



THE SIXTH FORM COLLEGE, COLCHESTER

**Minutes of Corporation Meeting No. 130
27 September 2021**

[Virtual Meeting held via Microsoft Teams]

Chair: K Finnigan

Members Present: A Beatty, M Atherton, S Codling, C Goldsworthy,
H Hallworth, M Hyslop, J Leslie, I MacNaughton (Principal), D Morran,
J Owens, H. Skeggs, I Vipond, J Tallentire, D Stebbings, J Johnson,
J Harker (Acting Principal)

In Attendance: Assistant Principals: J Cadman, A Johnson, G Rayner, A Frost, S Townshend
S Williams (HR Manager), E Gibson (Finance Manager),

Clerk: T Johnson

The minutes reflect the order of discussion

130.1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received and accepted from governors, M Waring & P Barker

130.2 Any Other Business & Chair's Action

130.2.1 No other business was requested.

130.2.2 The Chair confirmed that he had not been required to implement Chair's action since the last meeting. Following the government announcement that all schools and colleges were expected to deliver students' study programmes on site from September 2021, the previously arranged meeting scheduled for September 2nd 2021 to discuss college frameworks and arrangements (from 09.09.2021 onwards) had been cancelled.

130.2.3 The Chair reminded those present that action point summaries are shared with governors and managers via SharePoint within 3 working days of each meeting.

130.3 Declarations of Interest

No interests, recorded on the registers, related to any of the matters proposed for discussion.

No governor or attendee declared any interests.

130.4 Minutes of Previous Meetings

130.4.1 The minutes of corporation meeting No.129 held on 12 July 2021 were agreed, as a true record of the meeting.

130.4.2 Matters arising

Gift Aid: A governor requested an update re the enquires made into the feasibility of reclaim tax (gift aid) on donations made to the college (both a one-off donation and parent/student transactions), effectively increasing the amount of the donation. The Finance Manager explained the resource implications of making extensive enquiries at this time. The Acting Principal confirmed that CENBASE Principals could be approached to see if they have a solution to claiming gift aid, that doesn't create a disproportionate workload. Outcomes of the enquiries will be reported as and when appropriate.

Action: Acting Principal

All other matters arising were identified on the agenda

130.5 **Coronavirus (COVID-19)**

130.5.1 The Clerk reported that the Corporation had approved by ordinary, written resolution and in its entirety, the Phase 3 Operational Risk Management and Mitigation plan for the period commencing September 8th 2021 [timetable arrangements from September 9th]. The written consent was authenticated by the Clerk to the Corporation in accordance with the Instrument of Government, with the date of circulation recorded as 3rd September 2021. 16 governors were eligible to vote on the resolution – a total of 9 returns were received all in favour of the resolution. There were no abstentions or votes against. **The resolution to approve the Phase 3 Operational Risk Management and Mitigation plan was recorded as passed by a majority in favour on September 7th 2021.**

A governor expressed concern at the low number of returns received, compared to the number of governors in post and suggested that the low number indicated governors were abstaining from the vote. The Clerk clarified that although the option to abstain or vote against the resolution had been provided, no abstentions had been received. The Clerk reminded those present that the resolution had been in relation to the Risk Management and Mitigation plan and not on the wider opening of the College i.e. students full-time or equivalent study programme being delivered on site, which had been a government expectation. The Clerk advised that in the event that insufficient returns had been received an emergency meeting would have been constituted.

130.6 **Principal's Strategic Matters**

130.6.1 Governors considered the report, prepared by the Acting Principal, including detail of the enduring impact of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on teaching & learning, staff and student wellbeing and the impact on the wider community.

The Acting Principal updated governors on the following matters:

130.6.2 **College arrangements for the start of the year [see also 129.7]:** College test and trace responsibilities were withdrawn on July 20th 2021 and now wholly reside with the NHS. This has removed a considerable burden from the College. Governors were pleased that staffing resources would no longer be expended on this administrative task.

130.6.3 **Testing:** Following, the government announcement that from September 2021 schools and Colleges will be required to offer 2 on-site lateral flow tests, an Onsite Covid testing centre was re-established for the first 10 days of the autumn term 2021. Students were advised to take 2 voluntary Lateral Flow (LTF) tests - approximately 600 students attended the centre. Many students will have carried out LTF tests at

home prior to attending site. The College confirmed that there is a good stock of LTF tests and students and staff continue to take these for testing at home.

