

The chair reminded everyone present to declare any interests that they may have on matters to be discussed. No specific declarations were made and standing declarations were noted.

3 MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS HELD ON 19TH OCTOBER 2023

The minutes were reviewed and it was agreed that they were an accurate record of discussions.

AGREED: to approve the minutes of the meetings held on 19th October 2023.

There were no matters arising.

4 ACTION PROGRESS REPORT

The board were happy to note the content of the update provided.

5 SCENE SETTING AND APPROVAL OF NEW APPOINTMENTS (STAFF AND STUDENT GOVERNORS)

The chair thanked everyone for attending the meeting and indicated that the agenda was very tight. He informed governors that papers would be taken as read and asked that debate be kept as minimal as possible while still ensuring these important matters are explored and challenge given where appropriate.

The chair also acknowledged that focusing on 'sticking points' seems to have been a positive move. The current such sticking points were attendance in some areas, attainments, and maths and English, and additional scrutiny may be prompted by the change of local ESFA contacts. The chair asked governors to focus their comments and questions at a strategic level and to rely on the board subcommittees to provide the depth of scrutiny which cannot be conducted during board meetings.

(Items 6 and 7 were covered within the private minutes of the meeting.)

8 EXTERNAL GOVERNANCE REVIEW REPORT

Ian Ashman presented his report for governors to discuss and approve the improvements suggested. He informed the board that these conclusions have been reached following meetings held with governors and executive team members, as well as feedback received. These recommendations have already been endorsed by the chair, vice-chair and principal and will be carried out through the remainder of this academic year. The board was asked to agree the order of priority.

Key points highlighted within the presentation were as follows:

- This provides an opportunity for governors to get a feel for what has been done, and many areas were looked at in detail.
- Interim work has been produced in relation to emerging concerns, such as attendance to Standards Committee

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or the clerk. The balanced scorecard is also subject to internal audit review this year.

- Staff costs
There is a £900k overspend on staff costs – this is balanced by increased income and the budget having been reworked, so these targets will change and become more meaningful.
- Maths and English
There are 50% more students studying maths and English this year, as is the case nationally. Finding high-quality teachers is proving to be a real challenge; however there is good leadership in the English and maths departments. There are no red items underpinning this issue, but the overall objective is red as there are too many amber targets.
- Influence over devolution
Strong conversations have been held by the chair and principal with three candidates; however, it is rumoured that there is now also a fourth. These conversations with candidates will continue.

The chair noted that conversations have been held before about practical maths being more attractive for learners, and the same could be true of English. The principal agreed that he is a strong advocate for subject-based English and maths. Two senior officers are visiting the college in March 2024, and the principal and vice principal: curriculum and quality intend to rewrite and take the maths paper and show their findings to evidence that it is possible to successfully contextualise maths.

The college is also running a pilot with the examining body, Eduqas. AQA was the examining body used previously, but grade boundaries were very high in 2022/23's exams compared to in the past. The Eduqas exam paper is also written in a more straightforward manner than AQA's. If the trial is successful, the college will look to implement the Eduqas paper across the board in 2024/25. One governor challenged whether this was a case of 'dumbing down' the exams, and it was indicated that the same standards are still in place due to Ofqual regulations – a lot of colleges have indicated that they are moving away from AQA. The vice principal further explained that examining bodies do not really matter in terms English and maths as they do in terms of vocational subjects.

One governor questioned whether there is any movement around this sort of thing. The response was that the argument is made frequently but the sector is often overtaken by policy and is there is not enough bravery or ambitious to raise the right arguments. It is acknowledged that it is the right thing for young people to attain GCSEs, but the issue is the abstraction of this. There is scope to contextualise the exams, and

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- Governors questioned the principal and head of HR as to whether there were any signs of disengagement by staff in terms of satisfaction, and they reported that there was nothing unduly to worry about. The Executive team needs to work hard to drive communication and engagement, particularly with staff at the other sites, but drop-ins have been well attended so far and the team does try to be visible on all college campuses.
- The next staff survey will go out in February 2024.
- Staff governors reported that it has been a busy year but a good one, and staff are reasonably content.
- Membership of the committee is a concern, but it has been approved to increase this, particularly as part of the drive to recruit new governors.

AGREED:

- to note the content of the summary report
- to note the content of the minutes of the meeting
- to approve that the committee increase its membership number to nine and seek to appoint another external governor to its ranks, whether this is an existing or new board member.

15 PRINCIPAL'S REPORT

The principal presented his detailed report as read, but key matters particularly highlighted within the meeting were:

- The Mansfield Levelling Up Partnership outcome is still awaited.
- A consultation has been launched by the government around maintaining minimum service levels in colleges. This is very difficult to respond to, but the principal is working through it.
- A consultation around the Advanced British Standard was launched on 14th December 2023. Again, the principal will respond.
- The principal has a new PA, Freya Stokoe, starting in January 2024.

AGREED: to note the content of the report.

16 GOVERNANCE

The clerk to the corporation presented her report, detailing three matters of business.

- 1) It is proposed that all committees should appoint vice-chairs, ensuring that there is always a natural succession plan and stand-in in case of absence. This will be picked up individually as committee meetings take place.
- 2) In relation to external governor numbers, the clerk indicated that, if no additional members are recruited, these will drop to thirteen as at the end of January 2024. It is proposed that the college seek to

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recruit up to three, and a minimum of two, additional external governors. The principal has applied to use Peridot free of charge to support with this recruitment exercise. If the application is unsuccessful, it is suggested that the college will possibly have to look to pay for this service. However, a former governor has expressed interest in re-joining the board and the clerk will commence this process in the new year. There is an external network of contacts so there is scope to approach a network of partners if needed whilst awaiting the DfE outcome. The application sets strict criteria which might mean some of the more local people are automatically excluded if wish to adhere to these.

- 3) The third matter of business was the appointment of a replacement Corporation Board chair to commence from 1st February 2024. Governors were asked to propose candidates for the vote. Neil McDonald proposed Kate Truscott, and this was seconded by Charles Heaton and Keith Spiers.

(Executive team members and Kate Truscott left the meeting.)

The clerk invited external governors to vote by show of hands on the appointment of Kate Truscott as chair of the Corporation Board from 1st February 2024. Governors were unanimously in favour of this appointment.

AGREED:

- to approve that all committees appoint vice-chairs
- to approve that the college seek to recruit up to three additional governors (and a minimum of two) using Peridot Partners
- to approve the appointment of Kate Truscott as chair of the Corporation Board from 1st February 2024.

17 **AOB**

Recognition was given in respect of this being Sean Lyons's last meeting as chair. He was thanked profusely for his service to the college and his support of the board and principal. In turn, he acknowledged the improvements seen within the college during his time as chair and the excellent leadership exhibited by the principal and the Executive team. There is a bursary for students in the chair's name, and he will be invited into the college to present this award, if time allows.

It was agreed that confidential items would be recorded on a separate basis.

18 **DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

This was confirmed as 8th February 2024 at 17:00.

Staff and student governors left the meeting at 19:00.

Signed: _____ *Kate Truscott* _____ Vice Chair

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Meeting closed at 19:15.



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