



Minutes of the Board meeting

held on 22nd January 2013 at 1615hrs

Present:

Ms Louise Barry)	External Governors
Ms Sara Carthy)	
Mr Tony Cobain)	
Ms Clare Crowther)	
Ms Claire Dove)	
Cllr Nick Small)	
Ms Vivienne Tyler (Chair))	
Mr David Wilson)	

Ms Elaine Bowker		Principal
Mr Aaron Booth		Student Governor
Mr Daniel Hayes		Student Governor
Ms Martha Harris		Staff Governor – Teaching
Mr John Nolan		Staff Governor – Business Support

In Attendance:

Ms Gill Banks		Vice Principal Curriculum
Mr David Brennan		Vice Principal Partnerships and Business Development
Ms Angela Cox		Deputy Principal
Mr David McIntyre		Vice Principal Finance and Corporate Resources
Mr Chris Hegg		Clerk to the Board
Ms Christine Lenderyou		Secretary to the Clerk

13.1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the Arts Centre and advised that there was a tabled paper for Item 10 (College Self-Assessment Report).

13.2. Apologies

Apologies had been received from Ms Carmichael, Mr Denny, Mr Grieve, and Professor Pillay.

13.3. Declarations of Interest

The Board noted that the Principal and Executive team had an interest in items 22, 23.1 and 23.2 as these items related to Senior Post Holder pay.

13.4. Minutes of the meeting held on 4th December 2012

12.72 The final paragraph should read "...converting to a corporate type structure" rather than "...converting to a company".

12.83 The first paragraph should read "...sought confirmation of whether the College's insurers were aware of the incidents" rather than "...sought confirmation that the College's insurers were made aware of the incidents".

Other than the amendments listed, the minutes were approved as a true record.

13.5. Outcome of Actions of Previous Meetings

The Board received a report from the Clerk and noted that all actions from previous meetings were either in progress or complete.

The Chair requested an update on the development of the performance dashboard referred to in 12.114 as this report had not been presented to the Board at recent meetings. The Principal advised governors that now the strategic priorities had been put into place it would be possible to bring a dashboard report to the next Board meeting. **ACT: DB**

A governor asked why a visit to the Academy referred to in 12.145 had not yet taken place, but governors agreed the timing was not right. **ACT: EB**

13.6. Appointment and Reappointment of Governors

A new report was tabled by the Clerk replacing the one that governors had previously received. The Search and Governance Committee had met before the Board meeting to consider a recent application from Mr Neil Lazenbury. The Committee had recommended his appointment to the Board as he had financial experience as well as strategic and analytical skills. Mr Lazenbury also had strong links to the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and was an active member of the Low Carbon Economy Board.

Mr Hayes joined the meeting during the course of the discussion.

The Board approved Mr Lazenbury's appointment to the Board. Governors expressed concern that the Board's current profile did not fully reflect the diversity of the local area or the student body and agreed that this should be a key consideration when making future appointments. The Chair reported that Search & Governance Committee were conscious of this issue and that governors would be most welcome to use their own networks to reach potential candidates with required skills, particularly those that might improve the Board's diversity. **ACT: CH**

13.7. Corporate Structure and Risk/Assurance Considerations

At the strategic planning event on 11-12th January 2013 governors had been presented with three options and had discussed the advantages and risks associated with each. The Chair provided governors with a brief summary of the discussions that had taken place and invited comment.

Governors agreed that the second option, moving to a corporate-type structure with an overarching education trust, could be a suitable model at some point in the future but were concerned that this option currently presented too much risk as it had not yet been adopted anywhere else in the sector. Additionally the Principal expressed concern about adopting this structure at this time given potential issues relating to SFA funding mechanisms.

The third option, adopting a hybrid position where the College remained the top accountable organisation but wider activities were contained within a non-FE holding company, was identified by governors as the most appropriate model at the present time. The Chair commented that this option would clarify lines of responsibility and accountability, which governors had previously identified as key concerns. Governors also noted that this option provided scope to convert to a corporate-type structure in the future, should this be desired.

The Board confirmed the third, hybrid option was its preferred structure at this time and requested that the Executive team continue to seek advice on the related legal and financial implications. **ACT: EXEC**

13.8. First4Skills Memorandum of Understanding

The Board noted that the SFA required colleges to establish a memorandum of understanding between the College and any subsidiary companies. Governors expressed some concern that the proposed memorandum covered only financial arrangements. The Board also asked that the memorandum include some mention of the values of First4Skills as presumably these should reflect the values of the College, whilst bearing in mind the commercial nature of First4Skills.

As the next First4Skills Board meeting would be at the end of February, the Board requested that the memorandum of understanding be amended to address these concerns and delegated authority for final approval to the Chair and Principal. **ACT: EB & VT**

13.9. Confidential Item

Confidential minute held by the Clerk to the Board.

13.10. Principal's Report

The report gave an update on various projects and developments across the College. The Principal highlighted a number of points.

Strategic links between the College and the city's universities had been strengthened.