- 130.6.4 **Vaccinations:** During the enrolment period, an NHS vaccination mobile centre was positioned on site and approximately 200 students came forward for voluntary vaccination. Additionally, many students will have been vaccinated elsewhere. NHS staff were pleased with the number of students presenting for vaccination.

The Acting Principal and relevant senior managers responded to governor questions on the following points:

- 130.6.5 **2021 Examination Data:** Compared to 2019, the last sitting of normal examination arrangements, A* - A grades rose nationally by 75%. The College's A* - B grades at 53.2% may not statistically appear to be high as some other institutions, however, governors were assured that this was due to the resolute determination of the College to ensure that there was no over inflation of grades and therefore students received grades that provided a clear reflection of their achievements.

In this context, the College has received external benchmarking of: ALPs – Grade 2 (likely using 2019 data as a benchmark) and 6-Dimensions - 'above average'

- 130.6.6 **Progression to HE** – as expected there has been very high progression rates, with the vast majority of students gaining a place at their first-choice university. *[See also minute 130.6.11]*

- 130.6.7 **Enrolments:** to date 3,340 students are enrolled at the College.

1,792 Year 1

1473 Year 2

75 Advance Foundation Programme

- 130.6.8 **Strategic Plan:** at the point of the October ILR return, it is expected that the level of enrolments will be near to the 2024 projected numbers. With reference to funding allocations based on [lagged numbers](#), if the ESFA apply the same methodology for in year growth funding as for 2020/21, the College will expect to receive some funding during the 2021/22 year for the additional student numbers (rather than all funding being a lagged allocation).

The Assistant Principal Admissions & Marketing, joined the meeting.

- 130.6.9 **Admissions:** Due to oversubscription criteria has been applied due to oversubscription. In the context of a record year 1 co-hort approx. 90 students were not offered places (predominately late or out of area applications)

Student Attainment & Achievement:

- 130.6.10 **Grade Inflation: Governors asked**, in the context that national 2021 qualifications and results statistics show SFCs with a grade inflation of approx. 1%, compared to private schools' grade inflation of 15%, does the College's high integrity approach to the awarding of grades mean that our students are being disadvantaged. And, have conversations taken place with other colleges, to see any impact can be managed, moving forward to ensure Sixth Form College students do not lose out. In response, the Acting Principal advised governors that as the vast majority of students were able to progress to their first-choice university or for others, where their grades did not suit progression to HE they were able to consider and progress to other career pathways, the College does not believe that students have been disadvantaged. Historically, as shown by the HESA data, students from the College have a very high university retention factor. Students entering, HE with over inflated grades; studying university courses or taking a progression pathway that they may not be academically suited to, may result in that student struggling and ultimately dropping out of university -

this would be a disadvantage. In this context the College is very positive about the HESA data and looking forward to receiving the HESA data in 3 years' time.

CENBASE Sixth Form Colleges are in broadly similar positions and all Sixth Form Colleges have the SFCA supporting them. There is also some speculation that the new Secretary of State for Education and the new education ministers (one being the Colchester MP) will bring some hope to the sector re redressing the situation.

The Assistant Principal (Examinations), reported that the education sector was promised by Ofqual, a standardisation process that would be 'very rigorous' but there is concern that this may not have been as rigorous as colleges had been led to believe. Undoubtedly, the College's high integrity approach to the awarding of grades, had given both students and their parents confidence in the College's systems.

H Skeggs joined the meeting.

- 130.6.11 **HE Progression: A governor expressed concern** for the proportion of students who did not gain their first choice of university as, despite the integrity of the College's results, logic suggests, there must be some college students who had been forced to accept their 2nd choice university, due the grade inflation in the private schools' sector and were therefore discriminated against.

The Chair asked the Assistant Principal (Examinations) to comment on whether grade inflation in the private sector had discriminated against any of the College's students.

