

# WQE & REGENT COLLEGE GROUP

Corporation Meeting  
26 June 2024, 17:00 – 19:00, Room G01, University Road Campus

## **Members of the Corporation in attendance:**

Philip Parkinson (Chair), Frances Bettsworth, Joyce Black, Tia Brookes, Sofie Dadge, Shamir Ghumra, Nikki O'Brien, Jim Phillips, Alison Stone, Sarah Thomson, Paul Wilson, Jimmy Zachariah

## **Others in attendance:**

Carolyn Davies, Rachel Middleton, Sarah Oldfield, Tim Rogers, Donna Trusler, Peter Ryder (ERG Reviewer)

## **Apologies:**

Ibrahim Fadiga, Neil McGhee, Bernie Green and Andrew Jackson

## **Part 1 MEETING MINUTES**

### **1. Chair's welcome and apologies for absence**

The Chair welcomed attendees to the last Corporation of the academic year. A special welcome was extended to Peter Ryder who, alongside his colleague, Melissa Drayson, has been undertaking the Corporation's External Review of Governance. Apologies were received from Orhan Ahmed, Ibrahim Fadiga, Neil McGhee, Bernie Green and Andrew Jackson.

Following a conversation with Student Governor, Tia Brookes, the Chair confirmed that Tia had offered to remain as a Governor until such point that a new academic year Student Governor can be appointed in November 2024. The Corporation thanked Tia and extended her term of office accordingly.

### **2. Declarations of Interest in agenda items**

The following Governors declared an interest in agenda item 5: Philip Parkinson, Joyce Black, Sofie Dadge and Sarah Thomson.

### **3. Minutes of last meeting and matters arising – Paper 001**

The minutes of the last meeting were approved as an accurate record of proceedings. The action list was discussed and the following actions were completed during the intervening time between meetings:

- Governors to feed back any queries on the Accountability Statement over the next fortnight
- Promote student engagement opportunities run by the Student Executive via student desktops

- Present some options to the Corporation for Governor Socials
- Update on prevention of sexual abuse action plan to be tabled at January 2024 Corporation meeting – circulated by email in advance of the Corporation meeting.
- Table discussion about Artificial Intelligence on a Corporation agenda – this was delegated to the Audit & Risk Committee to discuss at its June 2024 meeting.

The Chair welcomed Peter to present his findings from the External Review of Governance to the Corporation.

## **EFFICIENT & EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE**

### **4. External Review of Governance report & presentation –Paper 002**

Peter Ryder - *For information & questions*

Peter's presentation to Governors had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

Peter thanked the Clerk to Corporation and the Vice Chair of the Corporation for their support with the ERG process.

He affirmed that the ERG had not been an audit and that the Corporation had successfully identified its own areas of strength as well as areas where it could focus to develop further.

The Board is committed, engaged and asks challenging questions to hold the senior leaders to account, and these relationships are positive and supportive.

Governance at WQE is very good and there are just a few housekeeping matters relating to governance as well as a couple of points about governance structure and model which the Corporation should consider moving forwards.

Peter confirmed that he had liaised with Sarah Thomson as she was nominated to conduct a piece of internal review work on Link Governorship. Additionally, Peter was also asked to conduct some interviews with local community groups and organisations with a focus on diversity, to determine if there were any known barriers locally to governorship for WQE.

A draft ERG report has now been written and this provides a fuller account, findings and some areas for future focus.

#### **4.1 Internal review of Link Governorship – Paper 003 - *For information***

Sarah Thomson

Sarah outlined the main findings from the internal review of Link Governorship and thanked Donna Trusler as well as Link Governors, Bernie Green and Sofie Dadge, for their insights and support with the review. Sarah highlighted the development points for the Governance & Search Committee to consider in the early autumn around how the work and findings of the Link Governors is communicated to Governors.

The Chair thanked Sarah for undertaking this important internal review.

### **5. Appointments to Chair and Co-Vice Chair roles – *For approval***

Rachel Middleton

Joyce, Philip, Sofie and Sarah left the meeting room.

The Clerk reminded the Corporation that the process to open nominations for Co-Vice

Chair roles and the role of Chair of the Corporation, opened after the May 2024 Corporation meeting. Subsequently two candidates for Co-Vice Chairs wishing to serve together, were nominated by members of the Corporation – Sofie Dadge and Sarah Thomson. Joyce Black has agreed to step down early to facilitate their appointment and to mentor the candidates. A single applicant for the role as Chair of the Corporation was nominated by members of the Corporation. The nominee was Philip Parkinson. The Corporation was asked by the Clerk to note the nominations via email and to raise any issues or objections ahead of the June Corporation meeting. Some messages of support were received and there were no objections.

The Clerk asked the Corporation to approve the addition of another year's service to the current Chair's tenure to enable him to stand again as Chair for the year ahead. Philip's tenure will commence immediately after his current end of July close date. Philip has agreed to serve over the summer of 2025 to support the Corporation to transition to the appointment of a new Chair and to facilitate time for their induction over summer 2025.

The Corporation approve all elements relating to the Chair's appointment. The Corporation approved the appointment of the two Co-Vice Chairs who will take up their roles from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2024. Joyce Black agreed to remain as Vice Chair to support the Chair for any matters arising over the summer.

## **OVERSIGHT OF STRATEGIC DIRECTION**

### **6. Principal's Update – (presentation to follow)**

Paul Wilson

The highlights from the Principal's Update were as follows:

- Findings from the recent Ofsted report
- Update on the College's People Strategy
- An outline of the CENBASE joint training day
- An update on the Accountability Agreement and skills
- An update on the Business/industry Stakeholder Group
- Highlights from the College's Futurewise event
- Culture Day overview – 13<sup>th</sup> June

Carolyn Davies provided a capital projects update to the Corporation. She reported that the value engineered tender return had come back within the levels anticipated in the five- year financial forecasts.

Carolyn and the Principal met with the DfE to discuss timelines and key risks to project delivery milestones. They were supportive of the College committing to the demolition phase of the project in order to adhere to project milestones. The College plans to enter into early works through a c. £200k facilitating package of works. This will ensure the C Building can be fully watertight and the site prepared as far as possible for the start of a main works package.

Significant risks still need monitoring, in particular:

- Discharge of planning conditions
- Start date on-site to ensure the full grant is spent by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.

The Corporation agreed that no decisions would be required at the scheduled Estates & Finance Task & Finish Group meeting in July, though monitoring and further discussion of risks to the above would take place. Any decisions required would result in an extraordinary Corporation meeting.

It was confirmed that if the programme slips due to planning conditions which do not come back within the expected parameters or where it becomes clear that the risk to drawing down the full grant escalate, then a board meeting would need to be convened to consider whether it remains appropriate enter into the full package of works in the context of changing risk levels.

The Corporation asked whether a credit check had been performed on the main contractor. Carolyn confirmed a credit check had been completed. A further option to mitigate risk of contractor insolvency would be a performance bond. A cost benefit assessment would take place if and when appropriate.

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

### **7. Update and recommendations from the Audit & Risk Committee meeting – 18<sup>th</sup> June 2024**

In Neil McGhee's absence, Sofie Dadge talked the Corporation through the matters discussed by the Committee and recommended to the Corporation.

#### **7.1 Risk Register and Risk Management Policy**– Paper 004a and 004b – *For information*

The Risk Register was discussed by the committee at length. Significant risks relate to the delivery of the capital project due to strict timelines for completion and any subsequent changes to the funding profile.

The Risk Management Policy had a light refresh. Governors queried any ongoing environmental risks which could cause future disruption to the student experience. They also asked whether a change of government could impact on curriculum reform and the publishing process of the College's prospectus. The policy was approved by the Corporation

#### **7.2 External Audit Plan for year ending 31<sup>st</sup> July 2024** – Paper 005 – *For approval*

The External Audit Plan for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> July 2024 was approved by the Corporation.

#### **7.3 External assurance programme for 2024-2025** – Paper 006 – *For approval*

The proposed approach in relation to external assurance for 2024/25 was approved, with a request for Governors to consider and report back on any particular areas where they required external assurance. A Board Assurance framework, incorporating proposed areas of external assurance, will be considered by the Audit & Risk Committee and Corporation in the Autumn term. Artificial Intelligence was suggested but the Corporation agreed it would monitor opportunities and threats via updates on the Digital Strategy, tabled at Corporation meetings on a cyclical basis.

Sofie informed the Corporation that the Audit & Risk Committee had considered the individual papers relating to external assurance activity for the period 2023-24.

Sofie reported that the Committee had considered in-depth the requirements of the new Financial Handbook for Colleges, as well as the latest iteration of the Post-16 Audit Code of Practice and that the Committee were assured that College practice were in line with these new requirements.

**8. Financial Regulations – Paper 007**

Carolyn Davies

Carolyn draw attention to two key points:

- None of the delegated authority levels have changed from the last iteration to the latest iteration
- The Financial Regulations meet the requirements of the new Financial Handbook for Colleges which comes into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2024.

