



THE SIXTH FORM COLLEGE, COLCHESTER

**Minutes of Corporation Meeting No. 126  
25<sup>th</sup> January 2021**

[Virtual Meeting held via Microsoft Teams]

Chair: K Finnigan

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

In

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

Clerk: T Johnson

The Chair opened the meeting by thanking all the staff at the College, for their work during what continues to be an exceptionally challenging time.

The Chair reminded those present of the Teams protocol. <sup>1</sup>

**126.1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received and accepted from J Leslie, S Okpattah

The Chair informed the meeting that S. Carmel has resigned as a community governor, The Chair has exchanged communication with SC and expressed, on behalf of the Board thanks for his work during his tenure as a governor.

**126.2 Any Other Business**

No other business was requested.

**126.3 Chairs Action**

None

**126.4 Declarations of Interest**

None

**126.5 Confidential Items**

None.

**126.6 Minutes of Previous Meetings<sup>2</sup>**

126.6.1 The minutes of the Corporation meeting No.124 held on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2020 were agreed, as a true record.

126.6.2 The minutes of the focused briefing meeting No.125 held 5th January 2021 were received for approval at the next meeting

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<sup>1</sup> The College systems are being upgraded and therefore the Teams upgrade (permitting large gallery view option) will be available for the next meeting

<sup>2</sup> Governors are reminded that following each meeting, action point summaries are shared via SharePoint

- 126.6.3 The confidential minutes of the Corporation meeting No.124 held on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2020 will be presented for approval at the next meeting.

*Action: Chair/Vice Chair*

126.6.4 Matters Arising

Due to the impact of the Coronavirus on workload, it was agreed to defer the following matters;

- Comprehensive review - ILT and Estates /Accommodation Strategies
- Consideration of impact /accessibility of the website
- Annual review of the Strategic Plan

All other matters arising were identified on the agenda.

**126.7 Principal's Strategic Matters**

- 126.7.1 Governors considered the report prepared by the Principal, including detail regarding the ongoing impact of the Coronavirus (Covid19) pandemic, on teaching & learning, staff and student wellbeing, teaching and learning and the impact on the wider College community.

It was noted that subsequent to the circulation of the Principal's report the Government had published updated Coronavirus guidance for FE Colleges, the FE White Paper and Ofqual's summer 2021 awarding of grades consultation, superseding some of the information in the Principal's report.

In response to governor questions the following points were expanded upon:

- 126.7.2 **January 2021 Examinations:** Further to minute 125.4.4 [January examinations] the Principal reported that many GFE colleges cancelled all or most of their winter period exams. Other colleges and schools with relatively small numbers of sittings proceeded to hold most of their vocational and technical exams. The College cancelled just one examination - the financial certificate (two papers) to be taken by year one students. This was a very large cohort (145+ students) with nationally timetable exams occurring at the same time resulting in 200 sittings on the specified morning. There were concerns about ensuring good levels of social distancing and also the ability to organise enough invigilation. The awarding body for the financial certificate qualification had given prior assurance that the January entries could be transferred to the July [see also minute No.126.10]

- 126.7.3 **Ofqual Consultation Summer 2021:** The Principal gave an update on the situation including the recent issue of Ofqual's Awarding of Summer 2021 Qualification consultations for GCSE/AS/A Level<sup>3</sup> and Vocational, Technical and other qualifications<sup>4</sup>. It is expected that the SFCA, will submit a response to the Ofqual consultation which will inform the College's response<sup>5</sup>. The consultation period of two weeks is short and the consultation text is lengthy. The College has some significant concerns regarding the consultation and has been told by the SFCA that requests for more detail, are on-going.

There is likely to be significant concern raised about the proposed framework, not least the additional workload for individual teachers and further for those with additional responsibilities including heads of departments. Governors expressed the view that an awarding framework, that resulted in further additional pressures on students and additional workload for staff, (above the additional work already required as a result of

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-how-gcse-as-and-a-level-grades-should-be-awarded-in-summer-2021>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-alternative-arrangements-for-the-award-of-vtqs-and-other-general-qualifications-in-2021>

<sup>5</sup> The SFCA response will be circulated to governors when received

Coronavirus) would require careful management and would be considered wholly unacceptable if over burdensome.