The Assistant Principal reported that there were isolated incidents where the College had supported students and communicated directly, with universities. The hope is that there will be a national 're-set' back to 2019 so that any inflation in grades does not disproportionately affect future students. *[See also minute 130.6.6]*

- 130.6.12 **2021 Appeals: In response to governor questions** regarding student appeals relating to the 2021 summer teacher assessed grades, it was noted that circa 10,000 grades had been awarded and only 5 formal appeals received. 150 early appeal enquiries had been made and following the provision of further information, the majority were resolved. Whilst recognising that there were very student few appeals, a governor asked whether any work had been undertaken to identify the root cause of the appeals, that were lodged and those that were upheld.

The Assistant Principal (Examinations) explained that 2 of the appeals had been supported by the College - analysis was undertaken and administrative issues identified. The other 3 appeals, relating to 2 students, are not being supported. These appeals are progressing through the Ofqual appeal framework - the College are not expecting these appeals to be upheld. In this context, it is difficult to formulate any meaningful analysis. An update on appeals will be given at the next meeting.

Action: Acting Principal

- 130.6.13 **Student Attainment – Grades awarded summer 2021**

	2021	2019
A level A*-C grades	77.6%	73%
A level A*-E grades	99%	98%
Applied General Extended Certificate/Diploma	99%	99.8%
GCSE English Language	76%	66%
GCSE Maths	64%	39%
L2 Science	96%	90%

- 130.6.14 **In the context that the data shows year on year improvements; governors asked whether** there was an understanding of the root cause analysis behind the

improvements and whether this was used to identify how the results can be improved further. [See also minute 130.6.5 & 130.6.10]

In response to [governor questions](#) the following matters were expanded upon;

- 130.6.15 [Enrolment data](#): Although the College has enrolled more students than predicted, class sizes remain reasonable and balanced. Due to the large cohort, entry criteria was stuck to rigidly. [See also minute 130.6.7 -130.6.9]
- 130.6.16 [Recruitment](#): 22 new teaching staff (net 8FTE) have been employed. New staff members are being monitored closely and are settling in very well. Due to forward planning, only 1 additional FTE equivalent (created from the deployment of existing staff) was needed to cover teaching requirements following enrolment. The staff concerned were willing to increase working hours to enable student needs to be met.
- 130.6.17 [Study Programmes](#): In the context of the rise in student numbers (number of 16 year olds locally) [a governor asked](#) the College to clarify the process where a student's first choice of study programme cannot be accommodated.

[A governor also asked](#); whether students' whose choices cannot be accommodated tend to choose alternative subjects to study at the College or do they generally choose to study elsewhere.

The Acting Principal explained that where ever possible the College, will provide students with their subject choices. In the event that a student does not achieve the requisite entry grades for a subject (often the required English or maths grade required for a subject), senior staff will discuss alternative study choices or more suitable academic pathways with the student during enrolment.

The Assistant Principal (Admissions & Marketing) reported that, currently, every student, whether advantage or disadvantaged, who applies within the required timeframes and attains the required grades, has been able to study their chosen courses at the College. However, this year, due to oversubscription, there has been very limited scope for flexibility in terms of the pre-entry requirements. The Assistant Principal provide governors with some generic examples.

- 130.6.18 [Staffing: A governor questioned](#), in relation to the most popular courses, whether the College was utilising trend analysis to inform future years' staffing needs or whether reactivity to the number of students applying for a course is required. The Assistant Principal explained that staffing is a whole college strategic level issue; broadly trends are used to anticipate staffing demands and inform proactive recruitment, facilitating quality provision in the subject areas students want to study.

[A governor queried](#) whether the cost of employing a new 1FTE or 2 part time teaching staff members, rather than increasing the hours of existing staff had been considered. The Acting Principal explained that as the hours required were fractional, across a number of subjects, it would not have been possible to create and advertise 'a post' from these hours. The Assistant Principal (Examinations) added that the College is a multi-skilled environment, with many teachers able to teach across a range of departmental subjects.

- 130.6.19 [2020/21 Funding and Resources: Governors agreed](#) that the review would be significant for the college and the sector as a whole and that many strands of the strategic plan would be dependent on the detail of the Comprehensive Spending Review outcomes (expected October 2021).

- 130.6.20 [Property Strategy: A governor asked](#), in the context of rising student numbers (applications), whether the renting additional accommodation, as part of the property strategy, had been considered. The Acting Principal responded, explaining that over

the next few months a strategic review of student numbers, applications, overall accommodation and staffing availability will be undertaken. Renting additional property is a potential option, however renting accommodation outside of the College's immediate vicinity has previously proven to be problematic.

