

**Minutes of the Corporation meeting held on  
Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> October 2023 at 9.30am  
Burslem Boardroom and via Microsoft Teams**

Present:	Jeremy Cartwright, Chair	In person
	Steve Sawbridge	Remote
	Sally Garratt	Remote
	Hannah Molloy	Remote
	Bernard Kumeta	In person
	Rob Fisher	Remote
	Tom Nadin	Remote
	Jo Mountney	In person
	Lisa Capper, Principal/CEO	In person
	Lyndsey Cherry, Staff Governor	Remote
	Dave Hopley, Staff Governor	In person
	Mekdes Mideksa, Student Governor	In person
In Attendance:	Cath Brierley, Deputy Principal	In person
	Nova Abela, Chief People Officer	Remote
	Antoinette Lythgoe, Chief Financial Officer	Remote
	Angela Brooks, Executive Director of MIS and Reporting	In person
	Paul Martin, Executive Director of Finance	In Person
	Jules Bridges, Clerk to the Corporation	In person

<b>No.</b>	<b>Action</b>
<b>1</b>	<p><b>Welcome, introductions and apologies for absence</b> Apologies for absence were received from David Rogers, David Boughey, and Kevin Hetherington.</p> <p>The Corporation <b>approved</b> the appointment of Bernard Kumeta, following the Peridot recruitment process over the summer.</p>
<b>2</b>	<p><b>Declaration of Interests</b> The Chair reminded everyone present to declare any interests that they may have on agenda items to be discussed. No specific declarations, other than for paid positions, were made and standing declarations were noted.</p>
<b>3</b>	<p><b>Minutes of the meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> July 2023</b> The minutes of the meeting were <b>approved</b> as an accurate record.</p>
<b>4</b>	<p><b>Confidential Minutes of the meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> July 2023</b> The confidential minutes of the meeting were <b>approved</b> as an accurate record.</p>
<b>5</b>	<p><b>Action Progress Report</b> The actions arising from the previous meeting were summarised in the progress report and all actions reported had either been resolved or, where appropriate, an update had been provided on progress elsewhere on the agenda.</p>
<b>6</b>	<p><b>Student Voice</b> The Chair thanked the Staff Governors, Lyndsey Cherry and Dave Hopley, on behalf of the Corporation for his contribution over his Term of Office, which has now completed.</p> <p><b>Student Events and Activities 2023/2024</b> The College has recruited well for 16-19 study programmes and freshers' festivals have been well attended and these were supported by over 26 organisations. The Challenge Stoke on Trent focus will continue around sustainability. The enrichment clubs and activities were detailed in the report.</p> <p>Mekdes Mideksa, Student Union President, is the first Student Governor <b>approved</b> to join the Board. She is a Level 3 Year 1 student on Health and Social Care and has progressed from ESOL programmes onto Level 1, and Level 2 Health and Social Care.</p>

There are two further expressions of interest to join the Corporation, so work continues to recruit to the remaining two Student Governor vacancies.

Students on the Challenge South Africa project who have already met their fundraising activities are now supporting other students to raise their funds. It was noted that the College's enrichment programme is in addition to the enrichment activities that are embedded in the curriculum as part of Study Programme and the college continues to invest heavily in this programme.

#### ***Student Voice Timeline 2023/2024***

Governors are encouraged to join Learner Voice conferences and activities as they usually do. The programme of events was included in the pack of papers.

The Chair asked for any feedback from the lockdown incident last week from students. Adverse feedback has not been received from staff, or students. It is thought that one student on Facebook was quoted by the media. The Lockdown event last week was managed effectively and the decision to lockdown the Cauldon campus was fully endorsed by the Police. Staff and students were commended by the Principal/CEO for the support and management of the incident, reflecting on this, a sub-lockdown procedure is being considered to manage further incidents that are potentially serious but not lock-down, particularly around Guy Fawkes and other seasonal events.

