

MINUTES OF THE CORPORATION MEETING

HELD ON WEDNESDAY 12th MAY 2021 AT 6.00 P.M. MEETING 20/04

via G. MEETS

Present: Cintha Archer, Ayas Fallon Khan, Jane Farrell, Paul Herridge, Donna-Marie Janson, Simon Lindfield, Jack Pattison, Robyn Read, Janice Robinson, Katharine Travis, Alan Walker, Brendan Ward, Simon Waters, Aldona Wheeler

In Attendance: Peter Bailey, Elaine French, Lisa Watkin-Stevens, Louise Pennington

Apologies: Belinda Dutch

In the Chair: Janice Robinson

SAFEGUARDING TRAINING:

The meeting commenced with a Safeguarding Training session given by Lisa Watkin-Stevens (Vice-Principal (Student Services)), which comprised a 20-minute presentation followed by questions.

QUESTIONS:

- Katharine Travis (Designated Safeguarding Lead Governor) highlighted a couple of points regarding concerns raised by many young women about sexual harassment and assault, and regarding FGM concerns, emphasised that the gender of the Student was not relevant and that any Student would be able to raise a concern/issue. Attention was also drawn to initiation and hazing affecting other providers in the area. She also highlighted the increasing need for mental health support and services for young people and in some cases, the interaction with Safeguarding issues, together with the consequential impact on FE and other educational providers, in terms of Staffing needs to provide appropriate levels of support for Students. Finally, recognition of the need for the effective control of social media and associated policing was noted, which was outside the direct control of providers.
- Cintha Archer confirmed the single point of access for making referrals was also in operation in Eastbourne, although it was noted that it may not be the same system in operation in Brighton and Hove, as the latter have a MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) service.
- Brendan Ward – in response to a question regarding the area in which the College would like to see improvement, it was noted that an improvement in systems/support and responsiveness was the priority. Lisa Watkin-Stevens explained the various developments which were underway, including the College's online systems to enable reports to be generated, highlighting various issues as quickly as possible, which enables better and quicker tracking and identification of issues and concerns. To date, the College has 1,662 concerns which have been raised within Safeguarding, equating to 564 Students, which means that the Staff dealing with Safeguarding matters, are very busy, and work with external agencies where appropriate, but also noting that regarding the latter, there were long waiting lists.
- Donna-Marie Janson reported on the meeting held earlier today, with the AoC and SFCA representatives regarding the need for additional support and funding for

Colleges in respect of mental health matters and emphasised the need to lobby the Government/DfE for further support. It was noted that £78M has been promised by the Government towards additional mental health support for Schools and Colleges in England and Wales.

1. Welcomes and Apologies for Absence

The meeting was quorate.

Apologies – as recorded above.

Welcomes: None

The Chair drew attention to Part II meeting, item b) and confirmed that owing to the sensitive nature of the business, regarding Senior Postholders, that Staff and Student Governors and SLT members would be asked to leave at that point.

2. Declaration of Interests:

None recorded at this time, other than those notified at previous meeting declarations and as recorded in the Register of Interests' folder.

3. Minutes of the Corporation held on 27th January 2021 – Part 1 (Non-Confidential)

The minutes of meeting were approved by the Corporation and the Chair was authorised to sign these.

4. Matters Arising and Action Points – Progress Report and Significant Risks Schedule

The Corporation noted the progress with actions to date and those which were on going or would be taken forward post pandemic and those internal audit actions which would now be taken forward following the appointment of the new Internal Auditors – refer details below in item 11.

It was noted that the action schedule would be updated to reflect any changes detailed above. **ACTION: Louise Pennington.**

SIGNIFICANT RISKS 2020/2021– the Corporation noted the risks for 2020/2021 and agreed to bear these in mind with reference to the Meeting's business.

5. Membership Matters

- a) **John McKee** – The Chair explained that John McKee had submitted his resignation owing to the fact that he now had a regular commitment on Wednesday evenings, the usual time for Varndean College's Corporation meetings. The Corporation thanked him for his support during his service. It was noted that the external Governor vacancy, would be discussed at the next Search and Governance Committee in June 2021.
- b) **Richard Seager** The Chair reported that Richard had decided to step down from the Corporation, but was willing to remain as a co-opted Member of the Audit Committee if possible. She confirmed that the S & G Committee members had recommended the change in his office (via e mail). The Corporation recognised Richard's long

service and was very grateful to Richard for his time and support over many years to the College's Governing Body. The Chair of Audit Committee, Alan Walker, also confirmed that he would like Richard Seager to remain on the Audit Committee and the Corporation approved the change in office.

