



Minutes of the Corporation Board meeting held on Thursday 8th February 2024 at 17:00

GOVERNORS

Kate Truscott, Chair

PRESENT:

Andrew Cropley, Principal and Chief Executive Officer
 David Ainsworth
 David Gillies
 Alison Griffiths
 Theresa Hodgkinson
 Neil McDonald
 Spencer Moore
 Ben Owen (until 18:55)
 Jane Peacock
 Edward Rawson
 Paul Wheeler
 Scott Smith, Staff Governor (Academic)
 Andrew Spencer, Staff Governor (Support)
 Amaya Waddingham, Student Governor
 Morgan Williams, Student Governor

ALSO IN

Louise Knott, Vice Principal: Communications, Engagement & Student Experience

ATTENDANCE:

Diane Booth, Vice Principal: Curriculum & Quality
 Jon Fearon, Finance Director
 Gavin Peake, Director: IT, Estates & Learning Resources
 Sian Geeson, Head of Human Resources
 Eloise Hopkinson, Clerk to the Corporation

		ACTION by whom	DATE by when
1	<u>WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</u> Apologies for absence were received from Keith Spiers.		
2	<u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</u> The chair reminded everyone present to declare any interests that they may have on matters to be discussed. Theresa Hodgkinson declared an interest in relation to item 13, as it is an Ashfield District Council project, and she also declared that one of the mayoral candidates is an Ashfield councillor.		

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anecdotal feedback has suggested that the measures put in place in terms of chasing have had a positive impact. Schools have also reported similar issues with attendance. Attendance to mock exams has been positive.

- 99The subjective measures report showed the position of the college in terms of devolution.

One governor raised a comment in relation to the college having failed to hit the target for industry placements last academic year. He indicated that this is important for the development of relationships with employers, and it is hoped that the monitoring in place will now mean that this target will be met or exceeded in 2023/24. The principal was asked whether he was comfortable that this will happen, and he indicated that, at the time of the meeting, he was not. He explained that there was still some work to do with particular departments, but the vice principal: curriculum and quality was working on this. The principal informed governors that he had recently been offered an opportunity for staff to go to the University of Nottingham for placements, which would be positive. Furthermore, the chair indicated that there was an issue in relation to some confusion around the recording of placements, which may have impacted the accuracy of the logged activity. The head of human resources had agreed at the recent Workforce Development Committee meeting to work on addressing this for future activity.

AGREED: to note the content of the report.

7 **ACCOUNTABILITY STATEMENT**

The principal presented his report, which also communicated the intention to label the college's accountability statement as a Community Pledge. He informed governors that it is now necessary for the duty to review to be included, but the college already included this in its own document when this was published previously.

He explained that governors were being asked to consider this for March's strategy day when the 2024/25 version will be discussed. For the strategy day, the principal proposed to invite the employer advisory panel chairs to join for the day, as well as the new leader of the Federation of Small Businesses for D2N2. The chair of the Standards Committee, who works for Lightcast, has also been invited to speak about labour market analysis. Assistant principals will attend for at least part of the day, so there will be external voices in the morning and then internal in the afternoon. The principal welcomed feedback from governors in relation to this plan. The agenda will be shared as soon as possible.

Clerk

14/03/24

One governor indicated that she would like to the current plans mapped out, particularly in terms of what is emerging and to know what skills gaps there are, in order to enable a steered conversation. Worklessness is also a big focus, and it is felt that it would be beneficial to have this

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on the agenda. In response to this, the principal informed governors that he has asked the director: IT, estates and learning resources to map out the plans as described, but there is so much happening at the moment that it is difficult to provide an up-to-date and accurate document. However, it will certainly be possible to provide the detail of what the facilities will deliver, and he hopes that some more certainty around deadlines and locations will definitely be in place by late March.

AGREED: to approve that the college's Accountability Statement be labelled as a Community Pledge again for 2024.

