

Corporation Board Board meeting



Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 5 July 2022 at 5pm
Board Room, Abingdon campus

Board members:

Gavin Maitland-Smith (Chair)
Jacqui Canton (Principal)
Howard Dodd
Victoria Field
Nick Handy
Adam Mumford
Nicolas Pages
Kathryn Schutterlin
David Walker
Robert Weavers
Sean Wellington
Sam Wolfe
Alan Bark

In attendance:

Laura Grainger (Clerk)
Olivier Cognard (Vice Principal)
Jack Price (Vice Principal)
Mark Lay (Finance Director)
Joanne Milsom (Vice Principal)

Apologies:

Ali Kennedy
Edward Collett

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

1 – Opening comments

The Board expressed their thanks to Roger File and Faye Croft for everything they contributed to the college during their time as Governors.

1.1 - Apologies for absence, declarations of interest and AOB.

Apologies were received from Edward Collett and Ali Kennedy. No new declarations of interest were received, and no items added under AOB.

1.2 – Appointment of new Governor

The recruitment of new governors has been overseen by the NRG committee. Last week, the search committee (GMS, VF and JCa) interviewed Alan Bark (AB) on behalf of NRG. AB is the previous bank manager for Barclays and has the skills identified in the Governor role description and would be an asset to the College. The search committee, on behalf of the NRG committee, would recommend he is appointed as a Governor.

The Corporation Board unanimously approved Alan Bark to become an External Governor at Abingdon and Witney College. At 17.10 Alan Bark and Mark Lay joined the meeting. AB had no declarations of interest to make.

AB introduced himself to the Board, now retired he had worked for Barclays for 41 years where he had a portfolio of education clients. AB told the Board he was delighted to be here and looking forward to giving back to the community in the role of External Governor.

Jack Price (JP) also introduced himself to the Board as the new Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality and had worked in Further Education for about 30 years. JP had joined Abingdon and Witney College in August 2021 as a Head of Faculty before applying for this role.

All other attendees introduced themselves to AB and JP before the meeting continued.

1.3 – Election of the Vice-Chair

The two candidates for the position of Vice Chair (VF and AM) left the meeting for the discussion of this item.

GMS reminded the governors that the election had resulted in a tie. The Clerk had given advice (from the Standing Orders) on how to proceed in the event of a tied result. However, VF and AM had a proposal whereby they would both hold the position of Vice-

Chair and share the role and responsibilities. Both GMS and JCa agreed that they would be able to make a tremendous contribution to the Corporation if they were to share the role of Vice-Chair (although their terms of office would run slightly differently).

- If approved, could there be a 6-month review to ensure it is working effectively for all involved? *Yes, we could approve in principle subject to a 6-month review.*
- To what extent do you think their roles will overlap? *We need to work on the detail as it is undecided if it would be an arrangement like a job-share, or two separate roles.*
- I have seen this happen before in other education institutions. One thing that would need to be resolved is that all the governance documents would need to be reviewed e.g. if the VC gets a deciding vote on a matter, what happens if they disagree? *Yes, we would need to unpick this and give the Board an indication of what might be a concern and what responsibilities they might share. They have both indicated that they could retain their committee Chairs, so would need to approve who chairs the NRG.*
- Should we review the election process in the Standing Orders which refers to the drawing of lots? *We could do this but wonder if it's to limit someone having a casting vote which could become personal. Perhaps it could be a delegated decision to the NRG committee in the event of a tied vote.*

The Board unanimously approved both candidates, VF and AM, to accept the joint position of Vice-Chair. This would be subject to a 6-month review and a report to Governors on the practicalities.

VF and AM returned to the meeting and were informed of the above recommendations and approval in principle. GMS said the Board was delighted to have both VF and AM as Vice-Chair and thanked them for standing.

Action	By whom	Deadline
Set a meeting for a 6-month review of success of joint VC and subsequently sent a report to NRG	Clerk	asap
Report to Governors on the practicalities and implications of having two Vice-Chairs	Clerk	asap
Review the Standing Orders process for elections	Clerk	asap
Arrange for approval of which Governor chairs the NRG committee	Clerk	asap

2 – Minutes of previous meetings

Members approved the public minutes of the previous Board meeting held in March 2022 as accurate and appropriate for signature. Members noted that the minutes stated reserved business would be added to all committees, but it would in fact only be Board meetings. They also noted that the committee minutes had been sent to this Board ‘for approval’ when they are just ‘to note’.

