

**FURTHER EDUCATION CORPORATION MEETINGS 2020/21**

**MINUTES OF THE FURTHER EDUCATION CORPORATION MEETING**

**Held at 4pm on Monday 19 October 2020**

**Via Zoom**

**Part 1 Meeting**

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| **Members present:** | Stephen Barnes (Chair), Phil Wilkinson (Vice Chair), Amanda Melton (Principal), Mike Phelan, Nadeem Rashid, Jane Cleaver, Stephanie Bridgeman, Emma Schofield, Tom Gee, David Whatley, Lee Burton, Julie Turner, Rob Pheasey (from item 1.5 onwards), Liz Sedgley (from item 2.2) Usman Muhammad |
| **In attendance:** | David Rothwell (Deputy Principal – Finance and Resources)  Tracey Baron (Deputy Principal – Quality and Curriculum)  Andrew Dewhurst (Chief Information Officer – CIO)  Alison Rushton (Vice Principal – Adult Learning and Apprenticeships)  Andy Parkin (Assistant Principal – Lancashire Adult Learning)  Jon Horsfield (Estates Manager) for item 3.1  Matthew Hirst (Fusion Project Management) for item 3.1  Debbie Corcoran (Director of Governance) |

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| **Item 1.** | **1.1 Welcome and apologies for absence**  Stephen Barnes (Chair) welcomed everyone to the meeting, and introductions were made. Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Tim Webber MBE and Neil Hart. Usman Muhammad was warmly welcomed to his first meeting as a newly appointed Staff Governor, and members were updated that Liz Sedgley recently appointed as a Board member, would be joining the meeting later in the agenda.  The Chair took the opportunity to warmly congratulate Amanda Melton (Principal and CEO) on recently being awarded a CBE, with the Board valuing this external recognition of Amanda’s significant and ongoing commitment and contribution to the Group.  **1.2** **Declarations of Interest**  2 declarations of interest were noted. Stephen Barnes (Chair of the Corporation) is the Chair of the Nelson Town Board, and this interest was noted to be relevant to agenda item 3.1 on capital investment, due to potential connectivity between the Town Deal and the College’s estates strategy, and therefore he would be excluded from decision-making in the meeting if relevant. Stephanie Bridgeman had a conflict of interest against consideration of her re-appointment as a Board member, and would leave the meeting for this item.  Other than this, members and officers present declared they had no interests, personal, fiduciary, or otherwise in any item on the open agenda for the meeting.  **1.3** **Minutes of the Previous Meeting (21 September 2020)**  *Submitted: ‘Minutes of the Board of Corporation Meeting held on 21st September 2020’ (circulated in Board papers)*  The Minutes of the Board of Corporation Meeting held on the 21st September 2020 were reviewed and agreed as an accurate record, for the signature of the Chair.  **1.4 Matters Arising**  *Submitted: Report (circulated in meeting papers)*  The matters arising log was reviewed, and it was noted that all actions due by this point had been cleared.  Steph Bridgeman dialled out of the meeting.  The Director of Governance presented the paper supporting the Board to consider Steph Bridgeman’s re-appointment as a Board member due to her term of office ending shortly. Following due consideration, Board agreed her appointment for a further term of office, ending 19th October 2024.  Steph Bridgeman dialled back in, was updated on the Board’s decision and thanked for her ongoing commitment and support for the College Group.  **Resolved:** **to receive and note the updated Matters Arising log**  **Resolved: to approve an additional term of office for Steph Bridgeman as a Board member, ending 19th October 2024**  Rob Pheasey joined the meeting.  **1.5 Principals Report – including Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)**  *Submitted: Report (circulated in meeting papers)*  The Principal presented the report, welcoming questions and clarifications. Information and areas reviewed in the paper and the meeting included:   * Recognition of the significant and ongoing efforts of all staff and the senior team, to continue to deliver the best quality education and support for students during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic – with an update on cases of Covid-19 infection in staff and students * The schedule of proposed strategic discussion items for Board meetings was reviewed, and the focus of the forthcoming senior leadership team virtual planning day * An update on 16-18 and adult recruitment progress and strategy was given, including feedback from recent virtual open events which Board had dialled into - noting that the January Board meeting will have a strategic focus on adult recruitment and the strategy for Accrington and Rossendale College for Board review and input * An update on development of the FE White paper and planned launch of the report of the Commission