



**Minutes of Corporation Meeting No. 123  
19<sup>th</sup> October 2020**

[Virtual Meeting held via Microsoft Teams]

Chair: K Finnigan

Members Present: I MacNaughton (Principal), M Atherton, I Vipond, R Wilson, J Owens, M Perrin, P Loveard, S Carmel, N Gerrard, C Goldsworthy, J Johnson, S Okpattah, D Morran, P Barker, J Leslie, A Beatty,

In Attendance: E Gibson, J Harker, S Williams, J Cadman, A Johnson, G Rayner, A Frost.

Clerk: T Johnson

*[The numbering of the minutes reflects the order of discussion]*

The Chair opened the meeting by thanking the Principal, senior managers and all staff at the College for continuing to operate the College during the difficult and complex times. The Chair, reiterated that the ongoing impact of the pandemic, the uncertainty of the situation and the longer-term impact of the pandemic on the College and its stakeholders, should not be underestimated.

**123.1 Apologies for Absence**

None – all members were present.

**123.2 Any other Business**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, and informed those present that he had not been made aware of any other urgent business. No other business, to be added to the agenda was requested.

**123.3 Chairs Action**

The Chair reported that during the period since the last meeting he had not taken any emergency action, on behalf of the Corporation.

**123.4 Declarations of Interest**

J. Owens declared an interest in item 123.11 Reappointment of community governors

**123.5 Confidential Items**

It was noted that the section of the Principal's report regarding future operational arrangements, should remain confidential until Government detail re local and possible national lockdown arrangements have been received and subsequent communication with College stakeholders has been completed.

**123.6 Minutes of Previous Meetings<sup>1</sup>**

123.6.1 The minutes of the following meetings were agreed as a true record.

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<sup>1</sup> Governors are reminded that following each meeting, action point summaries are shared via SharePoint

- Corporation meeting No.122 held 28.09.2020

#### 123.6.2 Matters Arising

There were no urgent matters arising, that had not been itemised on the agenda.

*18.20 pm R Wilson and J Leslie joined the meeting*

#### 123.7 Principal's Strategic Matters

Governors considered the report prepared by the Principal, including information detailing the impact of Coronavirus (Covid19) on staff, students, the wider College community and future operational proposals.

*In response to governor questions the following points were discussed:*

- 123.7.1 **Coronavirus Pandemic:** The Principal informed governors that as agreed at the last meeting, the operational arrangements to be instigated from late September, were communicated to staff, students and parents. Phase 1 arrangements are continuing but are being kept under review in the context of changing Government frameworks, formulated in response to the Covid pandemic.

Governors acknowledged that it was highly likely that the Government will announce in the coming weeks, that further localised restrictions or partial lockdowns for the majority of England will be imposed. Any announcements are not expected to have a bearing on the education sector, which will likely be expected to continue to operate under current arrangements. However, if it is announced that a temporary 'circuit breaker' arrangement is to be introduced there is the possibility that the Government will change its education sector requirements and in particular its expectations re the FE sector.

The College has had 7 unrelated positive cases of Covid-19 reported this term - well below national and local general population levels. As a result, 23 students and 1 member of staff have required to isolate. The relatively low numbers are predominately due to the rigorous, Covid-19 health and safety measures instigated by the College.

There is growing concern, regarding the length of time it is taking for students and staff to get a Covid-19 test and receive the test results when necessary. The Covid track and trace App is not designed for use in educational institutions and therefore, when a positive case is identified within the College community, the trace element is being passed on to the College. In this context, the high number of senior staff hours expended dealing with each confirmed case is concerning.<sup>2</sup>

Levels of staff absences since the start of term had been slightly higher than usual for this time of year. However, this is as expected and partly due to positive Covid cases but predominately relates to those involved in being tested who need to isolate or those who need to quarantine re symptoms or those in their household with symptoms [see also 123.7.3 - Resourcing].

- 123.7.2 **2021 Summer Examinations:** In September, the Government reiterated its commitment to holding summer 2021 exams and assessments 'as normal' - the Government made a commitment to provide the necessary detail later in the month. On October 5th the Sixth Form College Association (SFCA) met with Nick Gibb (Schools Minister) and subsequently communicated that the DfE/Ofqual are currently actively exploring a range of possible alternative options.

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<sup>2</sup> Each positive case takes an average of 16-20 senior staff hours to deal with.