- c) **Jill Arnold** – as there are now 2 external Governor vacancies and as per previous discussions regarding Jill Arnold's appointment as a Governor once a vacancy became available, it was resolved to appoint Jill as a full Governor with immediate effect for a four-year term of office, in addition to her role as member of the Finance Working Group.

It was noted that there remained 1 external Governor vacancy, which would be considered at the next Search and Governance Committee meeting in June 2021. **ACTION: Louise Pennington**

ACTION: Janice Robinson/Louise Pennington

6. Chair's Report – including developments within the FE Sector

- **GBMet** has agreed to merge with Chichester Colleges Group CCG with effect from August 2022 and Governors were reminded about the history leading to this decision (FE Commissioner issued notice for improvement re GBMet's financial difficulties, followed by consultation regarding merger options. There have been some concerns in the City regarding the potential impact from the merger, to the other local Colleges, but the Chief Executive of CCG (Shelagh Legrave), has stated that CCG was committed to maintaining and enhancing the local identity of GBMet and that the College will continue to meet the needs of the local community. The new FE Group, will have approximately 36,000 Students and in excess of 3,000 Staff. In future, Varndean College (and BHASVIC) will operate in a Sussex FE sector dominated by 2 large groups – CCG and East Sussex Colleges Group. Governors were also warned that may be potential implications for the Sussex Coastal initiative of which Varndean College is a member and the City Accord (Varndean College, BHASVIC and GBMet), with regard to the latter, the Principal confirmed that CCG has stated that they have committed to remaining as an Accord member. It is hoped that there will not be any additional competition from CCG regarding traditional Sixth Form provision (A Levels). It was also noted that the FE Commissioner had telephoned both Varndean College and BHASVIC to discuss the merger and other curriculum related issues in Brighton and Hove and a concern was raised that there may be a further withdrawal of some providers offering Level 2 Students courses, which would place additional pressure on Varndean College who does currently offer some limited Level 2 provision.
- **Coastal College Initiative** – GFEs and SFCs in Sussex have worked together preparing a submission for funding (pilot strategic development funding) for a local area initiative on researching local skills requirements within Sussex focusing upon green technology and industry. If agreed, the pilot will be implemented across East and West Sussex and CCG will lead on developing this bid further, eventually involving the establishment of a Local Skills Improvement Board and developing a Skills Improvement Plan in the green arena. The Governing Body will need to keep developments under review and if the proposals are successful, the College will need

to review its provision and decide what we might offer in terms of curriculum/qualifications relating to the Green Economy.

- **New FE Commissioner:** Referring to the CCG item above, it was reported that Shelagh Legrave (CCG Chief Executive) had been appointed as the new FE Commissioner with effect from October 2021 and hence until the new Chief Executive of CCG has been appointed, there remains uncertainty regarding CCG's plans for the future of GBMet offer.
- **FE White Paper and strengthening of Governance** – the further guidance from the Department of Education was awaited, so that the College may prepare for any changes required to its governance arrangements and requirements, including self-assessment and external review.

7. Principal's Report

Donna-Marie Janson presented her report to Governors and the contents of her written report were noted. In summary, the following points were highlighted:

a) Update on Staffing and Recruitment

- Appointed Deputy Principal – James Gordon from the College of Richard Collyer
- Permanent appointment of Vice-Principal (Student Services) – Lisa Watkin-Stevens
- Heads of School (HoS): In Summer 2020, 3HoS were appointed temporarily owing to vacancies created by retirement and promotion. In May 2021, there were 2 further HoS retiring. The permanent Heads of School appointments have been advertised internally and interviews have been scheduled for 13th May, equating to 5 people in total and including the Director of Student Engagement. The interviews will be held tomorrow, along with other mid-management interviews/appointments.
- New Director of Student Engagement (re-designated from Heads of School title) – externally advertised and appointed on 10th May.
- New Vice-Principal (VP) appointment – Lisa Watkin-Stevens was congratulated on her permanent appointment as the new VP.
- Governors welcomed the news of the various appointments and agreed that following retirements, it was also useful to have an opportunity to refresh the management team members. It was also noted that as some of the appointments had arisen owing to retirements, there was limited impact on the Staffing budget. Thanks were also recorded to Janice Robinson and Ayas Fallon Khan, who had been involved in the interview process, as part of one of the Panels and it was also noted that the College had made use of an independent member of the interview panels, by involving a Principal from another College in the VP process.

