



West Thames College Further Education Corporation

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporation

held at 2.00pm on Wednesday 10 May 2023
at the College

Present:	Mr S McGeoch (SM) Ms T Aust (TA) Mr A Barke (AB) Mr S Taylor (ST) Ms A Cornish (AC) Mr B Armstrong (BA) Mr A Rides (AR)	Chair CEO and Principal
Apologies:	Mr A Smith (AS) Ms C Callinan (CC) Mr L McBirney (LM) Ms T Kaur (TK) Mr S Wilcox (SW) Mr J Bryant (JB) Ms B Sandu (BS) Mr A Alimohamed (AA)	
In Attendance:	Mr J Bolt (JB) Ms C Ajit Singh (CS) Ms K Frost (KF) Mr M Michaelides (MM) Mr M Cooper (MC) Ms M Gajewska-Kopczyk (MGK) Mr S Forbes (SF) Ms V Taylor (VT)	Associate Member Associate Member Head of Governance Executive Director Resources and Student Experience Executive Director Finance, HR and Development Vice Principal, Curriculum and Quality Hounslow Local Authority Hounslow Local Authority

27/23 **Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly SF and VT. Apologies for absence were received and accepted from SW, CC, TK, AS, JB, AA, BS and LM.

KF confirmed the meeting was quorate.

There were no declarations of interest concerning items on the agenda.

28/23 **Local Authority Presentation**

Steven Forbes and Vicki Taylor from Hounslow Local Authority were in attendance to provide an update about the local area context and partnership working with the College. They explained that Hounslow had been particularly impacted by the COVID pandemic. There were very high numbers of people clinical shielding during the pandemic and

families had been impacted by the economy and job losses. In terms of education, the pandemic had impacted children's readiness for school due to the period when the under twos had spent the majority of their life shielding with their family. Hounslow did well in terms of progression and attainment but despite this, pupils were disadvantaged by the time they left school, often by a couple of years. There were a significant number of children with SEND in Hounslow and for them there were issues with the inclusiveness of schooling and a lack of opportunities once they left full time education. The number of parents choosing to home educate had increased since the pandemic. Pre pandemic, the numbers were on average 75-100 children but were currently around 400. It was proving to be a challenge getting the children back engaged in mainstream school.

A recovery plan had been put in place to tackle the issues caused by the pandemic.

A New Skills Guarantee would be launched in June and would be an opportunity for the Local Authority to work collectively with other organisations in the community to deliver what was needed for young people. It would be a call to action to employers, educators and public sector agencies to come together and build a partnership to change the prospects for young people.

Hounslow was one of 75 Local Authorities funded to develop Family Hubs. Three family hubs would be developed in Hounslow offering a range of support services for families and young people. This was tied into the Supporting Families Programme.

Governors asked what statutory responsibilities the Local Authority had with regard to education. VT said the statutory obligations were limited to safeguarding and ensuring children had access to a school place. AC explained that Section 19 of the Education Act required that children had access to education, including providing education for situations such as when children are medically unable to go to school.

Governors asked whether the New Skills Guarantee was seen as a cross political party issue. SF confirmed that it was, there was no opposition towards it.

Governors discussed the recruitment issues organisations were experiencing, unable to recruit the people they needed, yet at the same time young people weren't getting the skills needed or getting the wrong skills. They asked what the block was. SF said he thought there were a number of factors involved including issues around the Careers Advice and Guidance provided, perceptions about particular sectors, students moving out of the area and aspirations.

SF and VT left the meeting

Governors asked whether the College did enough to support entrepreneurs. The CEO said there was more the College could do in that space. It was an area that had been predominant in the Creative Industries

Governors discussed the issue of young people not being aware of the different career pathways available and whether it might in part be due to using the wrong mode of communication. Young people went online to find information, using apps like Tik Tok and were highly influenced by what they saw on social media.

Governors asked whether feedback was received from students about the quality of Careers advice they received from the College. MGK said conversations about work experience were held with students as part of the Deep Dives.

Governors discussed the New Skills Guarantee Alliance and were in agreement that the College would play an active role in it.

29/23 **Appointment of External Governors**

The Chair reported that the Governance, Search and Strategy Committee had put together a recruitment panel to oversee the governor recruitment process. It had been decided to work with Nurole on the recruitment process which had proved to be very successful. The panel had interviewed a number of potential candidates on 3 May 2023 and were making the following recommendations to the Corporation regarding appointments:

- To appoint Philip Sullivan as an External Member, joining the Finance, Resources and Capital Projects Committee.
- To appoint Tom Hayhoe as an External Member joining the Finance, Resources and Capital Projects Committee.
- To appoint Rose Turner as an External Member joining the Curriculum, Quality and Student Experience Committee.
- To appoint George Casley as an External Member joining the Curriculum, Quality and Student Experience Committee.

SM and BA summarised the skills and experience of each of the proposed governors.

IT WAS DECIDED to appoint Philip Sullivan as an External Member for a term of office of 3 years from 15 May 2023. Philip would join the Finance, Resources and Capital Projects Committee and would become the Chair of the Committee from August 2023.

IT WAS DECIDED to appoint Tom Hayhoe as an External Member for a term of office of 4 years from 1 August 2023. Tom would join the Finance, Resources and Capital Projects Committee.

IT WAS DECIDED to appoint Rose Turner as an External Member for a term of office of 3 years from 15 May 2023. Rose would join the Curriculum, Quality and Student Experience Committee and would become the Chair of the Committee from August 2023.

