

CORPORATION BOARD



Minutes of a meeting held on Thursday 17 October 2019 at Abingdon Campus at 5.45pm

Present

Di Batchelor, Principal
Fay Croft
Howard Dodd
Vicky Field
Roger File
Nick Handy
Ali Kennedy

Gavin Maitland-Smith, Chair
Adam Mumford
Eduardo Pereira (to the end of item 10)
Tony Petruso
John Revis
Stephen Vickers
Sean Wellington

In attendance

Jacqui Canton, Deputy Principal
Mark Lay, Finance Director
Jenny Craig, Vice Principal,
Curriculum & Quality
Ruth Reavley, Clerk
Jordan Whitefoot (item 4),
Marketing & Communications
Officer

Governor questions are represented with bullet points, and management responses are italicized.

1. Opening comments, apologies for absence and new declarations of interest

Apologies had been accepted from Nicolas Pagès. Eduardo Pereira was welcomed as a student governor; a second student governor, Kian Gregory, was appointed with effect from the December meeting. Mark Johnstone had resigned, owing to pressures of business and family life. The Chair acknowledged his enthusiastic and insightful contribution to the work of the Board and noted his intention to remain a “good friend” of the College. Darren O’Connor, co-opted Audit committee member, had indicated his intention to resign at the end of December 2019. The Chair acknowledged his valuable contribution over many years to the Audit Committee.

The Nominations Committee would initiate an external governor recruitment campaign.

The Chair invited members to consider participating in an “Immersion” meeting on High Level Learning at the College after half term. A further “Immersion”, into student experience outside the classroom, is proposed for Spring term. The activity had been renamed from “Deep Dive”, as that term is now in use for a particular Ofsted activity during inspections. The Working Group on the College Self Assessment Report is scheduled for Friday 15 November. Six governors planned to participate; others were welcome.

There were no new declarations of interest.

The Principal reported on the appointment of Jo Milsom as Assistant Principal, Student Engagement, with effect from January 2020. Jo Milsom is currently at the Buckingham College Group.

There was support for the Chair’s proposal that Governors do not join Senior Managers at the AoC Conference this year.

The Chair reported that the 2018/19 Student of the Year celebration at Blenheim Palace had been a fantastic evening, and real testimony to the work of the College and its students. There was some debate on whether an overall College “Student of the Year”, beyond the nominated Faculty level “Student of the Year” was any longer appropriate. A conclusion would be drawn in advance of the 2019/20 event.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2019

The Public and the Confidential minutes were approved subject to one typographical amendment to the Confidential minutes.

3. Written Resolutions, Matters arising and Action Points

The re-appointment of Gavin Maitland-Smith, Vicky Field and Sean Wellington by written resolution was noted. The use of written resolution to disapply the election process for student governors in October 2019 was noted. Other uses of written resolution, and progress on actions arising from the previous meeting, as set out in the paper, were noted.

4. Presentation: Marketing

Jordan Whitefoot, Marketing & Communications Officer, joined the meeting. The Deputy Principal demonstrated the design and features of the new website, which was not yet finalised. Key features included:

- Dynamic re-sizing, responding to research indicating users typically first accessed the college website by mobile;
- A simple, bold home page;
- Segmentation of the market by student type (full time, etc), followed through in colour coded sections;
- Tailored images, language, search function and news by segment
- One-click place-holder feature
- Priority to demonstrate how unlike a school the College is

Governors offered feedback:

- Could all the addresses of all three main campuses be given on the home page. Giving just Abingdon was understating the reach of the College. *That would be looked into.*
- Might a greater diversity of images of people be presented? *There were "sense-checks" yet to be completed, and diversity was to be included as a focus*
- Under GDPR, had all those depicted given their permission? *The model permission form was signed by all students, and a robust system was in place where permission was subsequently rescinded.*
- What was the expected shelf-life of the content management system? *The system in use, Craft, has been developed from Word Press, and a good shelf-life is anticipated.*
- Can google search find courses? *Yes. This was a very important feature and a step up from the current website.*
- Can "Chat" be added? *This would need to be researched. The Admissions Office currently respond to enquiries.*
Student Ambassadors are paid in some Higher Education Institutions to provide responses on the "Chat" facility.
- How is maintenance supported? *There are three in the team. Courses are generated from the student information system software programme EBS.*
- Can key messages, such as Snow Days, be loaded on the Home page? *Yes, they can.*

Jordan Whitefoot gave a presentation on Google Ads and Google Analytics. Effective use had been made of the software to further stimulate student recruitment. In one instance the return on investment had exceeded 5,000%.

- Is it possible to determine whether a student, in the absence of google leads, would have found the College by another means? *The College does track both paid-for and "organic" traffic.*

Other governor questions included interest in long-profile data on recruitment before and after the College used google ads, and whether it is use by competitor colleges that drives the college to use it. Investment in search engine optimisation should remove most of the need. The new website is much better in this regard.

Governors confirmed their support for the new website, noting the many improvements on the current one.

5. Principal's Report

Responding to the report, the Chair wished to pass on the Board's congratulations to all staff whose achievements had been noted.

The Principal outlined College preparation for Brexit. The Brexit readiness plan had identified that the College was not at high risk, for instance there were no Erasmus students, and few EU-national staff or students. Information continues to be gathered so that the College is well-prepared to run overseas trips in November.

Governors raised points on the Balanced Score Card

- Were HE numbers still slightly low? *The number included HNC students and is marginally low.*
- Is an explanation for low STEM student recruitment related to the competition between provision at the Abingdon Campus and provision at Culham? *That is a possible factor. In terms of apprenticeships, employers have recruited fewer this year. Other training providers are also experiencing an absolute reduction in numbers. The College will continue to reflect on the offer.*

Members agreed to vary the agenda order, to defer item 6 to later in the meeting.

7. Achievement Rates and Headline Performance Outcomes 2018-19

Members discussed the report.

- How was achievement calculated? *The proportion of starters who passed the course/qualification*
- The overall trends in English and maths both for functional skills and GCSE are good, with some areas for continued focus. *Improvements in 19+ rates are especially encouraging. This may reflect improved quality Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) ensuring students are on the right course.*
- What lay behind the poor retention on a small number of Apprenticeships? *The new Apprenticeship Standards have had an impact, notably in Accountancy. Students leave having achieved their AAT qualification, opting out of the end point assessment, thereby missing the Standard. Improved IAG for recruited students in 2019/20 makes the requirement clear.*

8. HE Self-Assessment Report and Quality Improvement Plan

The Vice Principal had prepared a summary presentation which would be posted on the Governor Portal but was not used, owing to time-pressure. The paper covered the detail. Governors noted that the HE SAR maps to Conditions of Registration set by the Office for Students (OfS). The Vice Principal would update governors on regulatory guidance as it was published.

- Why were there no judgements for Conditions B4, 5 and 6? *These were measures of participation*
- Does the College have evidence to support its claim of participation? *Yes it does. Page 5 of the paper does not make this clear, but the participation is proven.*
- The report is good. Is the College planning for subject-level application of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)? *It is helpful that the College piloted subject-level TEF, with course teams deeply involved. Improvements were made at a granular level as a consequence.*
- What is an EIND quintile? *It is a statistical measure of deprivation in a defined geographical area. It is a basket of metrics, Q1 identifies the most deprived 20% of the population, and Q5 the least deprived.*