8 QUALITY AND STANDARDS

The Committee chair's report was taken as read and opened to any questions from governors. The chair noted how well the surveys are doing and gave thanks to the vice principal: communications, engagement and student experience and her teams. He recognised that it can be hard to get good response rates for these surveys, but the college has maintained a strong position and has improved in some areas. Governors agreed that it was important to see this feedback, which showed a good start to the academic year.

Talking heads

Governors viewed the video, and the key points taken from it were:

- The video showed the range of students within the college and made it clear that one size does not fit all when it comes to the delivery of maths.
- It was agreed to be a very positive thing that provision is made for these young people.
- It is interesting that half of those students interviewed preferred to have maths lessons in the morning and the other preferred the afternoon.
- The vice principal: curriculum and quality advised that she is working to stream lessons by grade for 2024/25, and this will also help with timetabling.
- The range of abilities seen creates significant challenge for teachers to teach a range of learners, some of whom came into the college with no GCSE grades and some of whom are aiming to achieve a grade 4.
- The finance director reminded governors that the college has already taken some of those learners with a lower ability and put them on Functional Skills, which has already changed the profile.
- The college has also introduced a Pearsons award. Students are assessed for this via an exemption board, but this course gives them a stepping stone where needed whilst still ensuring that students are challenged and stretched.
- The finance director reminded governors that, unlike within schools where lessons are scheduled by year group, teachers who teach maths and English need to be deployed across the

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whole day, so there will always be lessons at the start, middle and end of any given day.

- The principal indicated that 1,200 students sat the mock exams, which was basically the same number as would be seen in a large secondary school. The high majority of these students have already failed their English and/or maths GCSE(s) at least once, and it is necessary to bear in mind how challenging this is for teaching teams.

Quality Improvement Action Plan

The vice principal: curriculum and quality was asked whether she has anything to particularly highlight in terms of attendance and apprenticeships. She wished only to assure governors that both of these matters are being very closely monitored. The college has still hit some flags on the apprenticeships accountability framework, but the vice principal was ultimately able to present significant assurance. The college's Department for Education link has also been invited to attend a monitoring meeting. Governors were informed that it can take a while to improve a situation like this, but the college is working to do so. Staff have also been working with employers to improve apprentices' attendance. Other measures, such as pre-apprenticeship monitoring meetings, have also been put in place, and findings from these have indicated that some numbers are reducing.

In relation to attendance, the vice principal: curriculum and quality advised that an existing staff member was recently employed as a standards coach to work with those teams where attendance is lowest. Also, it was planned for English and maths staff to meet with vocational staff to explore how to work together to improve attendance.

The safeguarding and Prevent risk register was approved by the Standards Committee. The vice principal: communications, engagement and student experience attended a counterterrorism meeting last week and now has some slight changes to make to the document, but she assured governors that these are minor.

VP: CESE

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AGREED:

- to note the content of the summary report
- to note the content of the minutes of the meeting
- to note the content of the reports relating to attendance and apprenticeships and safeguarding and Prevent.

9

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The former committee chair presented her report as read, and governors were invited to raise questions and discussion in relation to any key points.

In relation to the job evaluation exercise, one governor questioned what assumptions are being made in terms of the wage bill and what

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allowances are being made. The head of human resources informed governors that she does not expect a large change or impact following the exercise. The main expectation is that some staff will possibly move to band 4. Feedback has previously been received in relation to the salary for some clerical roles now being the same as for cleaning roles. The intention is to introduce an additional 'part' pay band for developed clerical roles, and this will be linked to performance. Some of the other job roles on band 3, which would historically have been band 1 or 2 until those bands were removed, will not have this same opportunity. The intention is to try to retain staff by giving them something to aim for. The finance director indicated that this will cost around £100k over time, but he has tried to allow for this and has made a saving by not putting the band 3 salary above National Minimum Wage at this point.

The committee chair indicated that the job evaluation system was very out of date, and the college needs to bring it up to date and avoid legacy issues.

A challenge from one governor was that looking at differentials as described can cause drift, which then means that costs increase more than expected. He indicated that it is necessary to ensure this 'drift' does not happen and that wages are not increased all the way up the scale. The executive team were in agreement with this sentiment.