### **7 Principal/CEO's Report including 5 Pillar update**

The Principal/CEO pulled out the highlights from the report to Governors;

- The College continues to be on a positive trajectory. Ofsted Good and outstanding financial health, growth in student numbers and improved Apprenticeship Accountability Framework are all positively impacting growing reputation and support for the College.
- 16-18 learner numbers are 1960 against an aspirational target of 1829. This growth is exponential with over 400 new learners.
- R014 to be submitted which will confirm the final achievement results for the year.
- Financial performance has been very good, and the year-end position has ended with outstanding financial health due to the earnings boost from AEB.
- The Adult Education Budget allocation ended at 101% allocation against a 97% threshold and a history of 94% or less for the last good number of years, which is to be celebrated.
- The College is out of dispute with UCU under pay. The local ballot found over 80% in favour of the pay award announced by the college. Governors were particularly supportive of the approach and effective management of this.
- The first round of bidding for LSIF funding to support sector-based work has been achieved.
- The Multiply Numeracy programme has been expanded and the College is the only named provider in the new City Strategy, Wellbeing for Stoke-on-Trent and the College and is the leader for the family support programme, delivering family learning across the City.
- The College continues building its relationship and connections with the Home Office and the DWP.
- As part of the launch of the strategic plan, the College will launch its Future Skills pledge with employers.
- Jo Gideon MP formally opened the Savoy sponsored Patisserie Kitchen.
- The Cyber Security platform, Varonis, has been implemented and new CCTV equipment installed, and two learning resource centres equipped with improved digital and a further £50K investment in IT.
- Staffing recruitment and retention remains an issue in the sector. Recruitment is going well, with some difficulties recruiting to ESOL, English, maths, and Motor Vehicle.

Paul Martin and Jo Mountney joined the meeting at 9.55am

- The next staff survey will be in Spring 2024 and staff wellbeing initiatives continue.
- Two T Levels are running and have recruited well. The third has not recruited as learners did not achieve the entry level qualifications required, so they have enrolled onto the BTEC route. A Foundation T Level will be introduced next year to engage students and get them to the required level to join the suite of T Levels.
- Curriculum planning will start at the end of October 2023. The theme is heavily weighted to meeting skills needs of employers.
- The College has chosen to be a partner with the Institute of Technology. Keele University and Newcastle Under Lyme and Burton and Derby Colleges established the IoT. The funding is for the area and so SOTC has requested to join as it ought to be for all partners and providers in the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire areas.
- The College sponsored a new award as part of the Staffs University Business awards called Skills for the Future, which links in to the newly created Future Skills Pledge. The college hosted a table of employers at the Skills for the Future Awards. There were 350 guests which was a great networking and positioning opportunity for the College.
- The College accepted the invitation from the Chambers to host the Chambers Business leaders to the Hammersley Restaurant at the College. Level 3 students prepared the menu and Level 2 students hosted the event and demonstrated professionalism and passion for their studies. This generated lots of social media awareness and promotion.
- The Podcast on BBC Sounds by us 'the Parents' Perspective' is now live. This is a general piece promoting technical education opportunities.
- Film for FE Week on Lifelong Learning

Hannah Molloy joined the meeting at 10.10am

The Principal/CEO also highlighted a few policy changes/updates;

- The Opportunity England Report from the AoC sets out where they see the FE sector across the country and the College has fed into this report.
- Advanced British Standard (ABS) will bring A Levels and T Levels together as a gold standard. This would take a decade to implement and could potentially change the character of the FE and/or college; e.g., institutions might remain as the technical deliverers of the ABS and/or retain or introduce A Levels in order to deliver blended programmes.
- New funding announced-£150m funding in 2024/25 to support maths and English GCSE resits
- £6000 tax free for teachers in their first five years teaching maths or Science
- The Centres of Excellence landscape is unknown
- New accountability for adult funding and devolution of the adult skills budget to the local authorities. This new regime will come in 2024/25 and the College is ready for this.

The Chair commented that the year-on-year increase in student numbers will be a challenge and, from a Board's perspective, it's worth reflecting on the success of the strategy. Over the past years, each year, there has been a pattern of budgeting, targeting, and increasing numbers but then losing them before the 42-day census point. This is the first year that the College has not only hit target (hit target 2022), but it has been surpassed and beyond, which is a result of the impact of the actions of the team, strategic journey taken from a college with a declining reputation in the community to achieving financial stability, the right quality strategy to achieve Ofsted Good and then projecting the College externally in a positive light. This journey has rapidly progressed and is now starting to bear fruit and Governors should take comfort from this from a strategic point of view and efforts of management and the College team has been exemplary.