Although a framework for awarding qualifications may be resolved by the consultation, the awarding of summer 2021 qualifications will ultimately be dependent on the coronavirus situation and whether students return to face to face teaching after the February half term (as the Government is currently suggesting) or later.

It is currently impossible for colleges to give students, staff, parents and carers any significant advice or guidance. Teaching staff are anxious about the lack of clarity as to how student grades are to be determined and what their responsibilities are within this process.<sup>6</sup>

126.7.4 **FE White Paper** : Published on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2021 the paper drives forward the two tier post 16 education system (Academic and Vocational & Technical i.e.no applied programmes), reflecting the summer AGQ consultation.

There is a very limited specific mention of Sixth Form Colleges (SFCs), other than in relation to levelling up standards of governance and delivering a series of governance reforms.

Governors discussed the suggestion, that the White Paper gave rise to questions around the validity of SFCs being part of the FE sector. The paper, alongside the outcomes of the Ney Review, suggests, that there will be major DfE involvement in the running of FE institutions, potential reorganisation of Colleges and further increased oversight and additional financial returns. In the context, of the FE sector direction of travel, potential questions as to whether logically the College should be aligned to the school/academy sector may need to be a future strategic consideration. The Principal reported that the SFCA would be keen to steer almost all sixth form colleges towards the academisation route.

126.7.5 **Government Review of Applied General Qualifications (AGQ)**: A third round of consultations re post 16 qualifications at Level 3 and below, are now taking place. Consultations ask for responses to the proposals to significantly reduce the number of funded qualifications available to post 16 providers. This would affect a small part of the College's curriculum provision (9 subjects) but would more fundamentally affect a majority of GFE colleges, a significant number of SFCs and some school 6<sup>th</sup> Forms who have significant numbers of students, studying these courses. There is concern that 15 and 16-year-olds who may not consider an academic A level or a T Level (vocational or technical route - specialising in an occupation) at age 16 as being the right choice for them at that point in time will no longer have a suitable alternative option. Ofqual, have also signalled in their response to the consultation, some disquiet at the suggested removal of AGQ expressing views re barriers to student progression and potential disadvantaged learner groups, 'if alternative choices are unduly restricted'<sup>7</sup>. In addition, the impact of the Coronavirus on businesses has reduced further the number of apprenticeships available to students at age 16. The College submitted responses to the previous consultations and is against the current proposal.

126.7.6 **Pastoral support for students – update**: Governors received reports on the widespread pastoral support available to students. Governors were assured that pastoral support is being maintained relatively effectively during the period of lockdown, for all students. Personal Tutors are 'checking in' with their tutor group at least weekly,

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<sup>6</sup> In part, the outcomes of the consultation were published 25.02.2021 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/awarding-qualifications-in-summer-2021/awarding-qualifications-in-summer-2021>

<sup>7</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/806055/DfE\\_post\\_16\\_consultation\\_of\\_qual\\_response\\_FINAL.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/806055/DfE_post_16_consultation_of_qual_response_FINAL.pdf)

as well as supporting and monitoring individuals as necessary. Support for students with additional needs, for example those with high level needs, continue to be offered as a choice of face to face or remote learning, with the support of a learning support key worker. Students requiring support with their emotional wellbeing can access the College's welfare and counselling services, which continue to operate during lockdown as a choice of face to face, Teams video or phone call support.

126.7.7 **Student Engagement and Attendance:** student engagement and attendance continue to be very good. In person student attendance, during the autumn term 2020 had been very good and since January 2021 (lockdown 3 period) student engagement with remote and online learning has been very high. In particular, Teams lessons are very well attended. In comparison to the size of the student cohort, there has been 'very few' parental or student complaints. regarding remote learning, indicating that the remote learning offer is being delivered and very well received.

126.7.8 **Augur Report - financing of higher education:** The [Government's interim response](#) to the Augur report has been published. Within the report, the Government has indicated that they will freeze university tuition fees for the 2021/2022 year. A full response is expected in spring 2021.

126.7.9 **Post Qualification Admissions Reform Consultation:**<sup>8</sup> Following the Government's commitment to 'level up' the Higher Education admission system, the Government launched a consultation, on the proposal to change to a system of post qualification admission. The consultation document details the rationale for reform, alongside various models post qualification admissions. The consultation closes 13th May 2021 and therefore any resultant changes are not expected to impact admissions for the current co-hort of college students. The College will be submitting a response.