The principal informed governors that he has wanted to carry out a job evaluation exercise for some years now, and this was the first year in which the college had the contingency to enable this. The head of human resources added that the majority of jobs have been through an evaluation historically, and this new exercise is really just about any new jobs that have been put in place since the restructure of 2018/19. Therefore, only a small proportion of roles will be evaluated.

AGREED:

- to note the content of the summary report
- to note the content of the minutes of the meeting.

10 **EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION (EDI)**

The vice principal: communications, engagement and student experience and the head of human resources presented the documents for approval, highlighting the following key points:

Public Sector Equality Duty Report

- Data relating to students was discussed in detail and recommended for approval by the Standards Committee.
- The data has already been presented to governors in various reports throughout the year.
- The report for 2023/24 is the first to include data in relation to care experienced young people, as it was agreed by the board earlier in the year to recognise this as a protected characteristic.

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- There are still some gaps. These form key KPIs linked to the equality, diversity and inclusion action plan, which continues to be scrutinised by the Standards Committee.
- A case study in relation to a former supported intern has been added following feedback from a governor.
- The document reflects the work being done by the equality, diversity and inclusion steering group.
- One of the Rising Stars delegates is working to introduce a forum for staff with disabilities to get feedback and actions.
- Staff data is also in the report and was discussed and recommended for approval by the Workforce Development Committee.

One governor acknowledged the importance which the college is assigning to care leavers and advised that this has been referenced in the Care Leavers' Action Plan for Nottinghamshire, which indicates that this has progressed to be county-wide and not just local.

The case study was positively received, and governors asked that case studies are collected through the year on an ongoing basis so that these can be used as needed without causing additional work.

VP: CESE

Ongoing

In relation to the staff element of the report, the chair informed governors that the Workforce Development Committee discussed reasonable adjustments and neurodiversity at the most recent meeting, and these elements are going to be taken forward by the college, with training offered to managers.

Gender Pay Gap Report

- The pay gap has reduced, which is positive, and is expected to reduce further when the report is drafted again in 2025.
- The mean pay gap has reduced from just over 21% to just over 16%, and the median has reduced from just over 38% to just over 26%. This reflects the work that has been done to improve things for lower-paid staff.

The principal informed governors that the college's pay gap is worse than can be seen in some colleges, but this is because West Nottinghamshire College does not outsource its cleaners and catering staff, who are usually female. The college has supported and promoted a large number of female staff members and is constantly trying to do more, but it is difficult due to the inevitable skew of females to part-time roles. One governor questioned whether the fact that these staff are not outsourced will perhaps mean that they have better terms and conditions, and it is felt that their terms and conditions are certainly better than these staff members would receive in a catering or cleaning company, where they would receive only minimum leave entitlement and pension, etc. These staff members are also very much appreciated by the college, often publicly, as are all employees.

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Statement of Intent

The vice principal: communications, engagement and student experience presented this document and reminded governors that 2023/24 is the third year of a four-year cycle. This means that the next review of this document will possibly involve at more substantive changes. The only addition within this year's review was of care experience as a protected characteristic. Governors were asked to confirm that they were happy with this minor change.

AGREED:

- to approve the Public Sector Equality Duty Report to be published on the website
- to approve the Gender Pay Gap Report
- to approve the Statement of Intent.

11

FINANCE AND ESTATES

The committee chair's report was taken as read by the board.

Business Case A – Debenhams

The director: IT, estates and learning resources indicated that, due to strong demographic increase, the college has used all of its available space; however, a plateau is expected in 2027 or 2028. In the past, the college has coped with similar situations by decanting back-office staff to other sites on a temporary basis.

In respect of this, the proposal is for the college to use the former Debenhams store, located in the Four Seasons Shopping Centre in Mansfield. The college currently rents two shops in the centre, but this is a risk as the college might be asked to move out should those spaces be needed for retail. However, the former Debenhams store carries a large liability for the Four Seasons in terms of the rates cost paid, and it is felt by the centre's management that the store will be empty for some time. The space is very large, and it will be possible to bring together several plans into this building.

