

**The College of West Anglia
Minutes of
The Corporation Board Meeting
17 March 2021
8.30 am
Remote Meeting – Microsoft Teams**

Present	Sharon Cambridge	Governor (Chair)
	Chris Ashman	Governor (Vice Chair)
	Andrew Cave	Governor (Vice Chair)
	Jacob Burton	Governor
	Dave Clark	Governor
	Sam Fletcher	Governor
	Cristiana Germeno	Governor
	Rebecca Hamilton	Governor
	Ray Harding	Governor
	Scott Leadley	Governor
	Alan Measures	Governor
	Lucy Nethsingha	Governor
	David Pomfret	Governor (Principal)
	Gill Rejzl	Governor
	Lee Smith	Governor
	Gary Webb	Governor
Roderick Watkins	Governor	
Donna Woodruff	Governor	
Attending	Paul Harrison	Vice Principal Corporate Services
	Ruth Harrison	Vice Principal Curriculum & Learning
	Stephen Halls	Clerk to the Corporation

1 Apologies

There were no apologies for absence received. Sam Fletcher had advised in advance that she would be slightly late to the meeting.

2 Declarations of Interests

Declarations of interests were noted for Roderick Watkins and Lee Smith should there be any discussions regarding ARU, the Student Governor report at Item 9 which mentioned HE issues, the School of Nursing Studies project and a possible future initiative for the College relating to the development by ARU of the new Peterborough University. Interests were noted also for Sam Fletcher with regard to her re-appointment to the Board to be covered in Item 5.

3 Minutes of the previous meeting – 9 December 2020

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2020 were reviewed and agreed as being a correct record of the meeting.

Lucy Nethsingha joined the meeting at 8.34 am

4 Matters Arising

The progress against the outstanding matters from previous meetings was summarised in the report for item 4. There were no questions or concerns raised on the items.

5 Governance Items

1. Re-appointment of Governors

The Board ratified the action of the Chair on 3 March 2021 to extend the term of office for Sam Fletcher to 17 March 2021. The Board noted the recommendation from the Search & Governance Committee and approved the re-appointment of Sam Fletcher for a further term.

2. Appointment of New Governors to the Board

The Board noted the recommendations from the Search & Governance Committee and approved the appointments of Hein van den Wildenberg (Finance & General Purposes Committee), Carolyn Rand (Audit Committee) and Sally Mitton (Employment Policy Committee).

3. Search for New Chair

The Clerk outlined the proposed process as recommended by the Search & Governance Committee.

The Board approved the proposed process for the appointment of Chair.

The remaining items of the Governance Report were covered by the Clerk. The recent use of the College Seal was noted. There was no feedback from Link Governors to be received. The Strategic Planning Morning on 21 April 2021 was highlighted, with the external speaker being Lewis Cooper, Director of the Independent Commission of the College of the Future.

6 Committee Chairs' Briefing Items:

- Performance Review & Quality Committee – The Clerk reported that the Committee continued to focus on the same areas of Technology, Apprenticeships and Maths & English. However, one new area of concern had recently arisen, that being ESOL, and a report had been considered by the Committee at its last meeting. It was noted that the teachers who usually delivered the subject very well in the classroom had been struggling with online delivery and attendance from students was dropping. Two funding grants had recently been awarded by the Combined Authority to support ESOL. Action was planned by managers to address the issues. ESOL was currently the only department graded as “inadequate” within the College. This area would be back on the agenda at the Committee’s next meeting in April 2021.
- Search & Governance Committee – The Chair commented that the Committee had considered the appointments to the Board, as actioned in the previous item. The Committee had reviewed the mid-year attendance levels and was pleased to report an overall excellent result of 93%, up on the 78% achieved in the same period last year and thanked Governors for their strong support of the meetings. Meeting dates for 2021/22 were being finalised and would be circulated by the Clerk in due course, along with a short questionnaire to gain feedback on the continued use of remote meetings in the next academic year.

The updates were noted.