Cllr Small had been part of the Gazelle Group delegation to an entrepreneurial college in Northern Ireland and commented that there were some interesting angles in respect of accessing European funding and links to business. Mr Booth had accompanied the Principal to London to present a bid to Barclays' Corporate Social Responsibility programme.

The relationship with the LEP was continuing to go from strength to strength and discussions were on-going about how the College could support the city region priorities.

The Senior Leadership Team had shadowed students to learn more about the reality of the student experience. There were both positive and negative aspects, with some themes strongly emerging, and feedback would be discussed by the SLT. Governors felt there was some scope for them to undertake a similar exercise and that this would be a valuable tool for governors to find out about student experiences, concerns and aspirations over and above the existing Student Voice mechanisms. The Principal agreed to consider the practicalities of this and report back. **ACT: EB**

Governors were keen to see the reinstatement of the Governor Link Scheme which had been paused while the College had been restructuring. Both the Board and Executive felt it was a valuable way of increasing the Board's knowledge and creating a dialogue while also enabling the Board to challenge more effectively. While the Link Governor Scheme had been paused, many governors had continued to work with sections of the College. Governors felt that the Link Governor Scheme would work best on a non-compulsory, non-prescriptive basis, allowing governors and the College to work out the most suitable ways of linking. Governors suggested that a list of ideas for links on either a curriculum area or thematic basis and previously expressed governor preferences be circulated. **ACT: CH**

The Principal advised that a round table event for employers around the SuperPort was taking place at the end of January; it was hoped this would develop apprenticeship opportunities.

The Principal highlighted the launch of 'Bread & More' at St George's Hall and encouraged governors to try out the new cafe being run by College students.

13.11. Student Performance - Action Plan 2011/12

The Board considered a report from the Deputy Principal and Vice Principal (Curriculum).

Key issues noted by the Board included: that student performance remained unsatisfactory despite significant progress made in 2011/12; that retention across all levels and age groups remained a significant challenge at 82% compared with the national average of 87%; that achievement had declined for 16-18 year old students on level 1 learner responsive programmes; that success across the different student groups was inconsistent; and that apprenticeship provision remained below the national average for overall and timely success despite significant improvements in success rates in 2011/12.

The Chair emphasised to the Board the importance of monitoring student performance. Governors queried whether there were protocols in place to identify students on the wrong programmes who may otherwise end up re-sitting courses or leaving the College. The Vice Principal (Curriculum) advised that the On Track Reviews were designed to identify this and would take a common sense approach to the support provided. The Deputy Principal commented that the tutorial strategy aimed to find the best route for students and although the system was more robust than in previous years, there was still work to be done to maximise its effectiveness.

Governors questioned whether the action plan for Employer Responsive Courses would have a positive impact. The Deputy Principal was emphatic that there would be a positive impact, highlighting that in previous years there had been very little focus on this area. The VP(P&BD) agreed there should be an improvement by treating apprenticeships as core rather than peripheral activity. In particular timely success rates would improve as a result of monthly meetings and improvements made to the initial assessment process. Recruitment would also move to a roll-on basis..

13.12. Current Student Performance

Governors received a report from the Deputy Principal.

Key issues noted by the Board included: that overall in-year retention was higher than 2011/12; that in-year retention was higher at both 16-18 and 19+ than during January 2011/12; that attendance was a key concern; that actions were being undertaken in order to improve the performance monitoring tools available to managers and that a review of the College Information Systems was being undertaken by the internal auditors.

Governors queried why retention appeared to be high whilst attendance appeared to be low. The Deputy Principal advised that there may be unprocessed withdrawals in the system and that although a reconciliation had already taken place but there may be some outstanding issues. The overall attendance figures had improved from the previous year but were still of concern with reasons for low attendance being explored. The Principal believed that low attendance was intrinsically linked to the student experience, although it was accepted there were also issues with tutorial attendance which were lowering the figures. A Student Governor suggested that all tutorials should, where possible, be located on the same site as a student's principal place of study and the VP(C) agreed to look into this for the 13/14 academic year.

ACT: GB

The Deputy Principal commented that in a changing world, the College had to modernise and look at the whole concept of attendance (flexible timetables, improved technology etc.) but cautioned that funding methodologies also had to be accommodated in terms of guided learning hours.

The Board welcomed the format of the report as useful and requested regular reports. The Board accepted that, as the structure of the College had changed, there could not be direct comparisons with previous years, but requested that trends be identified where possible.

ACT: AC

13.13. Teaching and Learning Observations

The Board received a report from the Deputy Principal.

The Deputy Principal had met with the Unions which had resulted in some minor changes to the process for Teaching and Learning Observations, but in principle the Unions had agreed to the process.

Governors queried whether the outcomes of the Teaching and Learning Observations were expected to correlate to success rates and were advised that both outcomes of Teaching and Learning Observations and Success Rates were considered together at Performance Reviews thereby facilitating effective correlation.

