would like to attend the refresher session with ELT on 28 th Feb.	Experienced Governors	Before 21 st February 2024
Present some options to the Corporation for Governor Socials	PP	
Inform Donna if Governors would like to attend PREVENT Day on 7 th March	Governors	Ahead of 7 th March 2024
Actions arising from 13 December 2023 Corporation meeting	Who is responsible?	Date for completion
Update the Corporation on whether fire assessment actions have been expedited	CD	Deferred to 20 th March 2024 meeting
Table for discussion at SO T&F Group meeting in Feb a discussion on whether there is a link between disadvantaged or SEND students and retention	TR	SO T&F Group – 13/02/24
External Review of Governance – return complete questionnaires in a timely manner	All Governors	Likely to be late Jan/early Feb 2024

Governor Insight Visits – completion and submission of reflection forms by Easter 2024	All External and Parent Governors	End of Spring term 2024 – 22/03/24
Actions arising from 04 October 2023 Corporation meeting	Who is responsible?	Date for completion
Update on sexual abuse action plan to be tabled at January 2024 Corporation meeting	DT	Deferred to March 2024 meeting
Actions arising from 24 May 2023 Corporation meeting	Who is responsible?	Date for completion
Set a specific target for GCSE attendance for 2023/24 and to report on this to the Corporation	Now DT	At appropriate points on the 2023/24 Business Plan
Provide a bar chart outlining the spread of attendance percentages, as part of future attendance reports to the Corporation.	Now DT	At appropriate points on the 2023/24 Business Plan
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	
Table discussion about Artificial Intelligence on a Corporation agenda	RM	At an appropriate point on the 2023/24 Business Plan

The meeting closed at 19:20

Signed:
Chair of Corporation

Date: