

The City of Liverpool College

Meeting of the Corporation Board

Held on 15th March 2017 at 4.30pm

Present: Dr Peter Tavernor, (Chair), Viv Lacey (Vice Chair), Heather Bebbington, Elaine Bowker (Principal), Martin Carey, Tony Cobain, Clare Crowther, Benjamin McGowan (Student), John Nolan (Staff), Sarah Peet, Abdi Saed (Student), Steve Sankson, Gill Williams (Staff)

In attendance: Julie Barnes (Deputy Chief Executive), Mike Firth (Observer – SFA), Nicola Kumar (Strategic Development Manager), Christine Lenderyou (Clerk), Ann Monk (Group FD), Simon Pierce (VP Curriculum) – for part of meeting.

17.16 Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies had been received from Louise Barry, John Denny, Lydia Field, Patrick Hurley and Phil Sheard. The VPC had given apologies for late arrival owing to his attendance at an Area Based Review meeting.

17.17 Presentation on Teaching and Learning

The Board had repeatedly emphasised the importance of improving teaching and learning to ensure that students received a consistent, quality experience. In addition to the standing items on performance (PIAP, feedback from PQTFG), the Principal gave a presentation which outlined the actions and strategies in place to continue to drive improvements. The Principal's presentation focussed on:

- High expectations – students and staff
- Observations – Evidence Based Practice
- Homework – high standard, marking policy clear.
- Monitoring students' progress – aspirational grades
- Promoting good behaviour – behaviour was routinely good, especially for an inner-city college and students reported feeling safe.
- Improving attendance and punctuality – improving, but more required.

The Principal gave detailed examples of strategies which were used and how this was communicated to staff. Governors appreciated that there was significant activity taking place but challenged on how the impact would be captured. The Principal explained that feedback from students was largely positive and attendance for English and maths had increased by 2% in the previous week. Other indicators included teaching and learning being consistently observed as good within the classroom and wider learning environment, and promoting higher ordered thinking as well as positive destinations. A measure for in-year value added was being examined.

The Principal had introduced an intensive six week process around observations which gave teachers and managers additional support. Teachers who were observed to deliver sessions which had areas that needed improvement would meet on a weekly basis with managers; managers in turn would be supported through peer observations and feedback sessions involving the Executive and the Director of Learning, which meant that senior post-holders could coach curriculum managers on how to support their staff to improve and ensure feedback given to teaching staff was robust and also constructive in driving the greatest improvement over a shorter period of time.

One governor with a background in banking commented that the strategies mirrored those in industry, particularly regarding the appraisals, feedback and moderation, and expressed support for a coaching model which ensured the 'coach' was also receiving feedback on how to improve. Similar feedback was received from governors with backgrounds in HE and FE elsewhere. The Principal stated that the majority of staff wanted to deliver for the College and their students and this should be seen as a positive step. Governors queried how the strategies described could be balanced against the risk of disengaging staff by "over processing". The Principal reminded governors that managerial roles were also under focus, with the quality of feedback and performance management seen as being key; she felt that managers were not timetabled many teaching hours (although this was under review) and most their time was expected to be focused on improving teaching and learning.

The need to celebrate success was also discussed with the Principal highlighting that where results, student feedback and value added were all good, then this was celebrated at the STAR awards. Staff could be nominated by students, managers and other staff, and these were well received; the six week process should also recognise where individuals improved, however where this were not the case the College's formal capability procedure would be invoked. The Principal clarified that the process used for observations included written feedback which always started with strengths. In addition, where good practice was observed, that teacher may be asked to share by leading a CPD session for other staff. The Board agreed that curriculum managers at different levels should periodically attend Board meetings, with governors welcoming the opportunity to triangulate the discussions held with the Executive. Governors who attended the Performance and Quality Task and Finish Group endorsed this approach as a window into the College. **Action: SP**

Governors questioned whether the Senior Leadership Team had been surprised by any of the findings. The Principal pointed to more checks and balances being introduced as a common theme had been managers wanting to focus on positive aspects rather than having difficult conversations around where improvement was required. Training was provided and across the College sessions on high ordered thinking skills had taken place.

The Board welcomed the increased focus on improving teaching and learning and requested updates and additional detail on the impact and how it was being tracked/used be provided at a future meeting points. The Chair added that the Performance and Quality Task and Finish Group had been able to take a detailed view, and had found that the drive on teaching and learning was evident across the institution, highlighting that outcomes for students had improved for each of the last three years and this was due to proper and objective processes which were measurable.