The first round of results from the new Observation of Teaching and Learning exercises would be complete by the next Board meeting. **ACT: AC**

The Principal advised that thematic issues from the reviews by Robin Goddard (Quality Consultant) would be brought to the next Board meeting. **ACT: EB**

13.14. College Self-Assessment Report (Indicative Grades)

The College Self Assessment Report (SAR) was tabled by the Deputy Principal and governors were informed that this was a draft document.

Part of this minute has been removed for reasons of confidentiality. For further information please contact the Clerk to the Board.

Governors were asked to give any feedback on the SAR to either the Chair or the Principal within a week. If clarification was required on any matters governors could contact either the Principal, the Deputy Principal or the VP(C). Authority for final approval was delegated to the Principal and the Chair. **ACT: EB & VT**

13.15. Risk Management Update

The Board discussed the update by the VP(F&CR) and queried whether First4Skills should be included in the risk register as, although it was a separate subsidiary company, it could have a reputational (and therefore financial) impact on the College.

Some governors felt unless there was a known risk there was no need to include First4Skills on the College risk register. Other governors felt that they did not have sufficient knowledge of how First4Skills was operating to know whether there were any risks and this lack of knowledge was a risk in itself. The Board therefore decided that some reference to First4Skills should be included in the risk register. **ACT: DMcl**

The Board requested quarterly updates on First4Skills which would contain both financial information and performance data. The key matrices reported to the SFA should form part of these quarterly reports to the Board. **ACT: DMcl**

13.16. First4Skills Update

The VP(F&CR) amplified his written report. The management restructure of First4Skills had been completed as a result of which management costs had been reduced. A "New World" business strategy had been adopted by First4Skills and communicated to staff. Recognising that the staff had experienced a great deal of change, staff conferences were currently being arranged to facilitate feedback.

Part of this minute removed for reasons of confidentiality. For further information, please contact the Clerk to the Board.

Further business development opportunities were being explored and First4Skills was bidding for a contract with a leading UK supermarket chain. The College management team would be meeting with the First4Skills management team to discuss how to develop further opportunities with particular reference to joint utilisation of the First4Skills sales team.

ACT: EXEC

13.17. Budget 2012/13 Update

Minute removed for reasons of confidentiality. For further information, please contact the Clerk.

13.18. Safe College – Autumn Term Report

The Board wished to express its sympathy to the families and friends of two students who had committed suicide.

The Deputy Principal advised that there remained three members of staff to be CRB checked and that this would be resolved when each member returned from long term sick leave. It was confirmed that governors remained eligible for CRB checking under the new guidance released and the Board agreed that any governors who had not been CRB checked would be required to complete the process as soon as practicable.

ACT: CH

13.19. UTC Progress Report

The UTC was progressing well and the RAG rating was green for everything except for the site. Discussions were on-going regarding the site and the situation would hopefully be resolved within the next week. The outcome would be reported to the Board as part of the next progress update.

ACT: GB

13.20. Studio School Progress Report

Preparations for the Studio School were progressing well with RAG ratings of green in all areas although negotiations about a suitable location were ongoing. Interviews were due to take place for the Principal Designate imminently.

13.21. Board Self-Assessment and Action Plan

The Chair commented that the response rate had been slightly disappointing. The Search & Governance Committee would look at the responses in detail but initial impressions were that governors felt there had been an improvement over the last year.

Governors felt it was significant that the question with the lowest score related to the Student Voice. The forthcoming Student Voice event at the LEX was mentioned to governors who were invited to attend. Governors requested that all key dates were sent to them as far in advance as possible, preferably at the start of the year.

ACT: DB

Governors suggested that all Board training did not have to be formal – sometimes a briefing before a Board meeting would suffice. A common thread was a need for more training on financial matters. Some governors had attended finance sessions that had been run by LSIS and felt those sessions had been very useful.

13.22. Confidentiality of Items

Item 5 – Appointment and Re-appointment of Governors – Mr Lazenbury's personal details.

Item 7 – Confidential Item

Item 10 – SAR

Item 12 – F4S Update – some operational details.

Item 13 – Budget update until figures confirmed.

Item 14 – Safeguarding Appendix

13.23. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting would take place on 22nd March at the Vauxhall site if possible. At the request of one of the student governors, a starting time of 4.30pm would be trialled.

13.24. Any Other Business

The Board were sad to learn that Ms Carthy had tendered her resignation although the impact of demands on her time were appreciated. The Board were sorry to lose Ms Carthy and her valuable HR expertise from the Board. Ms Carthy advised that she would try to attend a final Board meeting should a replacement governor not be recruited before then. The Board presented Ms Carthy with flowers and card as a token of its appreciation for her contribution over the last three years.

Ms Elaine Bowker, Mr Aaron Booth, Mr Daniel Hayes, Ms Martha Harris, Mr John Nolan, Ms Gill Banks, Mr David Brennan, Ms Angela Cox, Mr David McIntyre and Ms Christine Lenderyou left the meeting at this point

13.25 to 13.27. CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS – separate minute held by Clerk

The meeting closed at 19.15hrs.