On 7 October, the Scottish Government announced that in Scotland, the Summer 2021 Standard 5 (GCSE equivalent) exams, would not take place and teacher assessment grades would be used. Highers (AS equivalent) and Advanced Highers (A level equivalent) would continue to be assessed by exams. However, the Scottish exams would be 'dropped back' from May to June.

Governors recognised the considerable stress that the lack of clarity regarding the summer 2021 qualifications continues to cause for both staff and students (both in the College and for prospective students preparing for their GCSEs). Governors recognised that although it is unlikely that the Government will choose to replicate the 2020 CAGs process, it is possible that the summer 2021 assessments framework will include some form of teacher assessed grades. In the context of local restrictions/tiers of education and any future Covid restrictions, governors concurred with the College **perspective that** whatever framework is settled upon it must have built in measures to ensure consistency is afforded to all students across the country. It is **felt to be** unlikely that any definite frameworks will **now** be put in place **by the Government** until after the winter period.

### 123.7.3 **Resourcing:** Exceptional in-year growth funding.

The ESFA funding criteria for 'exceptional in-year growth' states the ESFA will 'identify 'exceptional growth' through analysing the current allocated student numbers against actual evidenced recruitment and the projected end-year position. Where institutions deliver exceptional in-year growth the ESFA may increase their funding allocation (notified to institutions February or March 2021). Growth funding will be based on a standard threshold determined by affordability, and growth is likely to be funded at a marginal rate.'<sup>3</sup> However, no clear detail regarding the eligibility criteria is published and the SFCA now believe that a restrictive criteria will be adopted (one of a number of measures to ensure that the overall 2020/21 16-18 educational budget will not be 'overspent') and therefore only those institutions demonstrating exceptionally high levels of 'in year 'exceptional in-year growth' perhaps of 7.5%+ and 100+ students in 2020/21 year, will receive the 'marginal rate' additional funding. Although the College still anticipates a high-level of 2020/21 growth of approximately 145-150 students, it is now felt to be unlikely that this would meet the ESFA criteria. This would mean that the College would not receive any additional funding to support the education of a large additional cohort of students, at a time when the Government has been asking all Post 16 providers to be flexible and accommodating regarding provision of opportunities to students and also in a context that Covid has added significant costs and resulted in significant loss of income. The College will be made aware of the ESFA's final decision re in-year growth funding in January 2021 and therefore reported at early 2021 meetings.

**Action: Principal/Clerk**

Lead Finance Governors informed the meeting that income/funding streams are being kept under review. Lead governors have regular, open dialogue with the Finance Manager with a view to monitoring and acting accordingly.

**Action: Finance Lead Governors**

The College is facing a significant budget deficit for the 2020/21 year, currently estimated at approx. £270k - £300K. This has been compounded by the following:

- potential lack of resourcing for exceptional in year growth
- potential removal of the teachers' pension grant funding for Sixth Form Colleges beyond March 2021
- rising levels of staff absence due to Covid, requiring extra costs for staff cover to be expended

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<sup>3</sup> [16-19 Funding Rates and Formula 2020-2021](#)

- loss of 70% of the usual catering income due to Covid
- other Covid related costs and losses of income

In all it is expected that approximately up to 25% of the College's overall cost reserves will be needed to finance the 2020/21 deficit. Finance Lead Governors advised that using reserves is

procedural the right action to take however, it should be acknowledged that this may reduce the overall ESFA financial health rating of the College (currently rated 'Good').

123.7.4 **Enrolments:** In the context of the significant in-year growth 2020-21, additional costs and losses (including those as a direct result of Covid) and the expected increase in the number of 16 year olds locally, governors questioned whether consideration should be given to restricting the number of student places to be offered for study commencing 2021-2022, as part of the 3-5 year strategic plan. In response, the Principal advised that the rise in student numbers 2020-2021 had largely been in line with local demographics and had therefore been as planned. The College did however, close down courses much earlier than in previous years and had this year accepted very few late applications in the autumn. At present, there is some uncertainty around the number of student applications that are likely to be received for study commencing September 2021.

In the context of not being able to hold open evenings in the autumn period, the College is providing prospective students with a significant number of opportunities to access online information about the College in general, specific courses, and additionality including via YouTube videos. Resources are being supplied to secondary schools for use with Year 11 students, in part, as a replacement for the usual 'in person' school visits, open evenings and other college promotional events which are unable to take place due to Covid.