for the College of the Future, and it was agreed that the Principal will share further details and an invite with Board * Plans to contribute to and celebrate Colleges Week, with Board members invited to amplify messages * Board welcomed the Group being shortlisted for the TES award for maths and English, and wished the team success and hoped for recognition of their exceptional results with learners   Board reviewed the content of the report. Discussions included the development of the online healthcare offer from Lancashire Adult Learning (LAL), and further opportunities to support the national agenda for digital skills so that people can access online outpatient services and GP appointments. Andy Parkin (Assistant Principal – Lancashire Adult Learning) explained the digital skills strategy in place to support local communities, partnership working with the NHS, plus the current and developing offer. Board considered this, and Emma Schofield shared East Lancashire NHS Trust perspective and challenges facing patients around digital skills. It was agreed that the Assistant Principal will link with Emma Schofield to further explore linkages, and any additional opportunities in relation to digital skills related to health.  Board welcomed the agenda planner and were assured that January’s strategic discussion on adult skills and Accrington and Rossendale gives the Corporation the space to shape the balance of the curriculum offer and ambitions for growth moving forward, particularly in relation to the Adult Education Budget (AEB) and Accrington. Board reflected that there must be a range of delivery projections developed and shared for the rest of 2020/21 and 2021/22 as part of this discussion, so that there is clarity and assurance on the impact and likelihood of risks around under delivery.  Board noted that the AoC have put back their view and consideration on recommended staff pay awards to the sector for 2019/20. The importance of accurate and timely information and rigorous forecasts to support the Group’s decision on pay awards was noted, as well as this also being critical in a broader sense to ensure any necessary action can be taken in a timely way in relation to key risks against the AEB and Adult Community Learning (ACL) budgets in particular. Given this, it was agreed that the Leadership Team will provide Board with an update between scheduled Board meetings, ahead of the December meeting, on spend and projected out-turn for the Adult Education Budget (AEB) including Adult Community Learning.  Board considered the update provided on the Apprenticeship Improvement Action Plan (AIAP) in the Principal’s report, which included sharing the updated AIAP as at 5 October 2020. Board noted the outcome of RSM’s independent review into internal controls in relation to the recording of Apprenticeship data. It was confirmed that RSM’s recommendations have been accepted and assurance given to the Board through the plan and in the meeting that they are being actioned at pace. Since the meeting of the Apprenticeship Improvement Task and Finish Group attended by Board members, the AIAP has continued to be driven forward, with the internal working group who are delivering actions meeting bi-weekly to ensure progress and impact. An update and assurance was given on the actions completed and those in train. Additional and continued assurance will be given in this area by the Quality and Standards Committee, who will monitor delivery of the Plan on Board’s behalf and escalate and update back to Board through their minutes and additionally as needed.  The Key Performance Indicator (KPIs) dashboard was reviewed, and attention was drawn to any areas RAG rated as amber or red. Board recognised the importance of the Principal’s Report systematically highlighting areas which are amber or red and detailing the actions in place to rectify performance, and mitigations. RAG ratings must be applied consistently, and explanation was given in the meeting against the RAG ratings for HE, Apprenticeships and recruitment of 16-18s.  The Principal was thanked for her thorough update, and continued work to draw out key areas of risk to support Board’s consideration and oversight.  **Resolved: To receive and note the Principal’s report** |
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| **Item 2.** | **STRATEGIC DISCUSSIONS** |
| **2.1** | **Strategic Discussion: IT Investment Strategy** |