17.18 Update from Performance and Quality Task and Finish Group

The Chair stated that this item should be taken next as many of the themes related to the presentation given by the Principal.

The Director of Learning had attended and it was clear that he had a solid understanding of the actions required to move the quality of teaching and learning to the next level and could provide a comprehensive analysis to the Group. In addition, the Assistant Principals for City 6 and Creative and Digital had attended the meeting, which enabled the Group to triangulate the information provided by the Director of Learning. The Group had been able to take assurance that processes were known and understood, with policies implemented. Attendance remained a concern. While

there was no agreed national benchmark for attendance, the information available to management seemed to suggest that attendance was better than national comparators and had improved from previous years, although the College's own aspirational targets may not be met. Consideration was being given to addressing poor attendance/punctuality in bespoke ways such as acknowledging music students frequently played in late night performances and timetabling accordingly, although it was noted that this was not without risk. The Group noted that identifying pockets of poor attendance/punctuality was possible due to the reporting available and it had been encouraging to see that the Assistant Principals owned responsibility for attendance and were not in denial about the improvement required, even though it seemed that the College was performing better than national comparators. It was clear to the Group that the Director of Learning and the Assistant Principals were implementing strategies and processes, enabled by a detailed knowledge of individual teachers, students and their corresponding industries.

The Group had tested several policies and process with attendees, for example the College's policy on marking schedules, and were able to provide assurance to the Board that the policies were known and understood and that managers were able to articulate these which was a positive indicator of a culture of expectations. The Director of Learning and Assistant Principals confirmed that information was provided to them on a timely basis which enabled performance management and intervention as appropriate.

Other areas covered at PQTFG included:

- Curriculum Review of Creative and Digital; the DoL had provided feedback on the findings of the Curriculum Review in this area and the Assistant Principal had confirmed the actions taken to address these.
- English and maths; English basic skills predictions had dropped from 65% to 46% but had now increased by c15% reflecting the movement from a particular point of time when results had not yet been received. The Chair emphasised that the accompanying commentary on the narrative needed to provide context. The Board were aware of the challenges for English and maths, with it being particularly difficult to secure good maths teachers. English and maths now fell within the remit of the Assistant Principal for Engineering and Construction who was a mathematician by background and had had some positive impact.
- City 6 mock exams; the mock exams had taken place in February with learning points from the previous year taken into consideration. The PIAP had been updated accordingly. Areas of concern and areas of strength had been highlighted to the Group along with the corresponding strategies.

The Board agreed that while it was reassuring to hear details of the challenge and triangulation, it was important to ensure that evidence of impact was readily available to third parties such as Ofsted in recognition of the large volume of information which often needed to be consumed in a concentrated time span.

The Vice Chair summarised that the consensus at PQTFG had been that there was good practice throughout the College but the challenge was to ensure consistency.

Current figures showed that the aspirational targets set for retention in term two were not being met but there was recognition that the target was challenging and retention was currently at the second highest level that the College had ever had. The Board were advised that the retention target for 16-18 would probably be achieved but governors were reminded that there was a balance between retention and achievement. The College was inclusive and reached out to vulnerable adults but this did present a risk to achievement. Liverpool had low skill levels for adults and there was an argument for delivering more Level 1 and 2 programmes, but there had previously been a correlation with poor retention on particular programmes and so this needed to be considered very carefully.

Other key highlights of the PIAP were:

- Retention of learners with a physical disability (98.2%), learning difficulty (96.3%) and in receipt of free school meals (97.4%) were above college retention rates, but it remained a priority of the Equality and Diversity Management Group to reduce the potential for achievement gaps identified in 2015/16.
- HE retention was currently 98.2%, significantly above the end of year target of 92%. HE continued to perform well and the College was hoping to achieve “Gold” standard.
- Maximum timely Achievement Rate (AR) for Apprenticeships was currently 76% with a target timely AR of 72% (National Rate 58.7%). A number of possible withdrawals were being investigated by the Head of School for Work Based Learning, which may reduce the maximum timely AR to 75.1%. Governors were concerned that the college would be judged on circumstances beyond its control, for example if an employer dismissed an Apprentice, but accepted that risks of this nature were known and the College tried to support employers where possible; consideration was being given to placing a member of College staff with one employer that had a poor Apprenticeship retention rate as part of an account management model. Governors believed this was an example of where government and employer expectations did not align.
- All apprenticeship learner portfolios were in the process of being moved to a new ePortfolio system by the end of April 2017, which would allow more detailed analysis of in-year indicators and support Assessors in evidencing learning within the workplace.
- Attendance was currently 85.2% (0.1% below February PIAP update) with English & maths depressing this figure at 72.7%. English and maths attendance for the past 7 days was 75.3%, a 2% increase on the previous teaching week. Attendance had been discussed in detail at the PQTFG.
- Currently 66% of English & Maths lessons observed were considered to be effective, and 74.9% of all sessions. Priority was being given to re-observing tutors delivering sessions identified as needing development.
- The number of learners currently working at or above their target grade in Functional Skills English had decreased from 65.8% to 46%. Many entry level tests had been scheduled for the weeks beginning 6th and 13th of March to address this prediction following intervention

by the Assistant Principal responsible for English and maths. As per the update from PQTFG predictions were now back at the higher level and were based on actual results. All English and maths learners behind target received intervention meeting requests from the appropriate Head of School which would take place throughout March.

Simon Pierce (VP Curriculum) joined the meeting at this point.

Governors asked for specific information regarding comparables (national, previous year etc) and were informed that predictions suggested that GCSE performance would be better than the previous year with a more robust process being cited as well as differences to coursework. The national rate for A*-C in English and maths was low 20 percent whereas governors were aware that the College target was far above this. Governors were cautioned that while the percentage of A* to C was still significant, with a focus on grade improvement the number of students moving from a D to C would be an important measure.

Governors appreciated the summary, but demanded greater clarity over what the key points of the year were and how they were tracked. The Principal explained that the key elements were contained within the PIAP with milestones but improving teaching and learning to consistently good was crucial as if that was achieved, everything else would follow. The Chair reiterated the need for the PIAP to provide context and note achievements, but acknowledged that the PIAP would of necessity be more focused on areas to improve.

The Board noted that the College was now above national rates at all levels and enquired what impact this would have on a forthcoming Ofsted inspection. The Principal explained that while the outcomes would provide some level of pre-information to the Ofsted team, these would need to be underpinned by what was demonstrated during the visit e.g. lesson observations, etc. English and maths would continue to be a significant focus and while the College was performing well against national benchmarks, this should not provide false assurance to the Board as national rates were extremely low. The sheer volume of English and maths enrolments posed a risk. The Board were informed that Justin Smith (Assistant Principal for Construction and Engineering) now had responsibility for cross-college English and maths and a positive impact had been noted.

National success rates for the previous year from the SFA had recently been made available via the QAR and would be circulated to the Board electronically.

ACTION: CL

17.20

Performance Dashboard

The Board had reviewed the information in the Performance Dashboard in advance. Most elements had been covered during earlier items, but governors' attention was drawn to the pages which included funding and HR information.

17.21

Finance Update

The Period 6 management accounts were reviewed. The reforecast had reduced income down but as reported to the last meeting, a prudent approach had been taken to the cash flow forecast which had not included full realisation of income and therefore the reduced income against Apprenticeships would have no impact on cash flow but the bottom line was affected.

Expenditure was tracking well against the budget. [confidential – held separately by the Clerk]

In Period 6 the financial health score had returned to good because additional capital from the loan had been paid from the sale of Vauxhall Road car park which meant that the amount of capital owed was reduced along with the gearing ratio. There was no specific change to the outturn. Year to Date tracking was in line with expectations. The Group FD was in the process of finalising the Period 7 accounts which would go to the next meeting of the Group Finance Committee.

Cost savings to date stood at £1m. Income was broadly in line with previous discussions. [confidential – held separately by the Clerk].

Governors interrogated whether staff costs as the main source of expenditure would reduce further in year and requested confirmation that the end of year position would still be a surplus. The Group FD confirmed that a Cash Based Operating Surplus was still anticipated as per the reforecast, and in answer to a further question confirmed that cash was tight, but in line with expectations. [confidential – held separately by the Clerk].

The £900k variance highlighted was reviewed by governors and there was clarity that this reflected the movement from the original budget to the reforecast.

The letter and dashboard from the EFA/SFA was noted. This was an annual communication to all colleges which was issued after the agencies had considered financial health because of the budget and financial plans submitted. [confidential – held separately by the Clerk]. The SFA expressly stated they had no significant concerns around financial controls in the College and referenced a number of external points of assurance. Governors agreed that the dashboard provided was useful as it enabled a year on year comparison although they were asked to note that the staff costs as a percentage of income were not based on the adjusted income so differed from what was reported to Board, with the Board receiving the worst case scenario with franchising removed.

Governors were informed that a good financial health score would be dependent on the AEB budget being achieved but reminded of the risks to delivery via in-year recruitment. [confidential – held separately by the Clerk].

The Board appreciated the detailed information provided and commented that while 2016/17 had been enormously challenging, the diligent approach to delivering savings while navigating a difficult cash position was to be commended. As well as the leadership from the Principal, DCEX and Group FD, the Board also noted the efforts of the wider finance team who had been handling the situation on a daily basis.

17.22

Financial Recovery Plan

Covered above.

17.23

Indicative Funding Allocations 2017/18

The Board reviewed the indicative allocations, noting that only confirmation of the EFA allocation had been received so far. In answer to a question the DCEX advised that a high level draft budget would be taken to the next meeting of the Group Finance Committee which would be based on known elements (cost base, EFA allocations) and informed assumptions on SFA and HEFCE allocations. This would provide a first view of the scale of savings required in 2017/18 but would obviously be refined further during the budget setting process.

The EFA allocation was in line with predictions and previous reports to the Board and would be around [confidential – held separately by the Clerk]. While the SFA and HEFCE allocations had not been received yet, there had been no policy announcements which indicated there would be significant change. [confidential – held by the Clerk].

Apprenticeship provision would be affected by the new levy which would be effective from April 2017 and there would be three ways Apprenticeships were funded:

- SFA will fund on-going apprentices who are in place before the introduction of the levy. The College will receive an allocation based on the value of the framework yet to be delivered.
- Employers who would be paying the apprenticeship levy (annual payroll bill more than £3 million) will be looking for opportunities to spend their levy.
- Non-levy employers who will be required to pay 10% contribution towards the apprenticeship and the remaining 90% would be funded by SFA (although a small employer co-investment waiver would exempt employers with less than 50 employees from the 10% contribution for a 16-18 year old apprentice).

Any additional support required such as Maths and English would continue to be funded by the SFA.

The Board acknowledged that the levy would provide an opportunity for the College to grow its Apprenticeship delivery but agreed this must be balanced against risk. [confidential – held separately by the Clerk].

17.24

Transformation Programme

John Nolan declared a potential conflict of interest in this item and left the meeting for its duration.
The Board were updated on the key actions. [confidential – held separately by the Clerk].

The Board accepted the report, acknowledging the high-level summary and that work was ongoing to further develop the suite of transformation projects outlined.

Dr Tavernor left the meeting at this point and Ms Lacey took over the Chair.

17.25

First 4 Skills

[confidential – held by the Clerk]

17.26

Risk Register

As per previous discussions at Board, the new format and strategy had been reviewed by the Group Audit Committee and approved under delegated authority. Most items had been covered during earlier agenda items, but the Board's attention was drawn to the following points:

- An additional risk relating to the impact on the College of First4Skills being placed into Administration had been added.
- The risk that Area Based Review impacted negatively upon the College would be removed following the conclusion of the steering group meetings and final report.

- The potential impact of Administered College Status on the approval and submission of the financial statements for 2015/16 by the SFA deadline had been removed following the submission by the due deadline in December.

The Board agreed that the risk register represented a fair summary of key risks and actions taken to mitigate. The report was noted.

17.27 Annual Review of Financial Regulations

The DCEx had provided a summary of the changes and the rationale. Since the report had been produced, there had been revisions to the Joint Audit Code of Practice (JACOP) which reflected the anticipated merger of the SFA and EFA so any references to this document would be updated with its successor.

The DCEx proposed a change in the purchasing limits. Currently anything over £30k was subject to a tender process but a recent internal audit had highlighted that this was a low threshold compared to the sector and it was creating an increased burden for procurement staff. The new purchasing limits would see the threshold increase to £50K. The Board were assured that the new £30-49,999.99 level would still have appropriate rigour and approval would be required from the DCEx or Group FD. The DCEx was asked to confirm that the proposal complied with sector standards.

The document retention policy would be removed and retained as a stand alone policy.

The Board approved the changes to the financial regulations.

Ms Bebbington left the meeting at this point.

17.28 Amendment to Students' Union Constitution

The SU President advised that the SU Parliament had reviewed the composition of the Students' Union and believed that it would be more beneficial to move from one full time sabbatical officer (the SU president) to the SU President and Vice President being paid on a part time basis. This would enable the President and Vice President to focus on engaging with students and spend less time on administration which would be covered by the Student Engagement Team. The DCEx added that the Student Engagement Team would find it easier to incorporate the administration into their roles on a more planned basis than the *ad hoc* support as was currently the case. As outlined in the paper the proposal would generate a small saving to the College due to reduced NI contributions associated with a full-time officer. The part time basis would make it easier to pay students for specific tasks and hours actually worked, providing increased flexibility.

The Board thanked the SU President for a clear, well written paper. The proposal was approved by the Board.

17.29 Safeguarding – Termly Update

The paper was accepted as read. Key points were outlined as:

- The number of safeguarding cases had continued to rise. In the Autumn term 2016/17, 120 students were dealt with by the safeguarding team. In the same period in 2015/16, 106 referrals were received by the team.

- All College Policies and procedures had been amended in line with changes in all relevant legislations (Keeping Children Safe in Education Published Sep 2016 and Working Together 2015).
- Director of Student Services and his deputy continue to deliver safeguarding and “Prevent Duty” training to new staff in the induction session. It had been agreed that more time would be dedicated to this training to incorporate Prevent Duty in more detail due. The Board had also received Prevent training in May 2015 and February 2017 but a further session would be arranged to ensure that all governors were fully up to date as this was a mandatory requirement and governors were asked to give this all due attention.

Action: CL

- The College had sourced access to the prohibition list used to check staff at the recruitment stage which was in addition to the existing assurance received from the DBS check.
- The team was working closely with the local Safeguarding boards, CMHS, CCG and various other organisations to offer range of support services to our students.
- There was a plan in place to train all the Learning Support Practitioners who provide in-class support in mental health support strategies.
- The number of EHATs (Early Help Assessment Tool) were relatively small for the size of the College although the Board were reassured that this was partly because of the pre-safeguarding work done by the safeguarding and the Counselling teams along with Mental Health and Wellbeing teams and partly because of the age group of students. Most EHATs were created when children are younger and/or at school.

The Board accepted the report.

17.30

Health and Safety – Termly Update

The key issues were highlighted to the Board:

- Three incidents had taken place in the Autumn term – two relating to students, one relating to staff.
- The comparison year in year was consistent for staff but had decreased for students from 33 to 13.
- Some trends had been identified in relation to incidents characterised as major accidents, but these related to relatively small numbers and may not therefore be significant.
- Slips and trips were the most common type of incident so mechanisms to reduce the number had been put into place.

The Board accepted the report but debated whether further in-depth sessions were required for both Health and Safety and Safeguarding so that governors could exam in detail trends and analysis. It was suggested that the annual report for each could be presented by the appropriate officer and the Board agreed this would be beneficial.

Action: CL

Mr Nolan left the meeting.

17.31

Update from Group Audit Committee

Most items had been covered. In addition to the discussion relating to F4S described earlier, a number of internal audit reports were received, including one on City 6 and another on procurement. The Committee had not been unduly concerned by any of the findings and the recommendations were being taken forwards accordingly.

17.32

Update from SharEd

[confidential – held separately by the Clerk]

The Board noted the report which was succinct and informative.

17.33

Intervention Process

The Principal advised that case conferences had continued with the most recent taking place the previous week. While the case conferences were challenging, there had been some acknowledgement of the financial recovery, although the Board had always been confident that the deficit was a single year issue. The Board agreed with the Principal that the DCEx and Group FD were working hard and their efforts were appreciated.

[confidential – held separately by the Clerk].

17.34

Any Other Business

There were no items of other business.

17.35

Confidentiality of Items

All items which were commercially sensitive or related to third parties would remain confidential.

17.36

Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting would take place on 17th May 2017.

17.37

Confidential Item

[confidential – held separately by the Clerk]

The Vice Chair thanked everyone for attending and brought the meeting to a close.