3 – Matters arising, written resolutions and action points

The Board noted the paper and that there had been one written resolution (ESFA terms and conditions relating to the Buttercross building grant) since the previous Board meeting. LG gave an update on the review of the terms of reference (item 060).

4a – Strategic overview and update

4.1 – Principal’s update

JCa gave an overview of the Principal’s report which includes standard reportable items, an overview of current key issues, an update on the achievement of strategic objectives, along with other matters of interest.

Covid-19 had been the main item of this report for a long time, but this is no longer an operational challenge for the College. Cases are currently rising so we will monitor and report on this.

JCa directed Governors to the balanced scorecard in Appendix 1 and that progress towards KPI is largely positive, but our single largest challenge is staff retention and recruitment. This is having an impact on staff welfare, and we have over fifty vacancies at present. One of the things we can do is around pay (which we will discuss later in the meeting). As a nation, we are in the middle of the ‘great resignation’ and looking at ways we can fill vacancies. It has been hard and in areas you might not traditionally expect and incredibly difficult with facilities/estates roles and also administrators.

Main other item JCa highlighted from the report was the development of the strategic plan and the considerable amount of project work undertaken in the development stages. The report includes an updated organisation chart which shows the College Leadership Team structure and key structural movements. There is still a vacancy for Vice Principal Commercial and Adult Provision, which JCa is interviewing for on 6 July 2022.

- You quote David Hughes in the paper, and he says “I wanted to kick into touch the idea that this is a plot by DfE to take over more control of colleges ... I am 100% certain this is not the case”. But, in a separate paper it is their stated aim to take into the public sector – how does this compare? *It is quite unclear. On the one hand you have the government looking at centralised control, but they say that doesn’t mean they want to control colleges.*
- Can you circulate the new Governance Guide? There seemed to be a suggestion they would be measuring the performance of governors against their own personal background. What does this mean for the recruitment criteria for new Governors? *We will circulate this to all Governors and also put on the agenda for the next NRG. We will also ask Eversheds to review the code.*
- Does this mean that the governor might have a level of liability in their area? *This is unclear. But it might apply anyway under a negligence test.*
- Can you give an update on the recruitment of the Head of Health and safety? *As you know, John Revis retired at Easter. We appointed someone, however they retired after 8 days as the job wasn’t what they expected. We subsequently recruited Yvonne Mortimer, a highly experienced H&S manager.*
- Do we measure the number of RIDDORS against other colleges? I ask as I went past a building site, and it was advertising how many hours it had been Riddor free! *This is something we can pick up again. We have had six this year, but we went a long time without any. I haven’t seen anywhere that this is formally recorded.*
- Do we have an exit interview process and are we content that there are mechanisms picking up issues? *This process has recently been reviewed and now allows people to complete to exit interview after they have left the College. The biggest reason given is career change, which doesn’t give us enough detail. There has been some more work on the staff survey and also with Unions. A big concern is workload which could be related to the vacancies, and this has come out in the work with the staff and with Unions.*
- On the issue of low student recruitment (as per the scorecard), are we content that our marketing is as good as it could be? *We have had vacancies in marketing, but we are now fully staffed. Hopefully this is showing through in our media. It needs to move on, and Olivier has good data which can be used.*
- We used to have a ‘deep dive’ opportunity for the Board to look at a business area or big topic. We spent time looking at the area and working with CLT. Could we pencil in a deep dive for marketing? *When we look at what governance structure is needed to support the strategic plan, we could look if this is needed.*
- When did we last look at our branding? Will we revisit following strategic work? *We haven’t committed to look at the brand, but we have done some work on the values. This could be a future piece of work.*

The Board noted the paper.

Action	By whom	Deadline
Circulate governance code to all Governors	Clerk	Asap
Ask Eversheds to comment on the governance code	Clerk	Asap
Add governance guide to the next NRG committee agenda for discussion	Clerk	Next committee
Investigate a ‘deep dive’ into Marketing (and branding)	JCa	asap

5 – Curriculum, Quality and Students

5.1 – Curriculum, Quality and Students committee update

VF, Chair of the CQS committee, gave an update on work since the previous Board meeting. The committee had welcomed David Walker to the committee as a new member.