IT WAS DECIDED to appoint George Casley as an External Member for a term of office of 4 years from 1 August 2023. George would join the Curriculum, Quality and Student Experience Committee.

30/23 **Accountability Statement**

The CEO shared some good news with the Corporation:

- The College Nursery had been inspected by Ofsted and had retained its 'Outstanding' Grade.
- It had been confirmed that last academic year, the College had the highest achievement rates in London.

Governors congratulated the College for the successes.

The CEO explained it was a new requirement that the College needed to submit an Accountability Statement by 31 May 2023. The Draft Accountability Statement had been circulated in advance of the meeting. Governors were asked to work in groups to look through the Accountability Statement and feedback whether it reflected West Thames College and whether there was anything missing that needed to be added.

After working in groups, governors gave feedback on the Accountability Statement.

Overall, it was felt it was a good document that reflected West Thames College well and achieved its purpose. Suggested amendments included:

- The addition of transferable skills.
- An additional target about careers.
- Making green skills more explicit in the targets.
- More detail about the inclusivity of the College and the diverse student body.
- More focus on the development of entrepreneurial skills.
- Reference to the Hounslow Youth Skills and Employment Guarantee and the Hounslow New Skills Alliance.
- Having separate sentences in the first target about ESOL and SEND students.
- The addition of an Executive Summary.

Governors asked whether the College was comfortable that the targets were achievable. The CEO said she felt the targets contained appropriate ambition but were achievable. They had been based on the targets in the Strategic Plan.

IT WAS DECIDED to approve the Accountability Statement once the suggested amendments had been made.

31/23 **Review of Progress towards the Strategic Plan**

Governors reviewed progress towards the targets in the Strategic Plan. Overall, performance this year had been good and the majority of targets had been met. It was agreed to focus on targets that were flagged as amber or red:

Curriculum, Quality and Students

- Apprenticeship Income: MC reported that the apprenticeship income had grown over the last 12 months but it was still short of the target.

Governors asked why the College wasn't recruiting the necessary number of apprentices. MC said a lot of work had been carried out building relationships with local employers, but this took time to achieve results. The College needed to do better in terms of recruitment and retention of apprentices.

Governors discussed whether to modify the target, leave the target and continue as it was the current path or divert resources from something else to try and meet target. It was agreed the target should be achievable and so decided to keep it. The CQSE Committee would monitor progress towards it.

- Level 3 National Skills Fund Income: MC reported that the allocation for next year had been cut. It was agreed to reduce the target to be in line with the new funding allocation.
- Achievement rate targets for apprenticeships: The achievement rates for apprenticeships were below target but it was agreed to continue with the same target.
- Attendance: Overall attendance was slightly below target at 85%. The College worked to ensure that student outcomes were not impacted by attendance issues. It was agreed to keep the target the same at 88%.

Staff

- Expenditure on staff training and development was below target. Training of Health and Wellbeing Champions had been deferred as a result of recruitment.

- The College was on track to achieve the staff turnover target but there had been higher sickness absence than targeted at 5% compared to the target of 3.5%. Governors asked what had been done to improve the staff turnover figure. The CEO explained that the College tried to keep good staff, to support them and offer them opportunities in order to retain them.
- The proportion of BAME staff was down 3% to 55%. A number of actions had been taken to tackle this such as staff training and development and looking at different ways of recruiting.
- The gender pay gap was noted. Governors asked whether the College was comfortable with the current gap. MC said the College understood the reasons for the decision. The gender pay gap compared well to other colleges. Information about the gender pay gap would be added to the Data Dashboard for next academic year.

Estates and Facilities

- Income from commercial activity was lower than target by around £100k. The number of children in the College nursery hadn't returned to pre-pandemic levels. A plan was in place to improve this.

Governors said they would like to receive information about any green areas where there were concerns the performance might slip. It was suggested an arrow could be added to the report to identify whether the risk had increased, reduced or remained the same.

32/23 **Governance Oversight**

The Chair asked governors for their views and experience of governance at the College over the last year. The following feedback was received:

- Governors had enjoyed being part of the Corporation. There was transparency and openness with governors informed about strengths and areas of development.
- The governance structure worked well, in particular how the committees interacted with the Corporation.
- There was a good level of expertise on the committees.
- The level of information governors received was good. There was good conversation and challenge.
- The strategy days were useful and interesting.
- Moving forward there would need to be more focus on skills and the structure of the curriculum.
- It was good to have members of staff attending Corporation meeting to present on a particular topic but care was needed to ensure adequate time was spent on the Board papers.
- Governors would like the College to become an Outstanding College and would need to consider what governors could do to help achieve that. A link with the student body would be important.
- The link governor system was good and could be further developed so governors developed an ongoing relationship with their link department.

The Executive Team gave feedback on how they had found governance:

- There was a good balance of support and constructive challenge and a good balance between governance and operational. Governors knew when to ask questions and when to hold to account.
- The Executive Team felt well supported.

- It would be important to consider the level of information and ensure there wasn't duplication.
- Recruitment of governors had been positive with governors being recruited with a good range of skills and experience.
- Follow up sessions outside of meetings had been helpful.
- It would be helpful to have a greater level of engagement with aspects that involve students, i.e. attending College events.
- It would be important to consider the potential risks of the changes in the Corporation and ensure the volume of change was manageable.

33/23 Date of the Next Meeting

The dates of the next meeting of the Corporation was Wednesday 5 July 2023 at 6.00pm.