L Capper left the meeting momentarily so item 9 preceded item 8

## **8 New Strategic Plan 2023-2026**

The Principal/CEO reminded the Board of the July Corporation meeting and the two strategy days held in February and April where Governors have worked on the development of the Strategy and how this has influenced the final draft. The Colleges values are now printed on lanyards and the text of the Strategy was shared in the pack of papers. A presentation of the content of the Strategy, not the finished product, but an indication of the final look and feel was shared with Governors at the meeting.

Under Article 3(1)(a) of the Instrument and Articles of Government, it is the responsibility of the Corporation for the determination and periodic review of the educational character and mission of the College and the oversight of its activities. Subject to a final proofread, which a Governor offered to support, the Corporation **approved** the Strategy copy that will be submitted for print and publication.

## **9 Enrolment Update**

The Deputy Principal highlighted the exponential level of growth and buoyant enrolment numbers. The budget target was 1686 with a stretch for growth of 1829 which has been exceeded. The actual number of 16-18 study programme learners is 1960. Of those, 162 have EHCPs and 74 high needs learners. Overall, this is 274 additional 16-18 study programme learners from target. The College is now in the period of the 42<sup>nd</sup> day. The ILR runs between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> October, and this is the crucial period to ensure that every learner is on a register to draw down the funding allocation. There are lots of activities to retain students; keeping warm, tutorials, enrichment, and enhancement activities and a 'swap don't drop' week to give learners opportunity to change programme.

This wider growth has been achieved through increased market share, working with schools promoting our delivery, marketing presence and Ofsted Good. With growth comes increased numbers and maths and English GCSEs in particular are large numbers, with 138 additional learners for English and 158 on maths. This is because the GCSE grade boundaries were adjusted back to 2019 and more learners are enrolled at entry level learning. The College has responded quickly to staffing and timetabling to accommodate these learners. Enrolment continues so numbers are still trickling upwards, and a close eye is kept on quality, retention, and learner achievement.

In terms of Adult Learners, the College continues to work with the key employers and closely monitors how the finances come out of the funding lines after the R04 run to ensure that the income is achieved early enough in the year to predict the outturn in the following year to grow adult provision.

Apprenticeship achievement is good. There are 172 starts in the system against a target of 259 and work continues to recruit, and focus on compliance, achievement, and relationships with employers. Governors asked if there was confidence that learners will be retained at the census point. The Deputy Principal confirmed that the team has worked tirelessly to monitor numbers, ensure learners are on the right courses, risk rated retention, assessment plans, check-in, and initial assessments, so there is confidence that learners will be retained.

Angela Brooks joined the meeting at 11.00am

## **10 Data Dashboard**

Approaching the final data return for the last academic year next week, so the figures may change minimally but it's a good position in terms of the completeness of the data set.

Mekdes Mideksa left the meeting at 11.05am

The headline retention and achievement figures focussing on 16-18s compared with 2018/19 shows that retention has been a challenge; however, those who do stay do achieve well. The retention does bring the overall achievement down and the College is changing its approach to delivery in this academic year, bearing in mind the impact

of the cost-of-living crisis, so programmes will be delivered over three days instead of four, enabling students to balance part time work with study, for example. Level 1 is performing lower than other provision and, through the SAR process, particular subject areas are under scrutiny.

Similarly, adults' retention has dropped and is just below the national average and the pass rate has dropped resulting in achievement falling below the national rate, so there are some complexities in adult provision to work through.

GCSE English for study programme learners shows that learners have been retained better with retention above the national rate and achievement above national rate. High grades have increased by 1% also. The College awaits the MIDAS data which is due out this week to see how maths and English for the College compares with other providers.

The GCSE maths cohort increased to 562 learners and there is a bigger increase this year. Retention is good and achievement is steady and comparable with national rate. The proportion of those getting high grades is an area of focus but this is better than some local providers. It was acknowledged that there is no complacency and this is a key focus. .