7 Principal's Strategy Report

1. College Leadership Team (CLT) Restructure Outcomes – the Principal advised that two applications had been received for the two available positions on the Senior Management Team. Applicants would undertake interviews and a presentation as part of the selection process. The new senior managers would attend all Board meetings and, where appropriate, individual committee meetings as well.
2. Return to College – 62% of students had now returned to on-campus teaching for some of their lessons with circa 3,200 Covid-19 tests had been carried out across all 3 campuses by Monday 15 March 2021, with around 300 test kits having now been issued to students for their own use at home. 250 test kits had been issued to staff. A large number of staff were currently still working from home. One student had tested positive on 15 March 2021 resulting in themselves and 9 other students having to self-isolate at home for 10 days. The testing process was time consuming, required staffing resources and was costly, but provided reassurance to those returning to the campuses. Governors acknowledged the monumental effort put in by staff in managing this process.

Governors asked if there had been instances of individuals refusing the tests. The Principal responded that there been some refusals noticed. The Principal voiced his concern over the regular use of home testing kits where students were not monitored, with individuals perhaps becoming complacent over receiving a number of negative test results and then stopping the tests.

Governors asked about mask wearing and the continued use of testing. The Principal outlined the current guidance on mask wearing in internal areas, such as classrooms, workshops and corridors. Generally, there seemed not to be any major concerns or difficulties with mask wearing across the campuses. The College was expecting a delivery of 40,000 facemasks. Testing would continue in the summer term, although by then most students would have been issued with their home testing kits for them to carry out their own tests themselves.

Cristiana Germeno joined the meeting at 8.54 am

Governors asked about the choices being offered to students for the next year, especially those who were staying on. The Principal advised that some awarding bodies were adapting their processes to take into account the effects of the current situation. In some areas, different approaches would be needed on a course-by-course basis, and even on an individual learner basis.

3. ESFA Early Intervention - Governors noted the Principal's summary. Governors asked about the financial impact to the College should the non-devolved Adult Education Budget tolerance level not be reached. The Principal advised that the tolerance level was still to be set, although the sector was anticipating this to be at around 85%. Based on the College's likely achievement of around 75% for AEB activity this would result in a clawback amount of circa £220k. Further, the Principal advised that a retrospective review of the tolerance level could possibly be carried out once the sector averages were known, which could be beneficial for CWA. The Chair asked when the tolerance level would be published; the Principal advised that the sector was not aware of a date, although there seemed to be some reluctance in the level being published. The Principal advised that it was purely the non-devolved AEB funding that was a cause for concern and that there were no concerns with the activities with the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority nor with the Greater London Authority.

4. White Paper – The Principal noted the FE White Paper published in January 2021 (previously circulated to Governors). The paper would focus the strategy and forward thinking for the College, and would be considered and discussed in more detail at the Strategic Planning Morning on 21 April 2021.
5. Budget – the Principal highlighted the launch of the Community Renewal Fund, (a replacement to funding previously received from the EU). Discussions were currently taking place with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority on how they would look to use their funds, with possible opportunities for the College. The Principal noted the new Peterborough University, funded by the CPCA and to be managed by ARU, due to open in September 2022.

The report was noted.

8 Strategic Targets 2020/21 Progress Review

Governors commented on what seemed to be a high proportion of targets performing below expectation and asked if this was higher than the same period last year, and if this had been caused by the coronavirus pandemic. The Principal advised that the pandemic had certainly had a negative effect on a number of the targets, many of which would not be corrected or greatly improved before the end of the academic year, highlighting particularly overall attendance which had fluctuated throughout the year, although this was currently at 90%.

Governors considered target 1.7f regarding students classified as vulnerable/shielding and was concerned that reporting data was currently not available on this group. Governors asked similarly for target 1.7g regarding students experiencing digital poverty. Governors also noted attendance levels and asked what was being done to improve this and if the College was reviewing its future offer and enrolment processes. The Principal accepted that the data had not been reported fully or correctly on a number of targets within the report and assured governors that this would be reviewed and corrected in advance of the next meeting.

