

Corporation Board Meeting

Wednesday 6 December 2023

West Herts College D114 – Watford

5.00pm – 7.00pm

MINUTES

Attendees:

Governors

Name	Role
Phil Thompson	Chair of Corporation
Gill Worgan	Principal & CEO
Zoubair Aouam	Student Governor
Phil Berry	External Governor
Irina Kendix (remote, left 18:15)	External Governor
Richard Lewis	External Governor
Shaun Merton	Staff Governor
Chris Nicholls	External Governor
Stuart Ord	External Governor
Paul Thompson	External Governor
David York	Staff Governor
Aisha Yusuf (arr. 17:10)	Student Governor

Other Attendees

Gary Dixon
Cath Gunn
Sarah Knowles
Eamonn McCarroll
Fiona Chalk
Anne-Marie Kinsella
Shachi Blakemore (remote, left 17:25)
Tammy Nuthall
Emma Doree
Apologies
Guy Ainsley
Laura Dawson
Jason Smith

Role

Deputy Principal West Herts
Principal of Barnfield College
Deputy Principal
Director of Finance
External Board Reviewer
Clerk to Corporation
Buzzacott (External Auditor)
Deputy Principal
Director of Student Experience
Role:
External Governor
External Governor
External Governor

Ref Agenda Item

17/23 1. GENERAL BUSINESS

1.1. Apologies for absence and quoracy

Apologies were noted and accepted, and the meeting was quorate.

All reports had been circulated in advance of the meeting for the Board's consideration

1.2. Declaration of pecuniary interests

There were no additional declarations to declare

1.3. Requests for urgent business

There were no requests for urgent business, but it was agreed to take agenda item 5 after agenda item 2 to allow the external auditor to leave the meeting.

18/23 2. PREVIOUS MEETING

2.1. Approve Minutes of previous meeting (08 November 2023)

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a true and accurate record and approved for electronic signature.

2.2. Audit Committee – 22 November 2023

The minutes of the Audit Committee meeting were noted.

2.2.1. Audit Committee Terms of Reference

DECISION: The Terms of Reference for the Audit Committee were approved on the recommendation of the Audit Committee.

2.2.2. Risk Register Policy

DECISION: The Risk Register Policy was approved on the recommendation of the Audit Committee.

2.2.3 Approval of appointment of Scrutton Bland as Internal Auditors for 2024-25 (on recommendation)

DECISION: The appointment of Scrutton Bland for 2024-25 was approved by the Corporation.

2.3. Action from previous Corporation meeting

Ref	Summary of Actions	Status
9/23/1.1	Statistics on retention of staff across different subject areas to be included in the HR Report.	Completed
11/23/3	Amend wording of KPI on Behaviour and review the need to identify specific group.	Completed

2.4. Matters Arising not on the agenda

There were no matters arising not on the agenda.

19/23 3. PRINCIPAL'S REPORT

The College is performing well against its targets. The Board noted the high student retention rates and the increase in enrolments which are well above target. It was noted that effective management of any additional income from increased enrolments is essential to ensure the College is prepared to meet any changes in further education going forward. The number of students retaking GCSE English and Maths qualifications has doubled this year and the College is being proactive in providing support and developing initiatives to meet the needs of these students. The Principal outlined in detail the actions in place.

The Board congratulated the College on its recent award for the Quality Standard in Careers and noted the significant work that was undertaken to achieve the national Standard.

The College's partnership with the Hertfordshire Police Safer Neighbourhood Team to deliver a knife arch operation at the Watford campus was noted. The operation was extended beyond the knife arch with uniformed and plain clothes police officers positioned outside the college and surrounding areas to identify students who appeared to deliberately avoid passing through the knife arch operation. The local police also welcomed the opportunity to engage with young people at the College, and feedback from students was positive saying it made them feel safe.

The report included details on student behaviour and exclusions, a robust moderation process is in place to ensure that decision-making is objective and reliable and low-level behaviour is being managed through early intervention which is helping students improve their behaviour.

The Board discussed the impact of losing the SEMLEP. The College had found the SEMLEP very supportive.

The report was noted.

