

CORPORATION MEETING

MINUTES

Date: 5th November 2024

Venue: Board Room, Poplar

Time: 5.30 pm

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| **Chair** | | Rob Hull |
| **Corporation Members** | | Alex Adranghi, Stephen Blackshaw, Stephen Critoph, Ruth Gilbert, Cynthia Griffin, Mohammad Hussain, Wojciech Ilowski (from item 3), Gerry McDonald, Brijesh Patel, Philida Schellekens, Nazifa Sania, Dean Stanford |
| **Officers** | | Principal Tower Hamlets & Hackney: Alison Arnaud  Principal Havering: Janet Smith  Intrerim Principal Redbridge and Epping: Jacqueline Mitchell  Principal Rainham and BSix: Colleen Marshall  Group Director Teaching, Learning and Development: Ruth Kendrick (item 7 only)  Head of Governance – Havering: Cathy Horne (minute taker) |
| **Apologies** | | Richard Smith-Morgan, Sue Williams QPM, Neil Yeomans |
| **Director of Governance** | | Elsa Wright |
| **Item No** | **Item of business** | | |
| **PRELIMINARY PROCEDURAL MATTERS** | | | |
|  | **Chair’s Welcome and Opening Remarks**  The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly Stephen Blackshaw and Alex Adranghi who had joined the NCC Board following the merger with BSix. He reminded Members that the former Vice-Chair, Marilyn Hawkins, had resigned to enable better succession planning and recorded his thanks to her. Ruth Gilbert and Neil Yeomans had been appointed joint Vice-Chairs. The Chair explained that item 9.3.3 was being brought forward to enable a new appointee to participate in the meeting subject to his formal approval by the Board. | | |
|  | **Appointment of New Board Members**  The Chair of the Search and Governance Committee informed Members that interviews had taken place and the Committee were recommending three appointments:   * Wojciech Ilowski as a full Member of the Board and to sit on Audit Committee. * Michael Samuels as a Co-opted Member of the Property Committee * Aidan Geboers as a Co-opted Member of the Finance and General Purposes Committee   **APPROVED: The Corporation APPROVED the appointments of Wojciech Ilowski, Michael Samuels and Aidan Geboers as detailed above, each for a period of four years.** | | |
|  | **Apologies for Absence**  Apologies were received and accepted from Richard Smith-Morgan, Sue Williams and Neil Yeomans. | | |
|  | **Declarations of Interest**  Members were reminded of the need to declare any interest in any items on the agenda. No declarations were made. | | |
|  | **Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 11 July 2024**  The minutes were approved and would be signed online as an accurate record of the meeting.  **ACTION – minutes to be signed online.** | | |
|  | **Matters Arising and Action Plan**  The actions were noted. | | |
| **STRATEGIC MATTERS** | | | |
|  | **Teaching and Learning Lab Presentation**  The Group Director Teaching, Learning and Development gave a presentation on the Teaching and Learning Lab which had been part of the Strategic Intent in 2020 and had become an integral part of the colleges work. Geoff Petty was the patron and the Learning Lab had been developed in partnership with the Education and Training Foundation (ETF). Commissions for research were proposed by teaching staff and selected by SMT, with a research panel, including a representative from the ETF, approving projects on an annual basis.  Members were shown some examples which demonstrated how the Lab had a positive impact on culture and was improving teaching and learning and student achievement. All teachers (approximately 800) were involved in the supported experiments and projects had been shared nationally, including at two research summits hosted by NCC. Short research project outcomes had been published on ResearchGate in the Book of Abstracts.  Members congratulated the Group Director and welcomed the innovative methods being used to support learners and involve all members of the teaching staff. Questions were asked around peer review, AI, commercial links, correlation with results and future careers, and lasting impact. The Chair thanked the Group Director for her presentation. | | |
|  | **Presentation on Attainment**  Presenting the achievement highlights for 2023-24, the Principal Havering informed Members that the full presentation had been shared with the Curriculum, Quality and Students Committee at the meeting in October. In contrast with national rates (NR) which were still being impacted by the pandemic, NCC achievement rates continued to improve and were 5pp above NR.  Drawing Members attention to the Overall Achievement Rates by Subject Sector Area (SSA) slide, the Principal explained that the green areas were above NR with the blue areas at least 5% above. The majority of English and Maths outcomes were significantly above NR and the College had self-assessed as Outstanding in this area. Members were advised that there was a link to the supported experiments with some trauma informed work improving the outcomes of Maths students.  The Chair thanked the Principal for her presentation. | | |