**9. Monthly management accounts – May 2024 - Paper 008 – *For information & questions***

Carolyn Davies

The May management accounts show an operating position with a surplus of £867k, against a surplus budget of £312k. Key factors for this variance were adjusted in the reforecast and the detail was shared with the Corporation. The reforecast shows an operating surplus of £557k compared to the operating surplus in the revised budget for the full year of £79k. Carolyn explained the rationale for this to the Corporation.

The Corporation noted the impact on financial health grading with regards to the level of reserves held by the College.

**10. Three Year Financial Plan Including Approval of Next Year's Budget - Paper 009-  
*For approval***

Carolyn Davies

Carolyn outlined the three-year financial plan, highlighting the three key areas noted in the executive summary which have an impact on the financial plan: student numbers impacting on funding, an assumed budget of £4.7m on the capital project; and ongoing inflationary pressures. The Corporation approved the budget for 2024/25.

**11. Health & Safety Policy – Paper 010 - *For approval***

Carolyn Davies

Carolyn highlighted the areas where changes were proposed. These mainly related to job titles, changes to responsibilities and changes to procedures. There was also some wording change around new and expectant mothers, highlighting the support which the College could provide once pregnancy has been disclosed.

## OVERSIGHT OF STUDENT OUTCOMES & EXPERIENCES

### 12. Student Voice Surveys

#### 12.1 Course evaluation questionnaire – Paper 011 – *For information & questions*

Tim Rogers

Tim highlighted when the questionnaire is conducted. Dashboards now make it easier to both read and analyse data. Each curriculum team can now do a deep dive on specific course data which can inform practice and developments.

Key actions for the future are to increase the number of students responding to boost the current 36.7% survey completion rate.

A Staff Governor reported that they found one of the questionnaire questions misleading – ‘Are you up to date with your studies?’, preferring instead to put an alternative question forward ‘Are you on target to reach your MEGs?’

The Principal highlighted that the lower response rate was probably due to students pursuing three different subjects and being required to submit three separate responses. The Early Weeks Survey always has the greatest number of responses from students.

#### 12.2 Cross-College questionnaire - Paper 012 – *For information & questions*

Tim Rogers

Positive experiences have been reported in terms of careers provision, IT, exams and student-lead activities run by the Student Executive. The questionnaire was completed before the highly successful Culture Day which could have impacted even more positively on feedback.

Students reported that they enjoyed their Pupil Progress Mentoring sessions but less so group sessions.

Students were less satisfied this year with the catering, which last year had been received more positively. This is likely due to the inconsistent opening of catering outlets at the Regent Road campus.

The Corporation asked that any future report to the Corporation also reflect the impact of any interventions, featuring a ‘you said, we did’ element.

### 13. Student mental health report – Paper 013 – *For information & questions*

Donna Trusler

Donna talked the Corporation through the detail of the annual student mental health report. She explained how signposting to different levels of internal support and enhanced referrals to external agencies were making an impact. The overall number of mental health incidents recorded has decreased this year.

Donna reported that students with disclosed learning differences have been very well supported and that as a result their attendance levels have been good. The number of mental health disclosures for this group has increased.

Governors queried whether students with multiple vulnerabilities were more likely to require mental health support. Donna affirmed that the data proved this to be the case.

## ROUND-UP

### 14. Any other business

#### 14.1 September kickstart meeting for Governors

The Chair confirmed the Clerk would shortly be writing out to Governors to confirm the date of the kickstart meeting which was likely to be more informal in nature than a normal Corporation meeting, but also focus on some operational and strategic governance matters.

#### 14.2 Removal of VAT exemption for public schools

Governors asked about the possible impact on the College if there was a change of government and the VAT exemption status for public schools was removed. Governors asked to be apprised of any knock-on impact to student numbers as a consequence, if the Opposition were to be elected and they delivered on their manifesto promise.

### 15. Confidential items

Subject to discussions during the meeting, the Corporation considered there to be no confidential minutes, but that Paper 013 should be redacted.

The Part 1 meeting closed at 18:55.

### 16. Closed meeting of External and Parent Governors (Part 2)

The closed meeting of External and Parent Governors considered the recommendations from the Remuneration Committee meeting – 19<sup>th</sup> June 2024. The minutes from this closed meeting are captured in separate minutes.

## Action List

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	

Signature:.....  
Chair of the Corporation

Date: .....