The committee had received a presentation from JP on the creative industries, and the key theme was getting closer to industry and adopting a commercial approach, by making the college responsive and seeking advice from industry and also getting students to understand that they need to make money with what they do. The presentation also set out that there were concerns on lack of careers advice for creative industries students, and the need for there to be a focus on this going forward.

The Committed noted that students continue to feel the impact of lockdowns and so they are getting additional revision sessions to support them with exam preparation skills and additional revision sessions.

The Committee heard that work experience placements can be a challenge in funding sufficient Industry Placements for Digital and Health T Level students. The T levels in Business and engineering will be launched in September 2022 and there is already a strong level of interest.

There was an issue with achievement rates for those students on Free School Meals, and this is being picked up through quality review process.

New developments this year have included the apprenticeships in Early Years and also Property Maintenance Operative which have both recruited in line with expectations. New for next year will be the apprenticeships in Level 4 accountancy, and level 2 Recruitment Resource.

In Higher Education, a number of external consultations are taking place regarding reform, with colleges expected to focus on level 4 and 5, with university taking on level 6. The HE quality improvement plan was presented, and the Committee noted that attendance has improved since the previous report from 88% up to 92.4%, and retention stayed at 97%.

Over one hundred teachers have now taken part in the Professional Development Cube process with an overall satisfaction rating of 86% from the attendees.

The Committee were informed that Ofsted have confirmed a full inspection of all colleges will take place between September 2022 and September 2025. Inspection teams will be larger and report on how well college meet needs, in line with the Government White Paper.

The Keeping Children Safe in Education was published on 27 May 2022 and, amongst other items, includes the recommendation that the College consider online checks during recruitment, and that all governors undertake safeguarding training during induction.

The College had been successful in achieving reaccreditation from the Carer's Federation in the Quality Standards for Young Carers.

The Committee heard that The Pathways students did well at Table Cricket and finished fourth nationally and had a brilliant day at Lords Taverners Table Cricket Competition. The hairdressing students had considerable success this year and once again and the Lee Stafford student of the year was from our college.

The Committee had a long discussion on the candidates for Student of the Year, which is being presented on 6 July 2022, and approved the winner, and also agreed a second and third place.

The Committee approved a number of policies for presentation to the Board.

The NRG committee said at the next meeting their focus will be on the SAR and recommended that a workshop for all governors should be held prior to this to ensure there is a greater understanding of this important process.

- Is anything happening with the Hairdressing and comments from industry that it's not current? *All hairdressers have their own styles and so it's not a concern, but we review on a regular basis. We have reviewed the contract and it does feel like there is a lot of input from the team which is positive.*

The Board noted the update.

Action	By whom	Deadline
Workshop on SAR for all governors to understand the self-assessment report	Clerk	October

5.2 – Student Voice report

JM introduced the Student Voice report and noted that, at the last Board meeting, Governors wanted to work closer with the Student Voice, and also increase involvement with the broader College Leadership Team in informal ways. The Governors had a conversation around needing more student input into the governing body and, as such, it would be good to hear from Student Voice.

The Board discussed needing a Sustainability Committee or a Working Group, so that more action takes place on the key issues, rather than just talking about them. It was noted that the Association of Colleges have produced a Roadmap and the College should look at this alongside the work the QAA have done on how to embed into the curriculum. The Working Group would need to work closely with estates (net zero aspirations), curriculum (education of sustainable development) and also students (carbon literacy) and should be a sub-committee of the Board. SW, NP, HD and RW all volunteered to be part of the Working Group and GMS suggested that a proposal would be brought to the next Board, including thoughts on how we integrate students into this.

- I don't quite understand the roles and goals of student voice and how it integrates with students. There hasn't been much interaction with myself from student voice so I would like a meeting. *Yes, great idea. I will arrange this and, so that you*

can have a discussion on how we can interact with the students better, we need to facilitate so Robert can have the relevant input and information.

The Board noted the paper.

