

**Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Corporation held on
Tuesday 5 April 2022 at 5:30pm via Teams Conferencing**

- Present:**
- John Barnett
 - Jill Colbert (left during item 71)
 - Pamela Dawson
 - Louise Doyle
 - CLlr Louise Farthing (left during item 67)
 - Taylor Finnigan, SU President
 - Julia Fox
 - Jeff Hope
 - Sue Houston
 - Lyndsey O'Leary
 - Susan Pollard, Staff Governor
 - Alison Shaw (Vice Chair)
 - Philip Smith
 - Jacqueline Steed
 - James Stuart (Chair)
 - Ellen Thinnesen, Chief Executive
- In Attendance:**
- Andy Grainger, Quality Teaching Learning and Assessment Manager (QTLA) (Observer) (left after item 75)
 - David Howells, Chief Operating Officer (left after item 75)
 - Nigel Harrett, Principal Northumberland College (left after item 75)
 - Toni Rhodes, Principal Sunderland College (left after item 75)
 - Vikkie Morton, Vice Principal Student Services and Registry (left after item 75)
 - Iain Nixon, Vice Principal Partnerships and Commercial (left after item 75)
 - Lee Lister, Vice Principal Curriculum (left after item 75)
 - Christine Stretesky, Head of Corporate Governance and Policy (left after item 75)
 - Donna Swan, Governance Officer/Minute Taker (left after item 75)

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Andy Grainger, QTLA Manager, who was attending as an observer.

Bd/21-22/59 Apologies and consent for absence and declarations of interest

There were apologies from Derek Cogle who, because of technical difficulties, was unable to participate in the meeting.

There were no declarations of interest.

Bd/21-22/60 Minutes of previous meeting held on 15 February 2022 and Matters Arising

The regular minutes were discussed and agreed to be an accurate record of the meeting held on 15 February 2022.

The remaining part of this item was determined to be confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Bd/21-22/61 Minutes of the special meeting held on 9 March 2022 and Matters Arising

This item was determined to be confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Strategy and Legal Duties

Bd/21-22/62 CEO Report

This item was determined to be confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Bd/21-22/63 Partnerships Plan Mid-Year Report

This item was determined to be confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Bd/21-22/64 Management Accounts

The Management Accounts for the three months ending 31 January 2022 were taken as read by the Board. The Chair of the Finance, Resources and Projects Committee reminded the Board that, as always, they should be mindful of the cash position and liquidity.

AGREED: to note the management accounts.

Bd/21-22/65 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report 2020/21

The Vice Principal, Student Services and Registry (VPCSSS) presented the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Annual Report for 2020/21 which shows the progress and achievements the College has made in discharging its public sector duties in this area. She recommended that the Board approve the 2020/21 EDI Annual Report for publication and endorse the EDI priority objectives for 2021 to 2024.

The Chair thanked the VPSSR and the SU President for the clarity of the report and the contribution of the foreword respectively. He also commented that it was good to see the inclusion of mental health issues within the report and the development of the Mental Health Champion Programme included as a priority objective. Governor Dawson also expressed her support for the focus on mental health and the clear links to safeguarding.

AGREED: to approve:

- the draft EDI Annual Report 2020/21 for publication, and
- the priority objectives for 2021 to 2024.

BD/21-22/66 Modern Slavery Act Statement

The Head of Corporate Governance and Policy presented the report highlighting:

- The annual statement is a requirement of The Modern Slavery Act 2015 which sets out the information that must be included within it.
- The statement has been reviewed and updated by the Procurement Manager for continued accuracy and has been confirmed by the Executive Leadership Team as representing current Group practice around the prevention of modern slavery.

AGREED: to approve the statement for signature by the Chief Executive on behalf of the Board and subsequent publication on the College's website.

Bd/21-22/67 Safeguarding Biannual Report

The VPSSR presented the Safeguarding Biannual Report highlighting the following issues:

- Completion of mandatory staff training on safeguarding and Prevent was at 91.8% and 71.9% respectively. Work is ongoing to reduce non-completion amongst permanent staff but the completion rate amongst agency staff remains low.
- Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) enhanced checks – a refresh at Northumberland is not yet complete with 27 staff outstanding.
- Increased reporting of safeguarding concerns by students throughout 2021/22 (521 more concerns than in 2020/21) in relation to:
 - Peer on peer abuse including bullying and sexual harassment – tackled via the Behaviour for Success Policy.
 - Mental health and wellbeing – bid to NHS Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) for funding of a 2-year project and working with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) to provide immediate mental health intervention to students.
 - E Safety – using the “Smoothwall” digital monitoring tool to monitor the increase in computer misuse/online safety concerns including review for access to extremist groups.