| *Submitted: Report (circulated in meeting papers) and presentation*  Andrew Dewhurst (Chief Information Officer) introduced himself, explaining his background and roles to date. A presentation was shared on the proposed IT and network services strategy, with key information and discussions focused on:   * Guiding principles, including ensuring the best possible user experience, systems and software being secure and safe to use, providing solutions which are scalable and flexible, offering sophisticated solutions with simplicity, delivering service level agreements (SLAs) to internal teams and customers, and ensuring value for money and cost-effective solutions to achieve the Group’s value of being phenomenal * The approach to security at network level and for users was outlined – and a video shared on e-safety and acceptable use – as well as the standards for user experience and availability * Help, support and guidance from the network services team to staff was explained, and the approach to collaboration with internal teams to support customer satisfaction * The Group’s KPIs have been updated to reflect this priority area, with 2 KPIs included relating to network availability and core business systems availability   The CIO explained that the total investment in this area agreed with Board through the financial planning process is £800k in 2020/21, with investment in 2021/22 expected to be circa £500k. The importance of collaboration and learning from best practice in commercial sectors was discussed, with the CIO explaining collaboration with other providers plus through the North West network of College CIOs and Heads of IT. Assurance was given on the availability of laptops and essential equipment to students given the move to online learning due to Covid-19, and that the student support offering from the Group includes both equipment such as laptops plus broadband access. Tracey Baron (Deputy Principal) confirmed that attendance recording includes attendance of on-line learning, and that it is above 90%.  Board welcomed the item and investment in the new CIO post. While being assured of the direction of travel, they requested a more granular understanding of the strategy - up to 2023 ideally - to ensure there is assurance that the Group has the essential capacity to not only support staff but deliver world class quality learning to our students both on sites and online. It was agreed therefore that the CIO will share with the Board the updated IT and Network Services Strategy for the Group at the December Board meeting, including an explanation of key terms e.g. VLE etc  **Resolved: to receive and approve the IT investment strategy, subject to additional detail being shared at the December Board meeting** |
| **2.2** | **Strategic Discussion: Blended learning and on-line campus** |
| *Submitted: Report (circulated in meeting papers)*  Liz Sedgley joined the meeting.  Fionnuala Swann shared presentation slides in the meeting, drawing out and amplifying information in the report to support Board’s consideration.  Areas covered, explained and reviewed by the Board in this item included:   * Background – the move to emergency remote teaching (March to June 2020) and gathering of student feedback, and how this has shaped developments, September re-opening and the ongoing online offer and approach to blended learning * The model in place, which is blended learning, with two weeks face-to-face delivery of learning being followed by two weeks online. It was noted that there are exceptions to this, for example foundation learning students are all learning on site, as are learners on with some technical and skills-based courses, since online learning would not be effective in these areas * The purpose, tools and approach to using educational technology to enhance and deliver teaching and learning were set out * It was confirmed that student voice feedback on online learning gathered in the summer as part of QDP survey had been supplemented by additional focus groups. Positives fed back included that live remote lessons offer instant feedback, and are more motivating for some learners. Negatives reported included the challenge some students face in having an effective home working environment with no distractions * Training and development of teachers was outlined and reviewed, including for example, the introduction of e-learning champions who work with the central e-learning team and IT support, and lead training within their divisions * Challenges were outlined – including those around technology, accessibility and inclusion, the need for hybrid lessons when students or teachers are self-isolating, adapting to Teams - plus the necessary changes in safeguarding and managing access which Board were assured have been implemented and are effective   Board members had recently joined online lessons and shared the feedback on their experience and insight. Lessons had been high quality, with the teacher engaging well and responding and adapting to learner feedback in the lesson. Recognising how different online teaching is to face to face, Board members discussed that they hoped that such a rapid move to such different delivery is not impacting on teachers love of teaching. Discussion reassured that the Group’s approach is balancing the need to ensure that quality remains high while being compassionate and supportive of staff. Challenges fedback from teachers around online learning included difficulties in building rapport in lessons - given that teachers can’t sit with learners - as well as positives also, such as Usman Muhammad (Student Governor) sharing his view in the meeting that UCAS advice and support for learners was more efficient and effective now it was online.  