Adult English is a much smaller cohort with lower retention but a strong level of achievement above national rate. There is overall a percentage drop though on high grades. Adult maths has more of an impact on retention, which has dropped by 4.3% and achievement has dropped slightly but is well ahead of the national rate. The high grades percentage however has dipped.

The Apprenticeship landscape has changed from a world of frameworks to a world of standards and end point assessments. The national rate for all providers is 53.4% and SOTC is demonstrating above that for last year and close to the GFE providers at 57%. The focus now is on OOFs and moving them onto completion. There will be some legacy withdrawals that will bring the 2023/24 outcomes down but there is confidence that the College is starting to turn the corner.

Antoinette Lythgoe joined the meeting at 11.15am

#### **10 Funding Indicative Numbers 2023/2024**

The College has processed its R013 position (an update on AEB income) which has seen a drop from the period 12 position of £104K but part of this was £60K non-delivery of subcontracted work. Other adjustments include pensions, and holiday accruals.

A Governor commented that the strong balance sheet shows an improvement in the cash held at the end of the year, but the number of non-cash adjustments made may cloud the picture for net earnings on the statutory accounts. Offline it was agreed that the underlying position within the financial statements would be disclosed.

Executive  
Director of  
Finance

The Deed of Amendment to the covenants was considered by the Corporation. It doesn't change the requirements of the covenants or the KPIs, it is allowing an additional amount to be excluded from the calculation so that the College can continue to invest in the estate. As part of the capital deal agreed two years ago, the College sold J Block and got the funds, this Deed of Amendment is to allow firstly the restricted fund to be released so that the College can use this to fund, and secondly for that and an additional £800K to be excluded from the calculation of CFADS (Cash Flow Available for Debt Servicing). Part of the deal signed up to meant that the College can only spend what it generates in a year, but the Deed of Amendment allows the College to spend an additional £2.1m over a 24-month period on capital builds. The bank has agreed the Amendment and is supportive. The Corporation **approved** that the Deed of Amendment is signed.

Chair

#### **11 Management Accounts – Indicative Year End Position**

The Executive Director of Finance highlighted that the FE Commissioner would rate

the College as outstanding for the CFFR. Key movements in the year included that income was £1.2m higher than budgeted, with £500K of this in capital grants depreciation (non-operational) and the remainder was around £400K higher in AEB, and Apprenticeships. A number of small grants were received totalling £47K and a couple of larger grants for Multiply at £226K and £66K for the SDF project. In terms of adult learning and advanced learner loans and full cost funding, this has seen a drop in the way individuals are paid but on the business delivery side this was £100K higher than budgeted, netting each other off. For commercial income, catering overachieved its budget by £143K but this offset by the decision to restructure and the nursery.

Expenditure in the year was £404K higher, which equates to exactly the amount of subcontracted work which was the Colleges response to the AEB issue earlier in the year, but from that point, the College maximised the income and reduced potential costs without impacting on operation. All KPIs are positive.

## **12 Sustainability Update**

The Corporation was asked to consider signing up to the Race to Zero pledge. This is a global initiative to encourage universities and colleges from around the world to sign up to the net zero by 2050. The College would pledge to reach net zero as soon as possible and an interim target would be set within the first year of signing the pledge and set targets. The Corporation agreed in principle; however, required more detail, so it was agreed that this would be further considered by the Transformation, Finance and Resources Committee.

Chief  
Financial  
Officer

## **13 Risk Management**

The Risk Register has been considered in detail by the Audit Committee. There are three changes; one risk increased around data protection, and two risks reduced both around funding. The financial results are positive for the year-end and the College has increased student numbers and recruited strong for this academic year, so there is less risk on College income lines.

## **14 Chair's Reports**

### ***Audit Committee***

The internal audit opinion for the year concluded reasonable assurance of adequate and effective governance, risk management, and systems of internal control, for the year-ending 31<sup>st</sup> July 2023.

The ESFA Subcontracting Standards External assurance review concluded full compliance, with only one administrative recommendation to implement.

The Teachers Pensions EOYC Return concluded with no exceptions or errors identified.

A risk appetite workshop is planned for February 2024 as part of the Governors' strategic planning work.