Action	By whom	Deadline
Review Sustainability roadmap from the AoC	Tbc	tbc
Develop proposals for a sustainability working group	Clerk / GMS	Next board
Meeting with Student Voice to be arranged with Student Governor	JM	Before next board

6 – Finance & General Purposes

6.1 – Finance & General Purposes committee update

NH gave an update from the Committee. They had welcomed Yvonne Mortimer to her first meeting as the Health and Safety Manager.

The Committee received the HR report and noted that recruitment remains challenging. The results of the Wellbeing survey showed that 81% of staff felt the college has an inclusive working environment. The HR report had been written before the results were known, but Abingdon & Witney College had been awarded Employer of the Year.

The Committee reviewed the estates report and the work on the Abingdon Green construction centre is complete and has been handed over, albeit now going through internal fitout. T levels wave three will start in Witney on the 27 June and Abingdon on 4 July and by September 2022 students should be able to start using the facilities. The major capital pipeline projects were discussed including the Buttercross roof repairs.

The new H&S manager had presented the H&S report to the Committee and highlighted there had been no RIDDORs in this period. There has been an increased focus on the reporting of near misses and how to encourage the reporting of them.

In the Finance reports, the Committee reviewed the 2022 budget and likely outturn, and the 2023 budget (which follows on from the Governor's budget drop-in session), the ESFA funding (which is locked in), and the payroll roadmap (affordability of staff pay award).

The Committee went on to have a long discussion and debate about an alternative to LGPS scheme. The paper that was brought to the Committee was seeking approval to continuing to explore this option. Typically, an alternative to the LGPS would benefit lower paid, high churn staff. A majority of the committee agreed for the research to continue, and this will be reported back to the F&GP Committee.

The Committee received an FOI update and reviewed relevant policies which are now at this Board for approval.

The Board noted the verbal update.

6.2 – Management accounts to 30 April 2022

ML introduced the Management accounts and highlighted the College was on track with revised forecast. The ESFA health grade to 30 April is 'requires improvement', all bank covenants were met, and cash holdings at the end of the period were £2,224.

The Board approved the paper.

6.3 – 2022/23 high-level budget

ML introduced the high-level budget, which included information on the staff pay rise, and results in an operating surplus of 0.05%. For the benefit of new attendees to the Board, the process of budget review was explained and that this had already been reviewed by all governors at a budget drop-in session and subsequently by the F&GP committee.

Increase in income is predominantly through additional ESFA funding and Apprenticeships, and this covers increased costs in pay and non-pay. The output of this is that we breakeven, our EBITDA is still at 4.5%, we stay at 'requires improvement,' all bank covenants will be met, and cash goes down by £0.5m.

- The thing that struck me was the difference in the contributions between 21/22 and 22/23. For most it was positive variance, but for some it was sizeable negative variance. What is happening here? *It can be linked to recruitment. We*

have looked at this worked with Heads of Faculties to find a more efficient way of delivering it e.g. closing the Witney courses.

The Board approved the high-level budget for 2022/23.

As a standalone item from 1 August 2022, the Board approved the overall 6.3% pay award for staff built up of the following: 8% for lower paid staff (up to band 8); a minimum hourly rate for all staff (excluding L2 apprentices); a 5% increase for lecturing staff (with a minimum pay point of £30,000 pa); Curriculum Managers to be promoted to pay band 11; and a 3% increase for all higher paid staff.

6.4 – Draft ESFA financial return

ML introduced the paper which included the report the Board is required to provide ESFA with each year. The Financial Plan covers 3 years, from the latest for the current year (21/22), the budget next year (discussed above), and the following year.

The reports showed an efficiency figure of £100k, £50k benefit from pensions, average pay inflation of 3% next year, 2% inflation built in, high level of cash flow due to a major project at Common Leys to increase capacity.

The Board approved the paper.

6.5 – Capital projects update

The Board received an update from ML on the major capital projects pipeline and noted the paper.

7 – Audit

7.1 – Audit committee update

The Board received a verbal update from AM, Chair of the Audit Committee. The first point highlighted to the Board was that the College has asked the external auditors to prepare statutory accounts. The Audit committee interrogated the ‘self-management’ threat and received reassurance that this would be conducted by a separate business unit.