Governors enquired about the rollout of IT devices to students experiencing digital poverty and asked if all students in need had been supported. The Principal advised that with continued student recruitment and the change in the needs of students from time to time, the overall situation was forever changing. It was considered that the majority of students had now been supported with new devices. The Principal would identify how many students had so far been supported and how many were still in need of a new device.

ACTION-PRINCIPAL

Governors asked if there were any targets that would have a negative impact on the College's financial position and which could be a concern for the ESFA. The Principal advised that the financial position was stable in the current year and that the review meetings with the ESFA were positive.

Governors asked what were the main reasons hampering the College's ability to monitor student progress (referring to the targets under 1.8). The Vice Principal Curriculum & Learning advised that the changing attendance levels had an impact on the overall monitoring of students. The Vice Principal highlighted Maths and English where attendance had fluctuated greatly, although was now currently around 70%. Monitoring was being undertaken on the activity of individuals using the student portal and by progress reviews at set periods. Catch-up funding would be used to help students where they had fallen behind with their studies. The Vice Principal was expecting the accuracy of monitoring to improve although for the monitoring of adult students, further work was required.

Governors were concerned with the performance of apprenticeships in target 1.9 (a&b). The Principal responded that there were a few concerns for the College in this area. Staff had been working hard to clear the backlogs and to improve the timely achievement rates. This area was being closely reviewed by the Performance Review & Quality Committee with a report being presented at each meeting by the Head of Work Based Learning.

Governors asked about the lower recruitment number in HE (target 2.1) and if this was as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. The Principal replied that it was not related to the pandemic and to a degree some reduction in numbers was expected, based on recent trends. Further, a number of other FE colleges had seen a reduction in the number of HE students in this academic year. The College was currently in discussions with ARU's senior team looking at possible future courses to offer.

Governors were interested in the development of the flexible working policy (target 3.7). The Principal reported that this matter had been discussed recently with the College Leadership Team. The policy, once implemented, could result in the rationalisation of the estate and a reduction in the requirements for office accommodation with staff mixing homeworking with hot-desking when on site. The policy continued to be worked on.

Sam Fletcher joined the meeting at 9.10 am

Governors queried the comment provided under target 4.4 regarding the adult education budget income target and if "reasonable progress" was an accurate statement. Further, external comments had been reported of the College being unable to speedily complete a number of apprenticeships, mainly within the construction trades, such as plumbing. The Principal considered that it was necessary to remain in close dialogue with employers, adding that the College would work hard to recruit suitable teachers to the Technology faculty to enable students to progress and complete their courses and apprenticeships.

The report was noted.

9 Student Governor Report

Governors congratulated Jacob Burton for his work on the on-line event with James Wild MP, held in December 2020. Jacob Burton reported that the LRC was planning a local hustings event to coincide with the local elections due in May 2021.

Governors were concerned with some of the HE issues being raised within the report around IT (the difficulties in using the CANVAS platform), complaints around communications, assessments and feedback. Governors asked if this would result in an increase of requests to have fees returned. The Vice Principal Curriculum & Learning advised that the issue of student communications had been discussed with Roderick Watkins, Vice Chancellor, and Aletta Norval, Deputy Vice Chancellor of ARU earlier that week. All were aware of the great frustration among the students this term and were pleased that the students had been reporting their issues which were being addressed and in many cases, resolved, although one or two remained outstanding. The Vice Principal Corporate Services reported that so far, no requests had been received regarding the return of any fees paid.

Governors thanked Cristiana Germeno for her thorough report. Governors commented on the recent careers service survey, to which no responses had been received, and asked about the national careers week at the beginning of March. Jacob Burton reported that both he and Cristiana Germeno had met with Ann Compton (Careers & Destinations Manager) to review matters; it was agreed that there had been difficulty in getting engagement from students.