Governors were informed that the College will also be taking care to ensure that year groups do not become unbalanced i.e. by not enrolling significantly larger or smaller numbers to the Year 1 2021 -2022 cohort.

123.7.5 **Staffing:** It was noted that in the relation to support staff, departments where due to the impact of Covid, it is identified that staff are temporarily underutilised, temporary deployments to other parts of the College have been made. Overall, staff have been very flexible. Governors asked the Principal to also look into the detail of the Government's job retention scheme and whether this option, should it be needed, is available to the College.

*Action: Principal*

In response to questions from the Chair, the Principal reported that the SMEX team continue to meet face to face, however this is undertaken in a Covid secure way in the large Lecture Theatre.

123.7.6 **October A level/Level 3 Examinations:** The 'one off' national programme of exams, offered to students following the cancellation of the summer 2020 examinations commenced on 05.10.2020. During the first week, the level of attendance of last years' students who had initially submitted an examination entry<sup>4</sup> had been a little higher than had been anticipated, at approximately 85%.

In response to governor questions regarding the safety measures put in place by the College to ensure this group of students do not pose a health and safety risk to staff and students currently studying/working at the College, the Principal explained that although the number of students sitting exams is relatively small extensive measures have been put in place. The Assistant Principal with responsibility for Health & Safety talked

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<sup>4</sup> by the early September deadline

governors through the measures including; entry and exit procedures, social distancing, muster points and PPE for invigilators.

- 123.7.7 **November GCSE Examinations:** The ‘one off’ national programme of GCSE examinations (offered to students following the cancellation of the summer 2020 examinations) will take place in November. GCSE Maths and English will take place at the College. Students wishing to sit GCSE examinations in other subjects will be required to do so at their secondary school, although the number of students is not large. This ‘withdrawal’ will have an impact on teaching & learning at the College as, although some of the students involved will be undertaking just 1 or 2 exams, a significant number are sitting 10-12 exams indicating that these students will miss significant amount of teaching at the College.
- 123.7.8 **Condition Improvement Grant:** The 75% 2019 Condition Improvement Fund Grant awarded in summer 2020 for the refurbishment of the Performance Studio roof, will commence with the erection of the scaffolding during the October Half Term. It is anticipated that the works will be completed by January.
- 123.7.9 The Chair led thanks to the Principal for his report and to all of the management team and college staff, for all they are doing to ensure the college continues to be operational in such difficult circumstances. The Principal indicated that although at present the scale of disruption isn’t overwhelming, staff are under huge pressures. Maintaining ventilation, during the winter months is also going to be very challenging.

## **123.8 Strategic Plan and Priorities**

### **123.8.1 Strategic Priorities - 2020/21**

Governors considered the 2020-21 Strategic Priorities, as approved at the last meeting.

The Assistant Principal (Curriculum and Quality Assurance) reported that the 2020-2021 Strategic Priorities had been populated with additional data, targets and other benchmarking measures, reflecting the relative improvement in the 2020 student outcomes.

An update on enrolment data for the current cohorts will be provided at the next meeting.

**Action: Principal**

In response to governor questions the following points were considered:

Many of the Strategic Priorities relate to Covid and the impact on Teaching & Learning and the delivery of the curriculum, whilst also retaining the thread of maintaining standards and aiming for improvements.

Governors were advised that while the College will always aim to be aspirational in the targets that are set, these currently must be viewed in the context that achievement may be significantly hindered by the known and unknown, short and long term impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the context, that the 2020 student outcomes were centre assessed grades (CAGs). Although the detail of the Government’s outline of the assessment framework for 2021 is still awaited, and assuming the Government will ensure fair and equitable outcomes for all students, it is not expected that there will be any significant grade inflation. Assuming the Government continues, to make changes to examination specifications, the College is confident that the 2020 and 2021 student outcomes will not show any significant disparity with the attainment of students in subsequent years.

Governors thanked the Assistant Principal for the updates.

## 123.8.2 Self-Assessment Review (SAR) Summary

Governors discussed the SAR Summary received at the last meeting. It was noted that college management had used the full range of evidence available in within the self-assessment to make the overall judgement of 'Outstanding'.

Lead Governors for Curriculum Offer and Educational Quality queried whether the self assessed judgment of Outstanding was a robust judgement. The query was raised in the context that the student academic outcomes for the 2020 cohort had been based on CAGs (Centre Assessed Grades)<sup>5</sup> and therefore, the improvements recorded in the vital areas of academic attainment and progress (value added), in comparison with previous years, may not be a completely reliable set of data on which to justify an Outstanding grading. In this context, Lead Governors suggested that a continuation of the theme that the College is 'Good' but with 'increasing outstanding features' might be a 'safer parameter to report' until a further years' data is held.