With regards to Internal Audit, one had been completed during the period on Financial Controls which had concluded there was ‘reasonable assurance’. With other internal audits, several of the outstanding actions have been cleared or the actions are in an improved position since the last period. There was also an anomaly at the committee meeting where TIAA had missed the internal audit strategy paper, and so this was circulated to governors outside the committee for approval.

The Board noted the verbal update.

Action	By whom	Deadline
Follow up on process for recruiting co-opted Audit Committee member	LG	Next committee

7.2 – High level risk register

ML presented the high-level risk register to the Board, which had already gone through the Audit Committee.

- On 4.3 it should say ‘reduction in funding’. *Yes – I will make this amendment.*
- Do we feel 5.1 (College is unable to recruit and retain the right staff) is sufficient given we have actually referenced the supply issue? And is there anything more specific we can add on staff retention, as this is quite general? *We have left this ‘red’ after the preventative controls to reflect this, and also the additional items to be implemented keeps it a high amber. We did discuss this a lot at SMT and highlighted that it was a challenge and a risk.*

The Board approved the high-level risk register, subject to the amendment.

Action	By whom	Deadline
Make amendments to 4.3 in the high-level risk register	ML	Immediate

7.3 – Internal Audit Strategy – next year

ML introduced the Internal Audit strategy for 2022-23 which builds in the work TIAA have completed over the last three years. This has been previously circulated to Audit Committee Members and is recommended to Board for approval.

- TIAA have now been with us 4 years; are they still providing good service? *Whilst we are looking at all contracts next year, TIAA are good value, and they look at key control areas and processes.*
- In terms of cyber essentials accreditation, does not currently having it impact business? *We are almost there with achieving this and, if the tills have been replaced in the canteen, we can complete the accreditation. The ESFA have changed the wording to say 'working towards' rather than 'have to have', so it is therefore not impacting our ability to pitch for business – but we can provide additional evidence to support this. The ESFA have changed the wording to say 'working towards' rather than 'must have', so it is therefore not impacting our ability to pitch for business – but we can provide additional evidence to support this.*

The Board approved the Internal Audit strategy for 2022-23.

8 – Nominations, Remuneration & Governance

8.1 – Nominations, Remuneration & Governance committee update

The Board received a verbal update from GMS on behalf of the NRG committee. The previous NRG Chair had come to the end of her term, so the Committee agreed to appoint a temporary Chair for their meeting and to wait until the election for Vice Chair had completed. GMS agreed to chair the committee in the interim.

The Committee heard of the recent Governance audit on 'committee structures' and that there may be a requirement to review the declaration of interest register.

The Committee had reports on Governor recruitment and that, even after this round of recruitment, there will still be an external governor vacancy. GMS asked all Governors to continue to talk to colleagues who may be interested in becoming a Governor. One of the earlier applicants had subsequently withdrawn their application but had enquired about becoming a co-opted member to the CQS committee, which needed to be discussed further.

The Committee had discussions on the role of 'Designated governor for safeguarding', a role previously carried out by Fay Croft, and VF had agreed to take over this role on an interim basis until we properly look at how this is dealt with going forwards. The Committee went on to look at the Link Governor policy and agreed that, before the next NRG meeting, it would be reviewed to see how it can be made more effective.

The Committee also looked at Committee self-assessments and agreed to postpone the review of the annual pay award for the principal pending the pay award to all staff.

The Board noted the verbal update.

9 – Policies for approval

GMS proposed that the policies, which had already been reviewed and updated through committees, were reviewed by exception. All Governors have had the policies in advance and GMS reminded Governors to engage with the material in advance of meetings.

9.1 – Risk management policy

The Board approved the policy.

9.2 – LGPS employer discretions policy

The Board approved the policy.

9.3 – Financial regulations

The Board approved the policy.

9.4 – Subcontracting fees and charging

The Board approved the policy.

Action	By whom	Deadline
Change the review and approval of the sub-contracting policy to Audit	Clerk	asap

9.5 – Health and safety policy

The Board approved the policy.

9.6 – Student financial support policy

The Board approved the policy.

9.7 – Safeguarding policy

The Board approved the policy.

9.8 – New SEND support policy

The Board approved the policy.