Governors asked about the difficulties of students with dyslexia having to pay for their own assessment test in order to then apply for Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA). The Vice Principal Curriculum & Learning advised that this matter was now being picked up by Students Services, noting that it only affected HE students.

Governors noted the that term dates between ARU and the College differed.

The Principal thanked both Student Governors for their reports, their engagement with their duties and the outside activities they had both been involved in.

The report was noted.

10 Student Union Constitution Review

The Clerk advised that the Student Union Constitution was reviewed every 5 years, or sooner should there be any urgent, necessary changes. Only minor changes were being proposed at this review.

The Board approved the proposed changes to the Student Union Constitution.

11 Management Accounts – January 2021

The Vice Principal Corporate Services noted his uncertainties on current year income lines such as commercial activities and the adult education budget, particular the tolerance level still to be published. Additional costs would be incurred as a result of the necessary Covid-19 testing that had been introduced. A budget reforecast exercise was currently underway.

Governors commented with mirth on the asset addition of a horse called 'Batman' as noted in the report.

Governors asked about the recently updated set of KPIs which had been issued by the FE Commissioner. The Vice Principal reported that the none of the indicators would affect the College's financial position or grading of financial health. The Principal added that, disappointingly, there had been no change to the KPI regarding pay costs as percentage of income, which remained at < 65%, far lower than sector norms and the College's current rate. The Vice Principal would circulate the new KPIs to governors. **ACTION-VP CS**

Governors commented favourably on the government's announcement to extend the grant support for Teachers' Pensions contributions into the next academic year. The Vice Principal advised that this financial support would be netted off against pay costs and so would help in the overall pay/income ratio calculation. Governors asked what the College's current pay/income ratio was; the Vice Principal advised that the ratio was around 70%, as expected and as allowed for in the medium-term financial plan.

Governors noted pay costs which were showing to be £117k over budget at this point in time (with teaching staff costs being £408k over budget).

Governors asked about income budgets, which were overall £925k down on budget as at January's accounts; within that tuition fees were currently £90k down. The Vice Principal commented that it had been difficult to design and launch new courses during this particular year. Governors asked for reassurance that managers had a full understanding of the positive and negative variances, and that the decisions being taken to manage budgets were informed and sound. The Vice Principal considered that there were one or two areas, such as the AEB tolerance level, where there were uncertainties at the current time, causing difficulties in planning decisions. The Principal added that there were also uncertainties with the support staff job evaluation and that its effects may not be contained in the budget assumptions that had been set.

The report was noted.

12 Applewood Nursery – Update Report

The Vice Principal Curriculum & Learning reported that she was meeting regularly with the Head of Faculty and the nursery manager to review progress and current operations. Income was currently down in the nursery and there was a need to contain costs to help the budget. More children were returning to the nursery and Norfolk County Council had agreed that 2-year olds could now be funded. Pre-school children appeared to be struggling as they prepared for school and so additional support was being given.

The Chair asked if it was possible to increase advertising for 2-year olds. The Vice Principal advised that this was not possible whilst the nursery had its 'Requires Improvement' grading.

Governors acknowledged the benefit of the training that had taken place and wanted some reassurance that in addition to regular supervision, there would be a continuation of regular training as it had clearly been a necessary factor in the improvement of the nursery. The Principal advised that training during the lock-down had been paused, but some training days had been retained which would be used in the coming weeks.

The report was noted.

13 Current Performance Data and KPIs – 2020/21

The Vice Principal Curriculum & Learning advised that she had attended various webinars with the awarding bodies to understand future requirements, and the effects these would have on college staff and the students. Support to Improve continued to focus on areas within the College that were in need of closer scrutiny, with input from the Vice Principal, the Quality Co-ordinator and the Head of HR in offering support to the faculties. Recent recruitment to Plumbing would help to alleviate some of the staffing pressures that were being experienced within the Technology faculty. ESOL was an area of concern, and it was noted that this area had just received 2 project grants from the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority.