Board discussed the latest position on whether examinations will be held face to face, and assessment methods change as a result. It was confirmed that the Government has yet to decide. Exams may be centre assessed, and in anticipation of this the Group now has 2 sets of mock exams for A levels and is considering ‘mini-mock exams’, and continuing to ensure the right support is in place for learners.  The Assistant Principal was thanked for the engaging presentation, and Board formally recognised and thanked teachers for their continued hard work, relenting commitment and ongoing resilience during Covid-19.  Usman Muhammad left the meeting.  **Resolved: to receive and note the strategic discussion on blended learning and on-line campus** |
| **3.1** | **Strategic Discussion: Estates and Capital Strategy** |
| *Submitted: Report and presentation (circulated in meeting papers)*  Jon Horsfield (Group’s Estates Manager) also joined as an observer.  David Rothwell (Deputy Principal) introduced Matthew Hirst (Fusion Project Management) who had joined the meeting. Matthew Hirst had worked with the Group in advance of merger on estates/capital approach being supported through the Restructuring Facility (RF), and continues to support in updating the Group’s forward strategy and investment priorities over the next 3-5 years, aligned to funding opportunities.  The Deputy Principal explained that this strategic discussion item was focused to support the Board to collectively consider key questions, priorities, risk appetite and timescales in helping shape the developing estates and capital strategy further. The intention is that a draft estates and capital strategy will be completed and approved by the Board around Easter 2021, with today offering further opportunity for Board input to drive this work.  It was noted that in terms of financing the estates strategy and wider capital programme, as per July Board meeting approvals, irrespective of possible additional capital funding, the College Group’s capital budget and planning provides for circa £4.5mn of investment over the two-year period to July 2022. This is reflective of the pre-merger investment planning and funding previously committed by the ESFA (Restructuring Fund) and grant support from the Lancashire LEP. Additionally, £1.27mn has been received by the Group from the national FE Capital Allocation (FECA) fund, which is part of the first £200mn allocated tranche of this new £1.5bn capital programme funding. The FECA frequently asked questions were shared with members.  Matthew Hirst’s presentation and supporting report recapped on the existing estates strategy framework and FE capital funding in place through both RF and the FECA. College specific plans and priorities shaping the strategy were explained, including the review of business needs and curriculum plans, an evaluation of the existing estate and appraisal of possible options and choices. Key issues by site were set out, and emerging capital investment proposals shared for the Boards consideration. The Deputy Principal’s presentation set out the capital programme planned and actual expenditure for 2018/19 through to 2021/22 (totalling £10.3mn) and solvency supporting this level of investment. Emergent priorities for remaining investment were proposed, including a developing work programme for FECA investment to support key remedial works. Capital funding possibilities were outlined, and their fit with strategic priorities considered – these include likely next stages in the DfE capital investment programme, Nelson Town Deal, LEP skills capital fund plus T-level capital and Institute for Technology.  Discussions included consideration of the affordability of future investment, recognising there is an investment reserve of £1mn that hasn’t been directly allocated. The approximate benchmark of usual College investment in capital and estates pre-merger was explained to be circa 2-3% of turnover, compared to post-merger levels of circa 8%. The expected cash surplus position for the Group at the end of 2020/21 was confirmed. Board was in agreement that future strategy and investment needed to consider matters such as future strategic approaches at the Accrington site, as well as high growth and priority sectors identified by Government, the LEP and through local intelligence and planning. The existing investment strategy agreed by Board has a focus on digital skills, and this was recognised as aligning well with Nelson Town Deal priorities.  Following consideration, the Board thanked the Deputy Principal and Matthew Hirst for the update and framework to support their considerations, and looked forward to the draft estates and investment strategy reflecting points made today when it returns to the Board for approval around Easter 2021.  **Resolved: to note the strategic discussion on estates and capital investment which will shape a new estates and capital strategy that will return for Board agreement around Easter 2021**  Matthew Hirst left the meeting. |