9.9 – Student Voice policy

This policy was not due at the Board for approval so was not discussed.

9.10 – Business continuity policy

The Board approved the policy.

10 – Chair approved committee minutes

10.1 – Strategy away day notes

The board noted the minutes.

10.2 - Nomination, Remuneration and Governance committee

The board noted the minutes.

Action	By whom	Deadline
Ensure all minutes from the last 2 years are on the website	LG	asap
Speak to marketing about the updated governor details	JCa	asap

4b – Strategic plan / direction

4.2 – Presentation on the strategic plan and direction

JCa presented this agenda item which would take Governors through what has happened so far with the strategic plan, and then the current thinking on way forward. The intention today is not to finalise the plan but to seek approval for the overall strategic direction and then share this with staff in September 2022.

JCa started the presentation by reminding Governors of the project plan including timeline, which was never intended to be a linear timeline, but an iterative process. Back in October 2022 the Board looked at the high-level vision before working through the three areas of research, curriculum planning, and underpinning strategy stages. In terms of the resource structure for the project plan, a lot of people have been involved (including external groups such as the LEP and JISC) but ultimately it will be the Board's job to approve the final strategy when it is ready.

JCa gave an overview of the activity which had already taking place which included the monthly Strategy Steeping Group, the curriculum oversight group (that had met 4 times), the curriculum teams (that met at least twice each), two governor strategy days (as well as time at board meeting, vector workshop and feedback on documents), the underpinning strategy groups (all met at least 3 times and presented to CLT), as well as consultation with staff and students. The process and activity has been time consuming but all involved thought it was useful and we have learnt a lot as a college.

JCa moved onto giving an overview of the research phase and highlighted the key findings and that the College has a lot of labour market intelligence through Vector. The research showed that the quality of what we do is good (and outstanding in a few areas) but should be better overall as an ambition. The majority of curriculum areas make a consistent financial contribution to the College (although a small number require further improvement or investigation). The research looked at lots of suggested areas of new provision, but there weren't any areas seen as quick wins in terms of diversification that could be moved in to. Financially, research shows us in a worsening position when compared to other colleges, but noted direct comparisons are difficult given the differences in colleges. We need to do some more work on this alongside looking for quantitative data which can help to assess the success of recent college mergers.

JCa gave an overview of the research onto mergers at other colleges. It had been hard to review the success of these as there is no quantitative data available. We have even seen some colleges are de-merging. Through the strategy development work, Governors didn't give a direction to seek out a merger (albeit conversations were had) but no local options were likely.

At this stage, Governors wanted to pause to ask questions before continuing with the presentation.

- Looking at the financial performance, could there be something linked to the fact that we have three sites and the higher cost of running these? *Yes, and we will look at this on a future slide. We don't subcontract out cleaning, for example, and so that increases our staffing costs when we compare with other colleges who outsource.*
- Reading the second bullet (where you say 'the quality of what we do is generally good') I agree with this. But having sat on the curriculum meetings there was a variety of quality and whilst, overall, we have nothing to be concerned about it is quite a varied picture which we don't get under the skin of at Board level. It's important that we understand there are some big inconsistencies in areas. *We don't have anything that is inadequate, although some that require improvement. We would want to move some others to the higher end of 'good'.*
- The word 'inconsistent' was used quite a lot. However, findings on quality are presented to internal audiences we use the words 'good overall' so we need to make sure we don't allow complacency. *Yes, no one wants to go back to their team and say we require improvement. So, we are good but if we stand still, we won't be. So we cannot be complacent.*
- Where do we set our target? Do we set it at good, good enough, outstanding (not in terms of an Ofsted rating but for our students)? Has that come to a decision? *It's something that is hard to talk about it. Why wouldn't you want to be outstanding? But you have to align this with – can you afford it? We have put together a financial plan which will give us the foundation to work towards being extraordinary. It's about impact not just grading. As we go through the slides, you will see we are being quite ambitious. We are also trying to move away from the Ofsted words being a target and instead move towards doing the right thing for our students.*
- From my own perspective, I found it staggering that we didn't have it written down that you wanted to be an outstanding college. However – I understand this more now. But it would be a clear benchmark that we can look at against nationally established benchmarks. If someone were coming in being critical of governor challenge – one could look at this (not having 'outstanding' as a target) and say it gives us somewhere to hide. *Yes, but as Governors we are here to look at everything as well as Ofsted. An additional challenge is that not all of our provision is covered by Ofsted.*