Governors asked if the plans for ESOL would help to improve its performance. The Vice Principal advised that the curriculum was being reviewed and staff training was underway. The main cause for concern was the ability of staff to deliver their courses online. Student numbers had reduced but this was for a number of reasons, including Covid, the use of on-line delivery and Brexit.

Governors noted that within the data in the appendices there were many lines highlighted in Red. Governors asked if benchmarking data was available in order to make comparisons. The Vice Principal advised that data for last year had not been published and therefore comparisons could not be made with other colleges or the sector. The focus and priority for the College in the current year was on Intent and Progression, as per the Education Inspection Framework. The emphasis in regard to learners was to understand what the learner was moving onto and what the College had done to help them achieve that. The Principal added that he had been in discussions with other local principals regarding the possibility of sharing local data although to date this had not progressed.

The report was noted.

14 Quality Improvement Plan 2020/21

Governors commented on the high number of items rated Amber and asked if management was expecting the actions being taken to improve each particular line. The Vice Principal Curriculum & Learning confirmed that at this stage of the year progress was still being made and that Amber was the correct rating for now. In time, the actions would achieve the desired outcomes and more items rated Green would appear.

The Chair noted that the last review update of the report was at the end of January. The Vice Principal advised that the QIP would be updated at the end of the current month.

Governors asked if there were any concerns or worries that would be an issue at the next inspection. The Vice Principal assured Governors that an inspection was not imminent, but the main concern for overall college performance related to the ability to recruit and retain good quality staff, particularly within the usual areas of Technology and Maths. This was an issue facing not just CWA but the sector generally. The Principal added that NALEP was aware of this issue and indeed it had been noted in its skills development plan for the area; further, the new FE White Paper focused on FE recruitment, but sadly did not offer any solutions to the issue of staff pay. Governors asked if there was anything to be done to resolve the issue which would remain a problem for the College and would continue to impact negatively on learners; the Principal listed the work being carried out by NALEP, the considerations of the College Leadership Team and the possible need to consider higher pay differentials for certain posts. Governors asked if working with other colleges to create joint/shared posts had been considered. The Vice Principal advised that this had been considered but was found to be unworkable for a number of reasons (travelling, reporting, management etc). The Principal said that the leadership team would continue to consider this matter and would look to find better ways to engage with the workforce using both HR and Marketing. The recruitment of graduates straight out of university was possible although much training was required to give them the skills necessary to teach in a college. The possible reputational damage caused by recruiting unsuitable staff would be a concern and should be avoided.

The report was noted.

15 Review of the Risk Register

The Vice Principal Corporate Services highlighted the increased scoring for 2018(4) - Inability to Recruit & Retain High Calibre Staff, noting the comments made during the previous item. Governors considered that the controls/mitigation regarding the recruitment and retention of staff should be rated as Red, rather than Green. The Vice Principal would review this rating. **ACTION-VPCS**

Governors asked if the scoring for the Nursery 2018(1b) should be reduced as action had now been taken to resolve the concerns and staff were confident of a good inspection outcome. The Vice Principal Curriculum & Learning supported the actions and confirmed the support and encouragement that had been received from external consultants. The Chair of the Audit Committee advised that the Risk Register would be considered in detail at the Committee's next meeting on 24 March 2021.

Governors noted 2019(1) regarding increasing numbers of HE student complaints and suggested that this be revised in light of earlier conversations in the meeting. The Principal commented that the risk register referred to formal complaints being received, whereas perhaps the earlier discussions related to concerns of a more informal nature, which had yet to manifest themselves into formal complaints. It was suggested that informal complaints be considered similarly to formal complaints.

The report was noted.

16 Any Other Business

Governors suggested that there was perhaps a need for the College to review the effects of digital poverty on its learners. The Principal agreed that it was necessary to consider also the type of technology being used and how it was being used with blended approaches to teaching.

ACTION-PRINCIPAL/SMT

27 Date and time of next meeting

Wednesday, 19 May 2021 at 9.00 am.

The Chair thanked everyone for their support and engagement with the meeting.

The meeting closed at 10.42 am