| **Item 4.** | **For Board approval** |
| **4.1 Health and Safety Annual Report**  *Submitted: Report (circulated in meeting papers*  David Rothwell (Deputy Principal) presented the Health and Safety annual report. The Deputy Principal explained that the annual report provides an update on the general approach to the management of Health and Safety during the period and provides assurance to the Board that the College Group is meeting its legal responsibilities and ensuring a safe working environment for learners, employees and others at the College.  It was noted that since March 2020, the health and safety agenda has been heavily focussed on the response to COVID-19. The Board has been regularly updated regarding the risks, position and progress relating to COVID-19 and pre-reopening was actively involved in the risk assessment process via the joint Governance and Leadership Working Group, and reports direct to Board.  Board reviewed the report, recognising that during 2020/21, Covid-19 continues to be the dominating issue and backdrop to all matters of health and safety. Assurance was given in the report and priorities for delivery, that as well as responding to Covid-19, important more day to day matters and considerations, particularly in high risk areas such as construction and engineering curriculum operations, continue to have careful management attention and oversight, as well as continued progression of a post-merger improvement agenda with regards to systems and processes.  Board members requested and received assurance that the Group complies with DSE assessment requirements in relation to home working. The Deputy Principal confirmed that advice and guidance is available to staff on home working, with a surgery and individualised response to any staff issues.  Following review and consideration, the Board approved the annual report.  **Resolved: to receive and approve the annual Health and Safety report**  Jon Horsfield left the meeting. |
| **4.2 Higher Education (HE) Complaints Policy**  *Submitted: Report (circulated in meeting papers)*  Following consideration, the Board approved the HE Complaints Policy.  **Resolved: to receive and approve the Higher Education (HE) Complaints Policy** |
| **Item 5.** | **Reports to receive and note:** |
| **5.1 Finance Report**  *Submitted: Report (circulated in meeting papers)*  David Rothwell (Deputy Principal) presented the report, elements of which had been reviewed in earlier discussions and items, including areas of risk related to 2020/21 performance.  The ESFA’s confirmed position on reconciliation of the AEB in 2019-20 was welcomed, and Group’s position against it noted. ESFA’s updated timetable for financial returns was considered, and aligns with the Board’s agenda planner. ESFA’s require an updated cash-flow from Colleges by the end November 2020 – which while it does not formally require Board sign-off, will capture information shared with the Board and endorsed future strategy and investment priorities. The Deputy Principal updated on ESFA’s planned review of the College financial health assessment framework, likely to be applied to consideration of the July 2021 financial plan/IFMC, and this will be closely monitored.  **Resolved: to receive and note the Finance Report** |
| **Item 6.** | **Any Other Business (AOB)** |
| There were no items of any other business. |
| **Item 7.** | **Review of meeting and reflections against the Group values**  Members considered today’s meeting, decisions and ways of working against the Group’s values. The Board reflected that these are unprecedented times, and the need to balance continued support and challenge while recognising the significant and sustained pressure staff are under. Leadership team were asked if there is anything the Board could do to better support both themselves and all staff, and all staff again thanked again for their hard work and resilience. Priority must be to look after our people, while continuing to work to meet our ambitions and generate the cash we need to continue to invest for the benefit of the communities we serve.  With this, the Chair thanked everyone for their contributions and the meeting was brought to a close. |

**Debbie Corcoran**

**Director of Governance**

**Signed as an accurate record:…………………………………………(Chair of Corporation)**

**Name:…………………………………………………………………………..Date:…………………**