Starting the presentation again, JCa gave an overview of the key findings from the curriculum phase of the strategic plan development. Overall, we are a general Further Education college with specialisms in SEN, apprenticeship provision, and a large adult education provision. There had been no compelling case to restart A levels although the college remains open to the listed opportunities and new areas of work. The findings show that we want to do more of what we are already doing well but do it more efficiently: quality of provision was seen to be a priority. The college should investigate new methods of delivery such as blended learning.

- We heard in some of the presentations that a few curriculum areas worked in silos – has there been work on joining these up to be more efficient? *There's a piece about efficiency and also enrichment. Jack Price will be championing this.*
- Interesting that we don't see ourselves as having a specialism in Land, given one of our campuses is land? *We could put this in as we have a lot of resource in this and looking to invest more.*

JCa moved on to the College's Mission, Vision and Values. Starting with the updated mission statement, and the new strapline (Be you: be extraordinary). This focusses on two things which Abingdon and Witney College are good at: allowing students and staff to be different and achieve in their own way. It's not about academic excellence all the time but individual achievements. The Governors had further discussion about alternatives to the strapline, if it had been discussed with students, and if due diligence had been conducted on it.

JCa summarised the slide about the new Vision (to be a college where everyone achieves more than they believe possible) and said that the College achieving some of this already, but a lot of the vision is where we want to be. Under the vision there are three key focuses on students, staff and partners

- Will this vision go out with job adverts? *Elements of it will and we will tailor it depending on the audience. If this is us, this is what we are going to live and breathe.*
- Community isn't mentioned specifically in terms of community ownership. Could we change to community and partners in the third point? *Yes, we can add this in.*
- Is there something about collaborative advantage or mutual benefit? We want to benefit the community that we serve, but we also want them to benefit us, for example with placements. *We can think about this.*
- We are a community asset and that doesn't come across from this vision. It sounds like the community is an employer rather than the relationship with the community. *This is something we can think about as well.*

Moving on to Values, JCa presented the updated 'drivers' for everything the college does. The values use the ABWIT tag as the starting letters and the Governors had a discussion on if this should be used or removed. JM explained to Governors that a lot of

staff recognise ABWIT as it is a Twitter handle and also staff log-in; feedback from students was that the values sounded inspiring. However, Governors requested that a new representation of the Values was created, without highlighting ABWIT. The Governors also discussed that there were too many values to remember and that perhaps they should be condensed. Governors asked who the values were for as, for some of the values, they are an absolute minimum the community would expect from the college (e.g. trustworthy). It was agreed that SMT would do some more work on these and bring back to Governors for comment.

JCa presented a slide to the Governors on a SWOT analysis which covers strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, before moving on to the slide with the 5 proposed strategic objectives. These are similar to the ones the College already has as we do not want to signal a complete change in strategic direction, just a shift. There are detailed plans which sit under these strategic objectives.

- The 'environmentally sustainable' one says 'organisation', but could it be changed to something else so that it also applies to students etc as using 'organisation' sounds like staff? We could use community, society, or sustainable future. *Yes, I will try some different things and circulate.*
- Could we have something in here about 'best meets the current and future needs of our community'?
- In the first objective, I don't feel 'learner' is this the right word. Should it be student? *I will amend and recirculate with both options for Governors to see.*

Next, the Governors were presented with slides on initial findings on how we afford to deliver this vision and that the underpinning strategy phase was looking at this. It was clear we need to continue to invest in staff: pay is a challenge, but benefits are competitive. The condition of the estate is generally good, but we need capital expenditure if we want to deliver the 5-year curriculum plan at Common Leys and Abingdon. Ongoing investment in planned and preventative maintenance in the estate is required. IT infrastructure is sound, but systems improvement is required to generate efficiencies.