20/23 4 RESPONSIBILITY & ACCOUNTABILITY

4.1 Health & Safety Policy & Report

The annual report included details of the Health and Safety activities that had been undertaken during the last academic year. The College's Internal Auditors undertook a review of Health and Safety arrangements in October 2023 and provided 'significant assurance' that the College has effective and compliant Health and Safety practices in place and is providing a safe working and learning environment. One low level recommendation and a best practice point was raised.

The impact of the pandemic was discussed, and it was noted that during lockdown periods staff were working from home and would continue working if they felt unwell. Sickness absence had decreased since last year and this was in part due to training for managers to manage absence; the introduction of a number of health and wellbeing initiatives and flexible working.

The College Health and Safety Policy details how the College meets its statutory duties and is approved by Corporation on an annual basis. There are no proposed changes.

The report and policy were noted.

DECISION: The Health and Safety Policy was approved by the Corporation

4.2 SEND Report

The annual report for students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) provided information about the work undertaken to support students with SEND in the College. The College has approximately 150-200 students on specialist provision and a further 350 students with high needs on mainstream courses. The vast majority of students with SEND achieve their potential and progress to positive next steps. Links with employers are strong and support the College

to provide a range of supported internships for students with aspirations to gain paid employment on completion of their studies. The College has strong relationships with key partners and attends a range of regional and national groups to influence national policy and its implementation at regional and local levels.

The Board thanked the College for such an informative report and asked if there were any concerns regarding the new National Improvement Plan. The College responded that the Plan had not been finalised, but the current proposals are welcomed and should improve consistency across the 13 local authorities the College currently works with.

The report was noted

4.3 Quality of Provision and Student Progress Report

The report provided an update on the progress of students aged 16-18. The quality of education is evaluated through several quality assurance activities, which are outlined in the report. The vast majority of 16-18 students are making expected levels of progress. Students who are not making expected levels of progress are receiving additional support and personalised support arrangements are in place.

A high proportion of full-time students have not achieved level 2 qualifications in English and Maths on leaving school. The Board asked about the actions taken to support these students and the College responded that this year students with low levels of prior achievement in the subjects are enrolled on Functional Skills qualifications. Students with prior achievement of grade 3 in GCSE qualifications will retake GCSE qualifications. The College found that students with lower prior attainment in English and Maths found multiple examination papers challenging and many fail to sit all papers. Functional Skills qualifications involve one examination only and can be arranged by the College on-demand. Those students with low or no attendance at English and Maths classes are being directed to Century, the College's online learning platform, to renew interest in the subjects through a more flexible and personalised mode of study. An external provider has also been engaged to provide specialist training to help students prepare for external examinations.

Students are undertaking work experience activities and industry placements; the college no longer receives funding from the DfE to support this work. Employers who are supporting these activities are being invited to join the College's Skillmaker Network. It is anticipated that over 200 employers supporting Barnfield College, and West Herts College will be invited to join the Skillmaker Network.

The Bravura Project also provides students with opportunities to work directly with employers to learn about specific industries and jobs, through a variety of activities including masterclasses, site visits, real-time project briefs, careers education, job assessment and selection processes.

In line with recommendations included in the new code of governance the College has commissioned an external quality reviewer to conduct an independent review of the College's quality of education. The findings of the first review will be presented at the next Corporation meeting.

It was noted that new teachers not yet meeting expectations are being fully supported to improve practice. The College have specifically focussed on areas where there are a high number of new teachers to carry out quality checks and appropriate actions such as coaching, assigning mentors and co delivering lessons are being implemented to ensure students are not negatively impacted.

Student awareness of the support available through the Bravura Project was discussed and the College said that a change had been made this year making the Bravura Project a choice as part of a student's occupational pathway, the College had also increased the number of staff working on the Bravura Project to ensure more students are engaged.

The report was noted.

4.4 Student Enrolment, Applications, and College Reach

The College received 9598 applications from young people aged 16-18 for courses this academic year. The College target for 16-18 enrolments is 6054, set by the Education Funding Agency (ESFA). Current enrolment numbers exceed the target by 294, and exceeds the number enrolled at the same point last year by 492.

The largest increase in numbers is across level 1 and level 2 qualifications and Barnfield College is reporting growth across level 3 qualifications. 117 applications were received for T-level qualifications and a very low number of young people have enrolled on the qualification, representing a conversion rate of less than 10%. Enrolments on the College's higher education courses is reporting a decline compared to last year of 34 and a number of programmes have been withdrawn. In response the questions from the Board, the College said that growth had been in all areas, including those on the skills agenda. Declining numbers in HE were noted, and it was hoped the higher technical qualifications (HTQ) would meet the needs of students when put in place. The College is currently working with the University of Hertfordshire on HTQ's.