The business case presented by the director proposed developing additional classroom space within this facility as well as moving the Adult and Community team from the two shops and back-office staff from Derby Road into the first floor. This would remove the uncertainty around the length of the shop leases and would free up space at the Derby Road site. The current proposal is for the classrooms to be on the ground floor and for open plan staff space on the first floor, plus a business centre on the second floor. NTU has expressed some interest in the latter space.

The Four Seasons management has confirmed willingness to lease the entire space to WNC for three and a half years, and there will be time for the college to get it ready in time for September 2024.

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The lease cost would be £27,778 per year, which is lower than the servicing cost paid for the two units occupied by the college. The refurbishment costs have not yet been fully calculated, but the paper proposed the maximum spend of £350k. The director explained that, once board agreement has been obtained, he will be able to work on a more accurate projected cost.

Governors were further assured that this proposal would be more cost effective than occupying the Civic Centre for two years with another option then needed for the third year.

One governor questioned how these plans fit with the intentions for the Beales development and whether this has been looked at as an option. The principal informed governors that the college's current interest in Beales is modest, to include three classrooms and one office space. He advised that the benefit of this space will be its proximity to the Jobcentre and, the college will retain this regardless of what happens with the Debenhams store. He agreed that the original plans for the involvement in the Beales building were more ambitious than this but did not come to fruition.

One governor questioned why the lease on the store would only be for three years, and the principal explained that the landlord preferred to commit to that duration at this point, with a view to potentially extend at a later point if this becomes convenient for both parties.

Another governor questioned whether the college plans to use the restaurant in the former Debenhams facility, and it was confirmed that the catering facility is empty as most of the equipment has been sold, so the college does not intend to develop a catering facility there. Governors agreed that this is for the best as it is important to encourage footfall and usage of town centre outlets. Furthermore, this facility will not include 16-18 learners in it due to safeguarding issues likely.

Governors questioned whether there is any risk in terms of moving people, e.g. turnover of staff. The director advised that similar moves have been carried out in the past and, as long as staff are kept informed, he does not anticipate any problems. He is keeping a log of questions so that everyone can participate and be involved in the move.

The finance director indicated that car parking costs have been built into this as taking away access to free parking would be likely to result in complaints or people not being willing to move to other premises. Furthermore, unlike past moves, this will not involve moving back-office staff in isolation as they will actually be at a busy college site.

Business Case B – Wilko's

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The director: IT, estates and learning resources informed governors that there is an established 'Plan A' for Station Park and Oddicroft Lane, and he has been looking at lots of different options to do something different with motor vehicle. There are plans to build a mezzanine at Station Park, but this has run into problems in relation to parking – the college leases space from a local business, but students' cars often spill into local roads. The council and the college have been talking about different options to address this, and the intention is still to create 40 additional spaces on the Station Park site. However the amount of additional space needed in brickwork, joinery and plastering may still overwhelm parking, so the college has continued to look at other options.

The opportunity to purchase the former Wilko's store is very positive, and the director wished to bring this to the board at the earliest opportunity. Again, not all the detail was available at the time of the meeting, but the director was content that he will be able to fit those three departments into the building.

The store is very prominent and is ideally placed within Sutton-in-Ashfield town centre. The majority of the young people who will be placed within the building do not drive and will rely on bus travel, and the town centre has excellent bus links. The site also comes with space in which to store materials. The building is a large, open space, and lends itself well to delivering brickwork and other construction courses. The proposed design includes a small kitchen to provide meal options for bursary students, as well as snack foods. There will be substantial breakout and social space for students, as well as office spaces and classrooms. The college has engaged Avis and Young at risk to give a valuation of the site. There is an amount of interest in leasing the space, but the owners wish to sell the freehold as a preference.