### **Curriculum Quality and Standards**

The Chair of the Committee mentioned, in addition to the data already covered elsewhere, the key theme from their meeting was recognising the tight deadlines for the teams to action the recommendations from the QIP to drive progress.

### **Transformation Finance and Resources**

The College appointed Ridge consultants to survey the campuses for RAAC (Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete). This confirmed no risk to the College. There are some time constraints on elements of the capital build projects notably going into contract at Cauldon by December 2023, otherwise theoretically the funding is at risk.

The Corporation approved the recommendations of the Committee as follows:

- The use of the Procure Partnerships framework to appoint contractors to develop the Burslem project to stages 4 and 5.

- The costs and plans for the upper floor of F15 for inclusion in the capital work undertaken as a result of the T Level Wave 4 project retrospectively
- To bid for Salix funding subject to affordability including match funding.
- To note the acceptance of T Level wave 5 funding for Health and Science and Broadcast Media.
- To note the appointment of Russell Bolton Consulting as project and cost management, as well as contract administration for the wave 5 T Level projects at a cost of £46,207, Ellis Williams Architects for architectural and principal designer services (cost of £38,500), C2C Consulting for civil and structural services at a cost of £4,200 and JPR for mechanical and electrical services at a cost of £18,300.

Further to a special meeting of the Committee held on the 9<sup>th</sup> October 2023, an amendment to the Salix bid had been considered and it was proposed to the Corporation to approve a full bid submission for £5m funding with a College funding contribution of £2.65m. It had been resolved that, based on the return on investment, level of risk involved initially, the Corporation **approved** the speculative bid submitted as there was no legal obligation involved to commit to the project.

Finally, the Corporation was asked to approve the subcontracting arrangements for 2023/24. Similar arrangements are proposed for this academic year with NSEG and Learning Curve but with the addition of partnership arrangements with Port Vale to deliver L2 and L3 Study Programme provision to PVFC Academy Foundation Teams, and Stoke City for SCFC delivery of work experience and enrichment up to 70 cross College learners. The latter two are not strictly sub contracts but the same principles are applied to ensure robust arrangements and monitoring.

A Governor questioned the need to subcontract with Learning Curve given that the strategy is to grow AEB provision and market share. The primary reason to subcontract is to ensure that we extend our reach and offer a wider curriculum to offer the best programme and variety of delivery and to employers. This offer is complimentary and extends out of region, so its about building capacity before the College can look to deliver everything in house.

The Corporation **approved** the subcontracting arrangements for the 2023/24 academic year as detailed, including £150k to Learning Curve and amounts relating to rollover of learners.

### **Skills and Apprenticeships Task and Finish Group**

The Chair of the Group mentioned the useful Construction roadmap that was shared. The Skills Statement will be circulated when available and lots of work has been done around sustainability and growth of the Apprenticeship provision and the Group is looking forward to seeing the changes positively impact outcomes.

## **15 External Governance Review**

External Governance Reviews are part of college funding agreements under which colleges must have an external governance review every 3 years.

The Corporation was asked to approve the recommendation of the Governance Committee to appoint the AoC, with Rob Lawson to conduct the external governance review in the Spring term 2024. The review will commence in December 2023. The proposal to appoint was **approved** by the Corporation.

## **16 Governor Link Feedback**

Governors commented that the capital projects visit at both campuses was interesting and useful. The Chair encouraged other Governors to arrange to see the plans and walk the sites. Governors questioned how the increase in student numbers and anticipating more learners in years to come can be accommodated and what facilities will be needed for their learning? There may be a need to look at temporary buildings but developing the estate is the preferred option and keeping flexibility of room sizes means that larger numbers can be accommodated.

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Link Governor attended the recent Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Board meeting. They are on target with lots of activities planned in curriculum areas. It was noted that the Armistice Day has been replanned and Christmas activities are in progress. The next Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Link visit is planned for November 2023 and the Careers link and Safeguarding links visits are also planned.

**17 Review of meeting**

Some technical issues posed some complications for remote attendees. Governors are encouraged to attend Corporation meetings in person whenever possible.

**18 Any other items of urgent business**

No other items of urgent business were raised.

**Date and time of next meeting**

Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> December 2023 at 9.30am

The meeting ended at 12.10pm