The Principal and Assistant Principal (Curriculum and Quality Assurance) reminded governors of the [Education] Inspection Framework, introduced for the period from 2019/20, and advised that academic achievement data is now a much smaller part of the Ofsted criteria than within the previous Common Inspection Framework (CIF). Although academic results are important and will be considered by Ofsted, there is now far more emphasis on a range of other areas including; welfare, wellbeing, safeguarding, behaviour and additionality, which are significant strengths of the College.

The Chair advised, that as with all self assessments the most important factor is that it is accurate against the criteria that it is assessed next to. Governors asked whether, if challenged, the College would be able to say with certainty that the 2020 student academic outcomes, were a result of the same scrutiny as previous years? In response, Governors were informed that over a three-year period, data shows that there has been consistent, overall improvement alongside consistent improvement within academic departments, whilst maintaining a series of other strengths including; excellent and outstanding pastoral provision for students alongside outstanding student engagement. In this context there is significant evidence to show that the College has moved beyond Good with Outstanding features. In addition, the Government has stated that there is no intention of producing January 2021 'League tables' or [holding colleges to account for data this year](#).

The Principal also counselled, that the wider criteria referred to under the [Education] Inspection Framework and also the resourcing context of the College, must to be born in mind. The Principal also provided governors with an overview of the resource context: the 52 Sixth Form Colleges are 15% less well-resourced than school and academy sixth forms. After council tax and VAT costs have been expended SFC student funding is circa £4K, which is also less than one third of that for an average day pupil in the independent sector (£12k). The Principal advised that the resourcing context was particularly relevant at the present time as for example; within the independent sector A Level class sizes are approx. 4 -6 students which is a significant advantage in any circumstances, but particularly now, when the College is having to split classes to make them Covid safe. It was noted that the impact of the required class splits and related impacts would also be relevant to the 2021/22 years results onwards.

The Lead Governors indicated that on the evidence presented they believe that the College is a very Good and emerging into Outstanding. One of the Lead governors asked

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<sup>5</sup> See also minute 122.9 Corporation meeting September 2020

the minutes to record that at the present time they could not endorse a College self-assessment of Outstanding.

In the context of Covid and the ongoing staff pressures, departmental self-assessment reviews (SARs), will be formulated as headline SARs, a review of last year's Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) and the departments 2020-2021 QIP. Departmental SARs will be made available to governors.

*Action: Principal*

The Cross-College SAR & QIP will be brought to the December meeting for final approval.

*Action: Principal*

The Chair thanked the Assistant Principal and all those involved with the production of the SAR and for the clarity of information presented.

### **123.9 Cross College Reports**

Freedom of Information: The freedom of information report for the 2019-2020 year was received and discussed. It was noted that the majority of requests received are from journalists or amenities and utilities suppliers. There were no matters arising

### **123.10 Finance & Premises Matters**

Financial Regulations: The Financial Regulations will be reviewed during the course of the academic year and subsequently brought to the Corporation for approval.

*Action: Principal*

### **123.11 Human Resources**

The HR Manager introduced the 2020 People Management Plan (Staffing Strategy). In response to governor queries the following points were discussed:

#### **123.11.1 Covid 19**

Prior to lockdown, relevant support staff were supplied with a College laptop and teaching staff took their computers home each day, to ensure that in the event of an immediate lockdown teaching, learning and professional support services would continue. Although staff worked remotely, a rota system was instigated to ensure, that in any event required on site support services could continue. Welfare and wellbeing support has continued to be offered to all staff.

#### **123.11.2 Recruitment & Retention**

The majority of recruitment for the 2020 - 2021 year was completed prior to lockdown. However, recruitment to several posts was suspended, including to that of Assistant Principal. When it was deemed to be safe on-site recruitment commenced (end of the summer term) and where appropriate virtual interviews were used.

The increase in student enrolments from September 2020, required the number of teaching staff posts to be increased.<sup>6</sup> At short notice, the College was able to successfully recruit teachers to relevant departments including Psychology, Law and Music Technology. The addition of new teachers, an increase in some staffs' part time hours (from September) and additional staff commencing work from January 2021 will mean that the College is fully staffed.