The finance director confirmed that there is strong support from Ashfield District Council, but one proviso is that the college will need to utilise the shopfront as a display in order to let people know that there is something going on within the building and to make it feel like a living part of the town centre. This which will need to be worked out, but there is a lot of positivity.

The directors confirmed that there will be approximately 200 students and 40 staff members on this site each day.

Governors expressed substantial support for this proposal and agreed that the outside of the building could very easily be given the college's brand. It would bring a large number of people into the town centre, helping to reinvigorate it. There are some significant investments going into Sutton-in-Ashfield at the moment, and this store is a key site. The town centre is being repurposed, and the nearby car parking is being increased. Further improving the town centre's vibrancy is key. One

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governor indicated that this would also add to the college's identity within Ashfield, rather than it being predominantly thought of as Mansfield.

Management Accounts

The finance director indicated that performance is on target and he has no concerns. A major reforecast of the year's outturn will soon be carried out.

Subcontractor approvals

The finance director's recommendation was to significantly increase the contract for the subcontractor White Rose due to strong performance.

He further proposed to reduce two subcontractors' contracts due to under-delivery.

The chair commented that ATTFE has got off to a 'slow start' but no changes are proposed. The finance director advised that this subcontractor always tends to start off quite slowly and they do manage a number of funding streams. He and the principal are aware of this and have discussed it; he confirmed that there is comfort in respect of this approach, but he agreed that this will be monitored.

Reprographics contract

The director: IT, estates and learning resources informed governors that it was more efficient to have a five-year renewal rather than a shorter period, and this has pushed the cost into the limit of board approval.

The proposal was to keep the same provider based on quality of service. This was marginally more expensive than other providers, but it would avoid the IT team having to swap kit and the risk of time with no working printers. This company has provided the service to the college for the past 15 years, with good results.

AGREED:

- to note the content of the summary report
- to note the content of the minutes of the meeting
- to note the content of the December 2023 Management Accounts
- to approve the leasing of the former Debenhams store in the Four Seasons Shopping Centre, Mansfield
- to approve the purchase of the former Wilkinson's store in Sutton-in-Ashfield for a price no greater than £1.6m
- to approve the increase in contract allocation to White Rose
- to approve the contract reductions for Qualitrain and Chameleon
- to approve the Konica Minolta reprographics proposal for a five-year period.

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

- 1) Charles Heaton has indicated that he would like to rejoin the board, and it is proposed that, as he has only recently stepped back into a co-optee role, this is done by way of a vote (show of hands) rather than via the usual interview method. Governors were supportive of this proposal and the vote for reappointment of Charles Heaton to the Corporation Board of West Nottinghamshire College was unanimous. The clerk indicated that Charles would be asked to join another committee than Finance and Estates, as a new chair of that committee has now been appointed. Charles has already been informed of this and is content.
- 2) Governors were made aware that some learning company activity is planned for March or April, most likely after the Easter break. Governor engagement will be appreciated, and governors were asked to share their availability (if any) with Catherine Walker, executive PA.
- 3) Full minutes and curriculum feedback received following December's student panel was attached for governors' information. A summary report was delivered at the panel meeting earlier in the evening, and further updates will be provided as they are received.
- 4) The final matter for discussion, which was not noted on the agenda, was the necessity of moving the Corporation Board meeting, student panel and meal currently scheduled for 16th May. The preference is to move this to 9th May, but 2nd May is also offered as another alternative. Governors are asked to indicate to the clerk whether or not they are available on either or both of these dates so that quoracy can be ensured.

One governor made reference to the governor vacancies, and it was confirmed that work will be undertaken with Peridot to fill these and that a stringent recruitment process will be followed. A couple of candidates have also been identified via the college's own network, and governors were invited to put forward members of their own network whom they feel may be suitable.

In relation to the student panel notes and feedback, one governor asked for the headline context in relation to how the feedback which does not have highlighted updates has been taken back and acted upon. The principal asked that time be allocated before the next panel meeting for students to be given an update on the previous notes. It was agreed that it is necessary to be more explicit about how the dialogue has moved things on and driven improvements.

AGREED:

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