126.7.10 **College arrangements March 2021:** The Government have reiterated their commitment to give schools and colleges at least 2 weeks notice of any changes to current arrangements/move to face to face learning. The Principal informed governors that the mass testing expected to be delivered by the College will require the employment of additional staff. The Principal reiterated that the first and foremost priority was to the students and staff at the College. The current level of hospitalisations and deaths, and pressure on the NHS and the Government view that human contact needs to be minimised, there as minimum need to be seen significantly less pressure on the national health system before the College fully opened.

#### 126.7.11 **Risk Management and Mitigation Plan**

The Assistant Principal (Risk) introduced the Risk Management and Mitigation Plan and the Risk Management and Mitigation Plan – Lateral Flow Testing. The Assistant Principal reported on the arrangements that had been in place to ensure the safety of students and staff during the period of the January examinations<sup>9</sup> and the testing arrangements that have been put in place for the spring term - assuming that the College returns to a full Phase 1 arrangement after the current lockdown.

25 vulnerable students have been approved for working on site. On most days the number attending is in the region of 10-15.

The HR Manager reported on the Covid testing arrangements. Testing for staff attending onsite during lockdown is being undertaken in accordance with Government guidelines

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<sup>8</sup> Governors will be provided with an opportunity to access the SFCa conference recording re PQA

<sup>9</sup> 700 exams took place. In light of statements made by Chief Medical Officer/Government advisor on 11.01.2021, at fairly short notice the decision to cancel the Year 1 Financial Studies Certificate exam was made.

and planning is in place to ensure testing can be 'ramped up for the mass testing when required.

The revisions to the Risk Management and Mitigation Plan and the new Risk Management and Mitigation Plan – Lateral Flow Testing, were approved.

## **126.8 Strategic Plan and Priorities**

### **126.8.1 Cross College Self-Assessment Review (SAR) 2019/20**

The Chair & Lead Governor for Curriculum Offer & Educational Quality, reported on the meetings held with the Assistant Principals; Performance and Quality Assurance and Teaching & Learning and the discussions held by governors at prior meetings re the college's headline SAR. The Lead Governor added his endorsement to the Colleges self-assessment grading of Outstanding/Good.<sup>10</sup>

In response to governor questions re self-validation of the 2020 Centre Assessed Grades (CAGs) and the level of assurance required in order to support using the data as the evidence base for the self-assessed Outstanding grading.

The Assistant Principal (Performance and Quality Assurance) responded, providing a verbal overview of the SAR, drawing attention to the 3-year data model (departmental and cross College), in particular the data for the two years prior to 2020, which evidenced an improving trend. Although 2020, had been a difficult year re self-assessment (particularly as the Government will not be publishing external benchmarking data), governors were reminded that the College's 2020 Centre Assessed Grades (CAGs) had undergone rigorous, internal and external assurance processes and therefore College management are confident that the 2020 data, can be used as reliable evidence of a third successive year of improved outcomes. These outcomes, considered in the context of the Ofsted framework, which is less data driven than previous frameworks and more favourable re the College's ethos re its offer to students / the students' experience. Therefore, the College is confident that the evidence is in place to support the College self-assessment of **'Outstanding/ Good' with the majority of features being at least, and in a significant number of areas better than, 'Good'**.

### **126.8.2 Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) 2020/21**

The Assistant Principal provided an overview of how the QIP is constructed, measured and evaluated noting that again, for the 2020/2021 year the Government will not be publishing any benchmarking data. The College's improvements and trends across departments and the whole College, will be key measures for governors considering next year's SAR.

The Chair advised the meeting that the SAR and QIP are evidenced based documents and the challenge for governors and management will be monitoring and evaluating student outcomes in the absence of external benchmarking data.

Governors agreed that a key detail will be how the Government will moderate the awarding of the 2021 grades, with a view to ensuring over inflation of grades within certain sectors or individual institutions does not occur and students do not feel undervalued. The College has always prided its self on being honest and transparent and therefore worries for its students should other sectors / institutions again be allowed to overinflate student grades. Evidence for each grade is absolutely key to ensure that if challenges form parents/students do occur there is clear and unambiguous evidence underpinning the College's judgement.