130.6.21 **Applied General Qualifications (APG):** the Acting Principal provided governors with an overview of the impact of the withdrawal of APG qualifications on CENBASE colleges. The College is keen that the 9 APGs (A level equivalents), currently offered by the College remain options for future students. The government decision regarding these courses will undoubtedly impact the boards future strategic discussions. For example, Criminology is the fastest growing subject, reflecting a national trend but if BTEC Criminology were to be withdrawn, approx. 20 teaching rooms would become available.

130.6.22 **Admissions: A governor asked, what the impact would be if all APGs were removed from the College's offer.**
The Principal replied, reminding governors of the breadth of courses and additionality, currently offered to students. In this context, the Principal explained that in the event that all the College's APG courses were withdrawn, the impact on the breadth of choice the College is able to offer would be minor.

A governor suggested, in addition to the rise in demographics (number of 16 year olds locally), the withdrawal of BTECS and other APGs will mean that students who previously would have chosen to study BTECs or similar at a GFE College but who are not prepared to narrow their options to study the new employer focussed T Levels will look at following a traditional A Level pathway. Governors asked how the College is undertaking horizon scanning and subsequently planning for what could be quite a big change and, in the event that the College was unable to meet the demands of its key stakeholders, a potential reputational risk.

The Principal responded, that although it is recognised that there will be a knock-on effect from the withdrawal of BTECs and other Applied General qualifications, at present there are no firm plans relating to how this will be managed. The Assistant Principal (Admissions & Marketing) informed governors that in the context of being an inclusive institution, the College has preserved the ability to be able to confidently inform all students from partner schools, including those from disadvantaged groups that if they wish to study at the sixth form and have the required grades, the timetable can accommodate any combination of study with a guarantee of no clashes - no other institution is offering this. The mechanism to manage this however, has meant in the past restricting subject choices for students from non- partner secondary schools and with the rise in applications it may be that this will need to be implemented more rigorously moving forward.

130.6.23 **A Levels / post graduate careers: a governor expressed concern for College students receiving 2021 A Level grades,** in the context that post graduate careers and professions are competitive and employers have, in some previously differentiated on the basis of A Level grades and although, at the present time, everyone recognises the difficulties faced by the 'Covid generation', in time this will be forgotten. In this context, there may be a further disadvantage to SFC students (awarded realistic grades) competing for jobs against peers who have overinflated A Level grades. [See also minute 130.6.11]. The governor raised a query regarding whether the College collects and analyses post graduate progression data.

In response the Assistant Principal (Performance & Quality) suggested that in theory the universities themselves should be looking to redress the balance of grade inflation.

Governor's thanked the Principal and contributing staff members for the updates and for providing the responses to their questions.

130.7 **Cross College Operational & Statutory Reports**

It was agreed to discuss Finance – agenda item 130.8 at this point

130.7.1 **Finance**

July 2021 Financial report: The Finance Manager gave an overview of the current budgetary position, as provided in the supporting papers.

In response to governor questions, the Finance Manager explained that the May 2021 Management accounts informing the 2021/22 budget had shown an anticipated surplus of £101k (significantly 'up' on the budget prediction of a small deficit). The July financial report showed a change to £185k, due to the impact of the pandemic and the resulting flexibilities previously reported to governors including; underspent departmental budgets, underspent training and premises budgets.

The increase to employer's National Insurance contributions by 1.25% will result in increased costs of approximately £78k for the College. Teaching and support staff pay negotiations are ongoing - indications are that a 1.5% raise across pay scales is likely

The finance lead governor reported that there would not be any significant matters to report until the auditors had completed their final work on the year-end figures. The lead governors had discussed with the finance manager whether there was anything emerging that would be likely to impact the new financial year – the finance manager had confirmed there were no material changes that would impact the 2021/22 budget.

It was noted that although the accounts are as yet unaudited no material changes to the accounts are expected. The College's self-assessed financial health grading remains 'Good'. It was noted that the College had self-moderated the ESFA grading of 'outstanding' to good to take account of the abnormal financial conditions.