|  | **CEO Report**  The Group Principal and CEO assured Members that the College remained in a strong financial position with a healthy surplus, no debt, good cash balances and outstanding financial health. Achievement data was robust and showed impressive improvements on the year before. As a result, the Executive would be asking the Board to support an Outstanding self-assessment judgement.  Although the recent budget had announced £300m for FE, there were no details as yet on what it could be spent on and it would not be available until April. As a result, it could not be used to fund an additional pay award in the current year. Employer National Insurance costs had increased by £1.7m and it was not yet confirmed whether this would be funded. A decision on BTEC pause and review was not expected until December.  Members were informed that the Executive were focused on OFSTED preparation, with an inspection expected imminently, as well as preparation of the 2025-29 Strategic Intent and the integration of BSix into the matrix structure. Narzy Khan was on maternity leave and Jacqueline Mitchell had been appointed Interim Principal – Epping and Redbridge. Alison Arnaud was the Senior Designated Safeguarding Lead. Following the departure of the Principal – BSix, Colleen Marshall had added BSix to her portfolio. | | |
|  | **Strategic Intent**  The Group Principal and CEO reminded Members that the existing Strategic Intent had been introduced in January 2020 and had been largely internally focussed. It was proposed that the new Strategic Intent, covering 2025-2029, would guide the development of the college, looking at NCC’s place in the market, employer engagement and curriculum innovation. Members were reminded that the Strategic Intent was owned by the Corporation and the proposed document was based on discussions at the strategy events earlier in the year. A further half-day ahead of the December Corporation meeting was proposed for further consideration and discussion and dates would be circulated the following day. Members welcomed the proposals and offered some thoughts and suggestions.  **ACTION – a half-day session to consider the Strategic Plan 2025-29 to be arranged. All Members to consider the proposals and provide thoughts and discussion points to the Executive.** | | |
|  | **Finance – Provisional Outturn Report 2023/24**  Presenting the report, the Group Principal and CEO confirmed that the external audit referred to in the paper was now largely complete. Members noted that the college had set a breakeven budget for 2023/24 with the final outturn projected to be a £2,120k operating surplus. The College was in a strong position with its financial health being outstanding. It was noted that the College had no borrowing and that the BSix loan had been paid off just after merger. | | |
|  | **Finance - Learner Numbers and Budget Update 2024/25**  The Group Principal and CEO introduced the report which gave an overview of enrolment to date alongside a budget update ahead of the formal Q1 review. He informed Members that the number of 16-18 learners was likely to be around 10,400, approximately 120 less than stated in the report. Members were informed that enrolment remained static at Poplar, with increases at Epping, Redbridge and the three Havering campuses. Hackney was a concern with the Hoxton Campus down by 10% and BSix by 13%. Members noted that approximately 1000 students left the borough of Hackney at the age of 16 which, alongside a declining birth rate and competition from schools, was cause for significant concern. The Vice Principal Tower Hamlets and Hackney would be meeting with Meg Hillier MP on Thursday and leading a Hackney Task Force to consider the issues and potential solutions. Proposals would be brought to the Board in the spring term.  Adult enrolment was in line with expectations in London but the non-London postcode allocation was below target with actions in place to address the shortfall.  There had been a significant increase in HE income, reflecting the revised strategy for HE delivery and recruitment.  The Group Principal confirmed that income and expenditure were in line with expectations and that the additional budgeted costs for BSix should prove sufficient based on current assessment of need. All staff had received a pay increase of 3% on 01/08/24. Apprenticeship enrolments had been strong. Members were informed that the cleaning contract with Sasse had now ended and that the agreed payments of £220k would be received before the end of December. | | |
|  | **Committee Business and Recommendations**  The Committee Chairs reported back on the recent round of meetings. | | |
|  | **13.1 Audit Committee**  In the absence of the Chair, the Director of Governance reported on the Committee held on 10 October, noting that it had not been quorate. The Committee had considered three internal audit reports, the Internal Auditors annual report which provided assurance about the controls in place at NCC, the regularity self-assessment, the Whistleblowing Policy, fraud, and the risk register and approach to risk. Scoring had been added to the Risk Register and the first draft was currently being reviewed by SMT ahead of further consideration at the December Audit Committee.  **Internal Audit Reports**  Three internal audits had taken place: Purchasing and Procurement; Apprenticeship Funding Compliance; and Sub-Contracting. The Internal Auditor, TIAA, were satisfied that the College had reasonable and effective risk management control and governance processes in place.  **Regularity Self-Assessment**  The Regularity Self-Assessment provided evidence to the external auditors of compliance with regularity requirements along with the formal statement on regularity, propriety and compliance with the funding body terms and conditions of funding. The Committee recommended the document for approval.  **ACTION – the Corporation approved the Regularity Self-Assessment for 2023-24 and authorised the Chair and Group CEO to sign.**  **Whistleblowing Policy**  The Whistleblowing Policy was unchanged from the previous year. In response to questioning, the Staff Governor confirmed that the Policy was included in the Staff Handbook and easy to find on the staff intranet.  **ACTION – the Corporation approved the Whistleblowing Policy for 2024-25.** | | |