- What are the non-pay staff benefits? *There is a large list such as holiday, sick pay, work perks, car schemes, cycle schemes.*

JCa summaries the high-level financial performance and key financial assumptions on the next slides. Over the last 5 years the college has had an income growth of 13% against staff cost increase of 13% and non-pay cost increase of 23%. In terms of the question of can we afford our strategic plan, we are making some prudent assumptions here and also continuing with efficiency savings. We talked about bank loans, and this week the ESFA issued a document which goes through the capital grants available.

- It could be offset by a funding increase, but the financial row that worries me are the inflation assumption. Two percent for next financial year is low. If we are modelling this, then 8% inflation should be used. *We have tried to be prudent, but maybe not cautious enough with the inflation.*
- I would echo this. We have seen 23% increase in non-pay costs when nationally there has been low inflation. Now we have higher inflation, but you have left non-pay cost increases at 2%. I would assume much higher inflation rates in the next 3 years. *Remember that this isn't a budget. Let's see what it looks like, and we can work on this. Also, the income figures don't have inflation in them. They have growth but not inflation.*
- I take your point that this isn't a budget, but I would like you to take Howard's point on board. How do we most prudently model this? *We can have two versions with a higher level of inflation. But we still need to look at areas to make more efficient.*
- Should we have a 'plan b' for high inflation which isn't covered by funding from government. You say we should be able to match inflation with funding, but if we cannot, what do we do? What's the plan b, what scenario planning have we done? *Other Colleges would also be experiencing this at the same time if no government funding was available.*

On the summary slide, JCa presented the Governors with a reflection of what had happened. The college remains responsible and proactive and will continue to review new opportunities as they arise. This is a strategic direction rather than an operation plan.

- In terms of timing, where are we and when do you need a final steer? Perhaps a governor group would work better in terms of timing to finish the final points. *This is something we can confirm.*
- The scenario planning (worst case inflation rates) doesn't have to be done in line with finalising the strategic plan. Could F&GP committee do this? *This is something we can review with the committee.*
- The strategy talks about meeting the needs of the community, but what are these needs and how do they change over the life of the plan? *If we are a general FE college, then what we do year-to-year doesn't change: delivering education and skills to people who need it most. How we do this, will change; but the core of what we are doesn't change.*
- We have seen the growth in green skills over the years, what are you thinking over 5 years for this? Is this growth included within our existing resources and so can evolve to meet new needs? Does this need to be mentioned in the risks and assumptions? *We have included this in the 5-year plan and threaded through there. In terms of resourcing, it is not entirely covered, that's why we talk about investing in estates. But in what we've laid out here, we can meet that.*

JCa said that what was wanted today was approval of direction. If, as a Board, the direction can be supported we then need to think about governance arrangements to monitor this, for example the F&GP doing scenario planning. So the Board needs to say it is happy with the general direction as this isn't an operational plan. If happy, we then put controls in place afterwards.

The Governors acknowledged that a lot of work has been done on this and, whilst there is more work to be done, the direction of travel is good and Governors supported the strategic direction. The consultation and research carried out through the process gives clear conclusions and leads to this strategic direction. Some Governors reiterated their concern with the increasing inflation pressures and rising uncertainty and having enough comfort on being able to manage costs and income to make the strategic plan robust.

(At 20.43, SW left the Board meeting)

The Governors noted that they could approve the strategic direction but recognise that a specific piece of work is needed to look at the detail and re-examine the challenges. On that basis, all Governors were happy to approve the strategic direction. GMS noted to management that the level of debate is due to the custodian ownership Governors feel and we know the level of work has been immense.

The Board noted the presentation and approved the strategic direction, whilst requesting follow-up work on the detail.

Action	By whom	Deadline
Add 'land industries' to our list of specialisms	JCa	asap
Add 'community' to the third bullet in our vision about partners	JCa	asap
Review the Values and recirculate without the ABWIT being highlighted	JCa	asap
Amend strategic objectives on sustainability and 'learner experience'	JCa	asap
Create a second version of finances with a much higher inflation rate	ML	asap
Include item on resource for increasing green skills in 'assumption'	JCa	asap

11 – Any other Business

None raised.

12 – Future business and reflection

The Board reflected that the meeting was lengthy but useful.

13 - Date of next meeting

To be confirmed.

The meeting closed at 20.53

Approved for signature.....

Signature.....

Date.....