Governor Farthing left the meeting at this point.

The Board commended the detail included within the report and was supportive of the partnership working being undertaken with the NHS in relation to mental health issues and the focus on building resilience amongst students to enable them to succeed. Governor Dawson referred to the DBS refresh noting that it is always difficult to keep checks up to date but hopefully the new plan will have a good uptake. It was confirmed that Governors would also be required to update their DBS enhanced checks in due course.

A link between the increase in safeguarding concerns and the impact of the pandemic was made; with the VPSSR advising that, whilst year on year increases in safeguarding reporting is being seen, the pandemic affected the College's ability to intervene at an early stage to tackle the challenges of everyday life being experienced by students.

The Board requested clarification of the high numbers of reported mental health and wellbeing concerns coming out of the Kirkley Hall Campus; the VPSSR advised that the students at Kirkley Hall present with more needs in terms of behaviour, relationships, and overall mental health so there is work to do there. The nature of the curriculum at Kirkley Hall may also attract students with additional needs.

It was noted that the schools in Northumberland are reporting a phenomenal impact on children as young as Early Years due to COVID, and that these are the children that will ultimately work their way through the education system to the College. The VPSSR acknowledged this and explained that the College was responding to this need by seeking to recruit specialist staff, including mental health practitioners. Governor Colbert offered to share Sunderland City Council data which will emphasise the scale of the problem in terms of the increase in numbers of people presenting with Social Mental and Health Needs during 2020/21 and discussed the financial issues around supporting them. She also highlighted the issues around population change pursuant to the Resettlement Framework for Ukrainian refugees.

The Vice Chair commented on the sensitivity of Smoothwall and the likelihood that it will capture many more concerns so that sufficient staff will be needed to follow these up appropriately.

ACTION: The Board requested that, in the interests of completeness, safeguarding cases reported with regards to the residential provision at Kirkley Hall should be recorded within table 4.7, even if there are no actual cases recorded.

ACTION: the Board requested that a report on bullying be included within the agenda of the next meeting of the Northumberland Local Board.

AGREED: to note the report.

Student Experience

BD/21-22/68 Apprentices/Governor Lunch: Senior Leader Response

The Vice Principal Partnerships and Commercial (VPPC) presented the Senior Leader response to the three identified themes from the otherwise extremely positive meeting between Governors and Health and Social Care apprentices on 2 March 2022.

One of the themes related to “lone working”, which is the normal model for the delivery of domiciliary care, and Governors, whilst noting that the primary responsibility for the health and safety of apprentices resides with their employers, were delighted to receive assurance that the College undertakes a range of checks, prior to enrolment and throughout the apprenticeship, to ensure that apprentices are safe at work. Further to the feedback received at the meeting, the VPPC advised that plans were now in place to strengthen and enhance the process further.

The Board then turned to considering the position of apprentices working either entirely from home or to a hybrid model of home/employers’ premises. In these situations, what would be the College’s responsibilities and how would these be navigated with the employer? The VPPC advised that “working from home” is unlikely to diminish as a model and ensuring that apprentices can work from home safely and with access to sufficient support will become increasingly important.

ACTION: the VPPC to provide a report on the implications of working from home for apprentices.

AGREED: to note the report.

Governance

Bd/21-22/69 English and Maths Monitoring and Scrutiny Committee: Adoption of Terms of Reference

The Chief Executive presented the draft terms of reference for the establishment of a time limited task and finish group to support improvement in English and maths as requested by the Board (minute 48 refers). She commented that the new Committee would work in much the same way as the Northumberland College Education Quality and Innovation Committee (NCEQI) had; this committee had been lauded by the FE Commissioner's team during the Diagnostic Assessment for its "agility" in tackling quality issues at Northumberland post-merger. It had also been noted that, in addition to the NCEQI fulfilling its primary purpose with respect to improving quality, it had also had an impact in the development of junior managers/practitioners (section 5.2.5 refers to this benefit.)

The Chair referred to section 7 and asked whether this general statement of the College's intent with regards to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) should be refined to be more specific around those groups of students whose levels of attainment have been disproportionately impacted. After a short discussion, it was agreed that the drafting of section 7 was an accurate reflection of the work that would be undertaken as fundamental to the job.

AGREED: to approve the establishment of a time limited task and finish group, to be known as the English and Maths Monitoring and Scrutiny Committee and adopt the draft terms of reference as appended to the report.