Funding Updates: The Principal reported that the P16 Capacity Fund has been further delayed by the government, decide and communicate bids requests by December for 2022 completion. The College is waiting for a response on their £150k bid for internal remodelling.

Regularity Self-Assessment Questionnaire and Annex B: The Audit Chair explained the rationale behind the requirement for the ESFA Regularity Questionnaire and Covid Annex and the process undertaken to date. Governors indicated that they had comments to add to the questionnaire, in this context the Corporation Chair requested that governors send comments to Clerk within the next 7 days.

Action: Governors/Clerk/College

At this point the Finance Manager left the meeting

130.8 **Strategic Plan and Priorities**

130.8.1 **Strategic Priorities 2020-2021**

The Assistant Principal (Performance & Quality) presented the final strategic priorities review for 2020 to 2021, including the quantitative and qualitative benchmarks and key guidelines. For the benefit of new governors, the Assistant Principal gave a comprehensive overview of the strategic priorities review and reporting processes. Governors noted the progress made towards achievement of the priorities. The Assistant Principal reminded governors that the full detail will be included in the Cross-College SAR presented to governors in the autumn term. Which will reflect the 2021-22 year planned improvements and sustaining successes.

130.8.2 **Student Numbers:** In response to a governor query regarding the predicted growth in student numbers, the Assistant Principal reiterated that the College had already reached the application & enrolment figures predicted for 2024/2025 [please refer to the 3-5 year strategic plan]. The College believes that GCSE grade inflation locally has positively impacted the numbers of students attaining the entry criteria to study at the College, as a result the College may need to consider increasing the entry requirements for some courses.

A governor asked for a view on whether there would be significant numbers of students choosing to study at the College, rather than at the local grammar school (single academy trust) that is likely, under the direction of the Regional Schools Commissioner, to be placed into a MAT. The Assistant Principal informed governors that no significant rise in applications from the local grammar or private schools were witnessed.

The Assistant Principal responded; although there is no firm decision on the 2022 Year 1 admission numbers, the number of students the College can enrol will be in the context that the 2022-23 Year 2 cohort will be a large cohort.

130.8.3 **Capacity:** The College is currently considering various options for increasing capacity, including creative accommodation strategies and timetabling. Overall there may need to be careful consideration of the strategic direction of the college including a review of the mission and vision. Proposals will be brought to the board for discussion and consideration in due course.

Action: College/Strategy Lead Governor

130.8.4 **Student Wellbeing: governors expressed** general concern for the wellbeing of all students who received over inflated grades, in the context of their ability to cope with their post 16 choices and the pressure on teaching and support staff who may be required to provide additional support to students who are not able to access the required level of learning. The Assistant Principal provided an overview of the 3-week induction processes, which supports the identification of students who are not coping or for whom concerns have been raised. Previously, moving students to an alternative course more suited to their academic needs or interests, would have been an intervention open for most students however, with courses full this is more problematic this year. The College's challenge is to ensure all students studying at the College succeed.

The Assistant Principal (Teaching & Learning) explained that the theme for teaching and learning strategies for 2021/2022, ensuring teachers spend time in the classroom, developing students' revision and examination skills.

130.8.5 **Grade Inflation:** One of the staff governors, suggested that universities will eventually realise that students coming from the SFC sector have grades that are 'real' and an A* from an SFC is more impressive than an A* from independent schools. The individual admissions tutors in top universities will be aware of; which students are coming from a comprehensive provider and of the grade inflation in the independent sector. The independent sector grade inflation, will also highlight that Sixth Form College students are well qualified for the courses they are applying to study. All of these issues will be taken into account of that when making their admissions decisions.

130.8.6 The early **SAR summary** will be presented at the next meeting.

Action: College/Clerk

130.8.7 2021- 2022 Strategic Priorities

Governors received the 2021 – 2022 Strategic Priorities, which had been be populated with targets and key performance indicators. It was agreed the priorities should be discussed at the next meeting.

Action: College/Clerk

130.9 Cross College Operational & Statutory Reports

130.9.1 Pastoral

The Assistant Principal (Pastoral) presented the draft Child Protection policy 2021-2022 for approval.

[The Chair raised a query](#) regarding the reference to the ‘College’s safer recruitment policy’. The HR Manager confirmed that a safer recruitment policy has been in place for some time, is published on the College website and is provided to applicants as part of the recruitment literature.