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<sup>10</sup> Aligned with the [Ofsted Education Inspection Framework](#)

Governors unanimously agreed the Self-Assessment Report 2019/2020 and Quality Improvement Plan 2020/2021, including the self-assessment grading of ***Outstanding/Good with the majority of features being at least Good.***

Governors thanked the Assistant Principal and all those involved with the production of the SAR, QIP and departmental reports

### 126.8.3 Departmental Headline Self-Assessment Review

As reported at the last meeting and in the context of Covid and the ongoing pressures on staff, the 2019/20 departmental self-assessment reviews (SARs), have been formulated as headline SARs with the impact of Covid highlighted. The Chair advised governors that the SARs additionally provided governors with an insight into the departmental journey re blended and remote learning.<sup>11</sup>

Strategies, deployed to further improve student outcomes including; departmental senior management support and the impact of leadership changes were discussed. Governors noted the improvements made to date, alongside the departments' quality improvement strategies.

## 126.9 Curriculum Offer & Educational Quality

126.9.1 The Lead Governor for Curriculum Offer & Educational Quality introduced the Quality of Teaching, Learning & Assessment report (triangulating the outcomes of the teaching staff survey /feedback on lesson observation/student survey outcomes).

The report included information re student engagement levels and an overview of the strategies deployed to monitor the delivery and quality of remote learning for students.

126.9.2 [Reviewing Remote Education Provision](#): the Lead Governor, made reference to the DfE framework supporting colleges in reviewing their remote education provision and reported that during the meetings held with the Assistant Principals; Performance and Quality Assurance and Teaching & Learning, the Lead Governor and Chair had discussed the 5 assessment categories of identifying, developing, implementing, embedding and sustaining. In this context, the Teaching, Learning & Assessment report evidences that the College is 'at the high end of *embedding* and in many cases *sustaining* remote education'.

In response to governor questions, The Assistant Principal, Teaching & Learning, explained the systems in place across the College to support students with additional learning needs. In addition, teaching staff, in all lessons, obtain feedback re access, understand and completion of work from students.

Each subject team has sourced and undertaken a considerable amount of inset training, research and resource sharing. In addition to other online CPD opportunities, the College has subscribed to the National College online and all teaching & support staff will be provided with a login for the site.

The Chair asked the College whether the remote learning offer will be published on the College website. Governors were informed that the report will be circulated to staff.

The Student Governor present at the meeting, spoke of the students' online learning experience and their personal view that teachers are 'making a very good job of a very difficult situation'.

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<sup>11</sup> The remaining SAR will be circulated to governors when available

**126.10 Cross College Operational & Statutory Reports**

**Finance**

**126.10.1 Cost Centre Review December 2020**

The Finance Lead Governors gave an overview of the current budgetary position noting that the accounts had been prepared on the assumption that the College will be closed until mid-March 2021

The December report showed a deficit of £418k for the month, which resulted in a net operating surplus of £605k for the first five months of the financial year. The budget showed an expected surplus of £554k (for this point in the year), and therefore the year to date (actual against budget), shows a positive variance of £51k.

The full year forecast has been revised from £203k deficit to £298k deficit. The increased deficit of £95k is due to a forecast increase in salaries and a decrease in refectory turnover, due to the impact of Coronavirus including the third national lockdown.

Potential 'exceptional student growth' funding has not been included in the forecast, but could be worth up to £300k. The College expects the ESFA to notify the College of any funding due, in February.

Capital Expenditure: The Finance Lead Governors advised governors of a potential issue re the profile of spend on IT (computer) equipment. It is possible, that rather than the full planned expenditure during the 2020/2021 year there will, need to be a larger capital expenditure next year. The Finance Manager explained that the IT department had underspent in the previous year and are predicted to underspend again this year, predominately as a result of the coronavirus; therefore, the underspend will roll forward to next year.

The Chair closed Part A of the meeting at 19.55

*At this point observers and I. MacNaughton left the meeting.*

**126.11 Governance Matters**

126.11.1 FE White Paper: governors considered the summary report detailing the governance aspects of the FE White Paper, prepared by the Clerk. The Clerk will provide further reports once further detail and the extent of the governance reforms are known.

126.11.2 Staff Wellbeing: In the context of the additional ongoing pressures staff wellbeing remains a significant concern. It was agreed that the Chair should write to all staff to thank them for their ongoing dedication and commitment to the College and its students.

*There being no other business the Chair closed part A of the meeting at 20.25*

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

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