Bd/21-22/70 Acknowledgements and Recommendations from Committees

The Board acknowledged the following decisions made via email:

- Group Security Contract and
- Gender Pay Gap Report.

The Board approved the following recommendation of the Finance, Resources and Projects Committee:

- To adopt the Fees and Refunds Policy.

Bd/21-22/71 Chairs' Updates

Governor Barnett confirmed that, whilst he did not need to raise any specific issues from the last meeting of the Sunderland Local Governing Board (SLGB), he would like to comment on the following:

- He praised the way in which the Toni Rhodes, appointed as Principal of Sunderland and Hartlepool Sixth Form Colleges at the beginning of this academic year, has settled seamlessly into the role and thanked her for the excellent contribution she has made to the work of the Sunderland Local Board.
- He referred to the Student Experience reporting at the last meeting of the Sunderland Local Board on 8 March 2022 which had been good.
- He thanked the members of staff responsible for the Governors' tour of the Immersive Digital Hub at the Bede Campus. This had been interesting and informative. The Chair added that it was intended that all Governors would have the opportunity to experience the Immersive Digital Hub in due course.

Governor Hope updated the Board on the work of the Northumberland Local Governing Board (NLGB). He highlighted the following presentations from the last meeting of the Northumberland Local Board on 10 March 2022:

- Agriculture and Agricultural Engineering Strategy (and associated funding bids to support the delivery of T Levels at Kirkley Hall Campus)
- Northumberland College Strategic Communications Plan – now being implemented.

Since the meeting, Governor Hope advised that the Chief Executive has attended a meeting of the Ashington Town Board in support of funding applications for resources for the Ashington College New Build; her attendance had been well received and helpful.

Governor Hope noted that the Principal of Northumberland College had also volunteered to serve on the Ashington Town Board and commented that it would be good for the College to be more involved in the local community. This also had formed part of a discussion that he had had with the representatives of British Volt. From this discussion, and others, it is apparent that there is beginning to be a positive change in Northumberland College's reputation and profile. The work that has been ongoing since the merger to "build the brand" is really beginning to change the perceptions of Northumberland College in the county.

The Chief Executive thanked Governor Hope for this feedback, stressing that the power of the Local Board had been helpful in place shaping and that Governor Hope had been a great partner in enabling the Executive to find a seat at the right tables. The progress made has been very much a team effort.

Governor Hope, in concluding his report, highlighted that the recruitment of a successor for Nigel Harrett, who is retiring as Principal at end of this academic year, will be a considerable challenge.

Governor Colbert left the meeting at this point.

Governor Fox updated the Board on the work of the Finance, Resources and Projects Committee (FRP) by highlighting:

- The Committee's tour of the Immersive Digital Hub,
- the Committee's scrutiny of the Management Accounts,
- The presentation from the Associate Principal, People and Resources of the new Staff Sickness management arrangements,
- the update as to the College's state of cyber safety and security, and
- The Committee's discussion of the risks associated with the HICSA project and how these will be mitigated via effective management of the estate.

Governors O'Leary delivered her report to the Board on the work of the Audit Committee by noting that this is a relatively quiet period for the Audit Committee. However, she highlighted the following items from the March meeting:

- The Internal Audit Progress Report, which set out the status of each of the areas selected for audit during 2021/22, together with good reports following the audits of Student Experience and Recruitment and Enrolment: Apprentices.
- Monitoring of the risks around Workforce and Market Share.

AGREED: to note the reports.

Bd/21-22/72 Any Other Business

An item of confidential business was raised; this item was deferred to the end of the agenda to be considered in the absence of the staff attendees and guest with minutes maintained separately.

There was no other business raised.

Bd/21-22/73 Date, time and venue of next meeting

- Tuesday 28 June 2022 at 6:00pm in the STEM Centre, Ashington Campus

Informational Items

Bd/21-22/74 Draft Minutes of the following Committees

The Board acknowledged receipt of the draft minutes of the following committees:

- Governance Committee (7 February 2022)
- Sunderland Local Governing Board (8 March 2022)
- Northumberland Local Governing Board (10 March 2022)

Bd/21-22/75 Papers from Committees

The Board acknowledged receipt of the following reports:

- Student Feedback Report – Local Boards
- Student Positive Behaviour Report – Local Boards
- Revised Budget– FRP
- Staff Sickness Presentation – FRP
- Procurement Waiver Annual Report – FRP and Audit
- Internal Audit Report: Student Experience - Audit
- Internal Audit Report: Recruitment and Enrolment - Audit
- Internal Audit Report: Apprentices - Audit

There being no further business the meeting closed at 7:25pm.