|  | **13.2 Finance and General Purposes Committee**  In the absence of the Committee Chair, the Chair of the Corporation reported back on the meeting held on 22 October 2024. The Annual Workforce Report had been considered and the Committee had commissioned further work on staff progression as it affected different ethnic groups. The Committee had also considered the subcontracting and partnerships update, the provisional outturn for 2023-24, learner numbers and budget update for 2024-25 and the Health and Safety termly report.  **RESERVES POLICY**  The Reserves Policy, a requirement of the new ESFA Financial Handbook, sets out the framework and guidelines for maintaining adequate financial reserves for the College to ensure financial stability, support the educational mission and comply with UK Charity Commission requirements.  **ACTION – the Corporation approved the Reserves Policy for 2024-25.** | | |
|  | **13.3 Property Committee**  The Chair explained that the Committee had met on 1 October 2024 and then again on 22 October which was a joint meeting with the Finance and General Purposes Committee. They had received an update on all of the live projects including the Wingletye Lane new build, the Ardleigh Green remodelling and the Hackney project. Options for Poplar were also discussed and the Board was informed that a high-level proposal would be brought in the spring.  The annual report on sustainability showed a 20% decrease on direct carbon emissions. Scope 3 emissions made up 73% of the overall total but were largely to do with staff and student travel which was outside of the College’s control. Members congratulated the College on progress. | | |
|  | **13.4 Curriculum, Quality and Standards Committee**  The Chair of the Curriculum, Quality and Students Committee informed Members that the Committee had met on 17 October 2024 and had reviewed the final QIP for 2023-24 and progress against the KPIs as well as reports on HE, community engagement, enrolment, equality, diversity and inclusion, and Safeguarding. She noted that outcomes for students with Mental Health needs had improved by 2.5pp but were still below the national average. The gap between males and females had closed and outcomes for GCSE Maths and English were outstanding. Two of the QIP targets remained amber but the Committee were satisfied that there were good reasons for this and would continue to monitor throughout 2024/25.  **SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT FOR 2023-24**  The Chair of the Committee commented that there had been excellent achievement and that the Self-Assessment Report (SAR) was being presented to the Board for approval slightly earlier than normal ahead of the expected Ofsted inspection. The Chair of the Committee and other Members commented that the College could demonstrate additional impact particularly around the quality of teaching and learning and leadership and management and encouraged SMT to do this in the report. The Chair of the Committee congratulated the College, commenting that they were rightly proud of the achievements of the learners and staff and that outcomes, in particular, were significantly improved.  **ACTION – the Corporation approved the Self-Assessment Report for 2023-24, including the overall judgement of Outstanding, subject to the inclusion of additional impact examples.** | | |
|  | **13.5 Search and Governance Committee**  The Chair of the Search and Governance Committee reported on the meeting held on 26 September 2024. The Board appointment recommendations had been dealt with earlier in the meeting and the Committee were still actively searching for new Governors and Co-optees.  The external Board review had been considered and a draft action plan prepared which also took into account feedback from the self-assessment process. A presentation and discussion on progress would take place at the Strategy Day in the spring term.  **SEARCH AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT**  Members noted that the annual report of the Search and Governance Committee was a requirement of the College Code of Governance.  **ACTION – the Corporation approved the annual report of the Search and Governance Committee for 2023/24.** | | |
|  | **Annual Declarations of Interest Report**  The Chair reminded Members that it was important to inform the Director of Governance should any circumstances change as there was a wide range of situations where a conflict of interest could arise. | | |
|  | **Governance Matters – Use of the Seal Report**  Members noted the occasions where the seal had been used during 2023-24. | | |
|  | **Governance Matters – Written Resolutions Report**  The Director of Governance informed Members that there had been one written resolution since the last Corporation meeting. This related to the appointment of the Vice-Chairs of the Corporation. Fifteen signatories had been received and the resolution was passed. | | |
|  | **Any Other Business**  There were no items of any other business. | | |
|  | **Date of Next Meeting**  Thursday 12th December 2024 | | |

*The meeting closed at 8.20 pm*