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<sup>6</sup> For the academic year 2020/21 the College appointed 7 teaching staff on permanent contracts and 5 teachers on temporary fixed term contracts

### 123.11.3 Staff Wellbeing and Engagement

The College continues to support employees through its family friendly policies, flexible working practices and supportive approach to staff wellbeing. The Lead Governor for Human Resources reported on staff wellbeing and the menu of support available to all staff at the College both through internal resources and the Employee Assistance Programme.

The HR Manager was thanked for producing the Staffing Management Plan.

### 123.11.4 Policies

Teaching Staff Performance Management: The relationship between pay and performance was discussed. The Assistant Principal (Teaching & Learning), explained that the CPD process is stringent and robust and includes for applicable staff, consideration of whether, a teacher has met the national teaching & learning standards, prior to confirming any pay award or incremental rise.

The **Teaching Staff Performance Management** policy, was unanimously **approved**.

The **Support Staff Pay and Conditions** policy was unanimously **approved**.

## 123.12 Curriculum Offer & Educational Quality

### 123.12.1 Quality of Teaching & Learning

The Assistant Principal (Teaching & Learning), introduced the Quality of Teaching & Learning report. The report included the 2019 - 2020 lesson observation summary and the report on the effectiveness of improvement measures. In response to governor questions, it was noted that last year and despite Covid complications and restrictions, all but 9 of the planned lesson observations were completed. This year, due to the ongoing impact of Covid-19, there will be a pared down process. The focus of 'stretch and challenge' will be continued, with the aim of ensuring improved progress for all students, irrespective of ability. Importantly, this will be supplemented with techniques to identify and fill any gaps in knowledge, understanding or skills, arising from student's undertaking remote learning March – July 2020 and to monitor the impact of supported self-study under 'blended learning' arrangements.

An extended student subject induction programme 'Getting A-level Study Ready' was delivered by all subjects to Year 12 students at the start of the year. The programme helped students make the transition between school and College and promote confidence to study following Covid lockdown, many months away from a formal study /educational setting and no summer examinations.

One of the Lead Governors for Curriculum Offer & Educational Quality, reported on Lead Governors' initial meeting of the 2020-2021 academic year. The Lead governor reported on the discussions held with Assistant Principals, including, consideration of key outcomes and 'the steady progress the College has made towards being outstanding'. Lead governors informed the meeting of the areas they will be considering moving forward.

The Assistant Principal (Teaching & Learning) drew attention to the Key Outcomes 2019 – 2020, and explained the elements of the report that provide reassurance that the College grading of Outstanding is justified.

123.12.2 Student Governors

Student governors commended the College for all that it is doing to provide education and support for students. Student governors explained that there is a reassurance to having the visible presence of the Principal around the College and at the beginning and end of the College day.

Student governors expressed the view that it is important that students are aware of whom they can contact if they are struggling mental health and/or work wise.

Students are concerned that 2.5 hours of face to face teaching time, per week may not be enough to support their studies and enable them to achieve the A Level grades they require for entry to University.

123.12.3 Student Attendance

The Principal reported that currently attendance and engagement for both the first and second year students is very high. Attendance and engagement are being monitored both in College and for remotely learning. It was agreed a report on attendance and engagement will be provided to governors.

**Action: Principal**

The Chair led thanks to the College Management for giving their time to attend the meeting and for their diligence and commitment to the College’s learners.

*8.10 pm At this point observers and all students left the meeting*

**123.13 Governance Matters**

123.1 Social Media

The Social Media report, received as a matter arising from the last meeting, was discussed. Governors suggested, in the context that the website is not only a tool for disseminating information but also a promotional tool, that some further consideration should be given to the attractiveness of the website and the user experience. The Principal explained the retirement of the website manager had provided an opportunity to consider some restructuring of the IT department. The Chair will be kept informed of the situation and a report on the restructuring brought to the Board, as applicable.

**Action: Principal**

A governor provided feedback following the recent SFCA re-opening webinars. It was noted that the 3 Principal’s presenting as part of the webinar, had all indicated that social media platforms had been an exceptionally important tool for maintaining communicating with students during and post lockdown. Having considered other College’s webpages, a governor suggested that a large number of Sixth Form and FE Colleges have live social media feeds. The College agreed to look into whether one-way social media platforms such as Twitter, could be introduced.

**Action: Principal**

*There being no other business the Chair closed the meeting at 20.20*

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Approved by the Corporation on ..... Minute No.....

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