Governors unanimously approved the Child Protection policy 2021-2022

Safeguarding: the Assistant Principal (Pastoral) provided governors with an update on safeguarding within the College, covering the following:

- Current situation & trends – the impact of the pandemic on student’s mental health including the rise in eating disorders, Tics and Tourettes, is being seen across the College and is reflective of the national trend.
- During the first 2 weeks of the 2021/22 year, 69 new referrals were made to Welfare, - the vast majority were too high level for WARMS intervention.
- Child Protection files have been received from new students’ schools much earlier than usual, due to the new information exchange expectations detailed within Annex C KCSiE¹.
- Proactive work is being undertaken to safeguard students. A FEDEC (Federation of Essex Colleges) grant facilitated the fixed term employment of transition officers to support new students, particularly during enrolment and the early days of term. Tutorials have been developed and are being delivered on resilience and well being
- In addition to new staff training, L3 safeguarding training for senior tutors has taken place and safeguarding updates for all staff have been delivered. External on-line peer on peer abuse training has been brought in for all college staff. Governors were invited to access the training via the Clerk.

[A governor enquired](#) whether there was any emerging gender imbalance in the students presenting with mental health issues. The Assistant Principal reported that the rise in Ticks and Tourettes seems to mainly be girls a reflection of the nationwide trend. There is no statistically significant difference in the genders reporting anxiety issues. Notably, the College does not seem to have any issue with boys not coming forward for support.

[A governor asked](#) whether there was a disparity between the rise in mental health cases and the resourcing level available to deliver the required pastoral support. The Assistant Principal explained that the situation is challenge, the welfare hub are working very hard and resources are very stretched. However, in part the resourcing issue is about upskilling other members of the college community. During recent staff development meetings it was highlighted that teachers are actively seeking training such as mental health first aid and as

¹ Where children leave the school or college (including in year transfers) the designated safeguarding lead should ensure their child protection file is transferred to the new school or college as soon as possible, and within 5 days for an in-year transfer or within the first 5 days of the start of a new term.

a result the College have booked places on a course locally. However, with resourcing it is a balance - there is a limit to what the College can do to make up for the deficit within the NHS and other providers that should be picking up some of these students.

Action: College

130.9.2 Cross College

Social media/communications working group. The Assistant Principal (Admissions & Marketing) informed the meeting that an agenda is being formulated and a first meeting is being arranged. An update will be given at the next meeting.

Action: College

130.9.3 Personnel

The HR Manager reported that the Staff Code of Conduct is being drafted and will be presented at the next meeting.

Action: College

At this point all observers left the meeting.

130.10 Governance Matters

130.10.1 Remuneration Committee

The Chair reported that the annual report of the remuneration committee, will be circulated following publication of the SFCA workforce survey.

Action: Clerk

A governor suggested, in the context of the Remuneration Committee minutes, relating to the Code of Good Governance and best governance practice, that consideration should be given to the issue of placing restrictions on the number of terms a governor can serve. Another governor also made an observation regarding the diversity of the board and suggested that the board should also consider to what extent the board represents the student body and other stakeholder groups.

Action: Governors

130.10.2 Search & Governance Committee

The Chair reminded governors that mentors for new governors and responses to the equality, diversity and inclusion online survey, informing the ESFA, FE governor data collection were required.

Action: Governors

130.10.3 Governor Visit Day

The visit day is due to take place on November 12th and will be the first opportunity for governors to come together as a group, since the beginning of the pandemic. The Clerk reported that the overarching theme of the day will be 'Enabling Board Effectiveness' and the outline plan for the day will include meetings with stakeholders and opportunities for governor training and development, as well as departmental visits. As for previous visit days, the aim is for there to be as little impact on the college and college management as possible. There will be a back-up plan in the event that the pandemic requires governors to again work from home.

Action: Clerk

130.11 Confidential Matters

130.11.1 Confidential minutes of meeting No.129 held 12.07.2021 were unanimously approved.

130.11.2 The Chair will arrange for the preparation and circulation of the May 2021 confidential minutes [128.12]

Action: chair

There being no other business the Chair closed the meeting at 19.29

*These minutes were approved by the Corporation on 18.10.2021
[Minute No. 131.4]*