The Director of Finance (DoF) outlined the financial impact linked to the increase in enrolments and the additional associated costs.

The decline in the number of ESOL learners was discussed and clarified. It was noted that these student numbers will always fluctuate depending on circumstances and the offer is always flexed according to need, the College works with local agencies to support the needs of young people with the need to develop English speaking skills.

The low uptake of T-Levels was noted. Students are currently choosing Btec qualifications over T-Levels.

IK left the meeting 6.15pm

The report was noted.

4.5 Finance Report

(confidential, part 2 - *please see separate minutes*)

21/23 5 REGULATORY COMPLIANCE - This agenda item was taken after item 2 and before item 3

5.1 Audit Committee – Annual Report

(confidential, part 2 - *please see separate minutes*)

5.2 Annual Report and Financial Statements 2022-23

(confidential, part 2 - *please see separate minutes*)

5.3 Post Audit Report 2022-23

(confidential, part 2 - *please see separate minutes*)

5.4 Corporate Risk Register

The report provided the Board with the annual full Risk Register which included a summary of High-Level Risks; a detailed Risk Register (appendix 1) and a specific Risk Register for BC Redevelopment Phase 2 (appendix 2).

These risk registers were reviewed in detail by the Audit Committee at its meeting in November 2023.

The report included a comparison for the risks reported to Corporation at its meeting in December 2022 and highlighted that no risks have been added to the High-Level Risk Register and one risk had been removed.

There were 83 risks in total, 6 risks are considered high level, which were detailed in the report.

The Board discussed the risk associated with T-Levels. There was no further update on the future purpose of the Watford UTC. The merger between Central Beds and Bedford College was discussed and it was noted that Barnfield has had significant growth and so no detrimental impact.

Learner achievement in English and Maths still represented a challenge. The College are using a number of initiatives as outlined in agenda item 4.3 to motivate and engage students by linking English and Maths to their chosen career paths.

The possibility of increasing hours was considered but this was found to have no impact in the past. The use of the Century Learning Platform was explained in more detail. Its usage is monitored, which has highlighted that these learners are regularly engaging with Century. Students using Century are able to return to lessons at any time.

The report was noted.

22/23 6 GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES & REVIEW

6.1 Chairs Action – There were no chairs actions to report.

6.2 Learning walks – The Chair reported back on a recent visit to Barnfield and the progress of the phase 2 build. He said the College had a positive and vibrant atmosphere.

6.3 Corporation Membership

The membership was noted.

The Chair of the Search & Governance Committee gave the Board an update on the recruitment of a new chair of governors and a finance governor.

Applicants selected for interviews would be agreed by the Search & Governance Committee and the interviews would be held on the 29/30/31 January. Board members were asked to email the clerk by the 15 December if they wished to be on the interview panels.

David York's (DY) term of office expires on the 7 December 2023.

A staff election has been organised and 2 nominations received. The ballot will take place between the 8-15 January 2024. DY has been nominated for re-election.
 The Chair thanked DY for his services to date.
 The Chair said he would be contacting all governors to arrange one to one meetings with them in January.

23/23 7 URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of urgent business.

24/23 8 DATE OF NEXT MEETING - Wed 14 February 2024, 5pm, Hemel Hempstead

Meeting closed: 18:36

Minutes approved by the Corporation on the 14 February 2024

Ref	Summary of Actions	when
	No actions were recorded.	

Ref	Summary of Decisions
18/23/2/2/1	The Terms of Reference for the Audit Committee were approved on the recommendation of the Audit Committee.
18/23/2.2.2	The Risk Register Policy was approved on the recommendation of the Audit Committee.
18/23/2.2.3	The appointment of Scrutton Bland for 2024-25 was approved by the Corporation.
20/23/4.1	The Health and Safety Policy was approved by the Corporation
21/23/5.2	The Corporation approved that the Chair of Governors and the Principal and Chief Executive could sign the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • West Herts College Annual Report and Financial Statements 2022-23. • West Herts College Regularity Self-Assessment Questionnaire 2022-23; and • West Herts College Letter of Representation 2022-23.