b) Update on Securing the Site following the incident at Crawley College

- The College's main building is secure with access controls at all entrances (noting that all Governors will need their current ID cards updated to provide access rights –**ACTION: Louise Pennington.**
- The College has a lockdown procedure in place
- There are still parts of the perimeter fencing etc along Surrenden Road which needs to be secure and this work is in progress together with a review of some potentially vulnerability associated with the Huts. The College has been working with a security

agent to review the site to ensure that we have the most appropriate security plan in place and at the same time, to ensure the College's insurers are kept up to date.

- The Principal also updated Governors on her tour of the site, yesterday, with representatives from Green Varndean, when she explained to them the duty of care responsibilities which the College had to its Students and Staff, in terms of site security etc.

8. Student Governors' Report

Jack Pattison and Robyn Read presented the following update to Governors:

- STUDENT COUNCIL – progress has been made to implement this within the College, so that Students have more input in to the College. There will be 2 tiers of meetings – subject meetings, whereby subject representatives (Student volunteers from each subject area classes) are able to share ideas and suggestions from class feedback at a half termly meeting. Arising from the latter, a selection of suggestions are taken forward to a second meeting (held once per term), comprising about 32 Students who then review the ideas and options. The conclusions from the latter termly meeting will then be fed back to the Student Union and then to SLT, with updates being provided to Governors.
- Lee Finlay-Gray (IB Lead) has established a focus group in respect of online learning feedback obtained from a Student Survey completed during lockdown and good practice from this will be taken forward.
- Student Wellbeing – there has been some overcrowding reported by Students in the study areas.
- Leavers Event 25th June – not sure at the moment whether A1 Students likely to be involved owing to end of year assessment, but waiting for details regarding costings for preparing food from different cultures etc (and see below).
- Bo-Min Ryu originally started discussions with Staff, for a culture and diversity event including food from different parts of the world etc, combined with charity funding raising opportunities. This was passed to the ethnicity and diversity group to take forward with the aim of incorporating this into a September 2021 Freshers' event but involving both first and second years.
- Mental Health week – a summary of activities for this week, were reported, including everyone being encouraged to wear green on Thursday, but this includes story-telling, guided meditation, photography competition. There is also a Varndean College mental health awareness page on the website.
- SU members attended a Rainbow Alliance event to see what improvements could be made at College and it was suggested that preferred pronouns could be introduced to College Student records, so that all reports regarding Students could be accurately prepared etc, notwithstanding procedures in place to ensure that confidentiality is maintained where necessary/requested by Students. Regarding preferred pronouns, the Principal advised that a policy relating to this was in the process of being drafted and that the College's systems were being reviewed to check that the addition of preferred pronouns may be incorporated. The difficulty regarding the number of genders recognised by the Department for Education, was also noted.
- SU plans and initiatives for September will include more socialisation between A1 and A2 Students.

9. Curriculum and Standards

Pete Bailey presented the paper to Corporation, the contents of which were noted and the following points were recorded:

a) Student Numbers including implications for Staffing – paper

- The impact of Covid on the timing of the Student applications' process was noted – normally finalised before Easter, but this year the deadline was extended.
- The application numbers are looking very healthy with 1,377 applications received by the May deadline (compared with 1,318 last year – at usual January deadline), reflecting an increase in numbers (mainly home Students, but with a slight increase in International Students). There has been a greater percentage of applications from Brighton Schools this year and also an increase from Students located in West Sussex.
- Governors were reminded that owing to the Accord agreement (with GBMet, BHASVIC and Varndean), the City applications are more secure, as only 1 application may be made to local Colleges.
- International Student numbers are less than that achieved 2 years ago, but a reasonable recruitment of Students from Europe is still expected, whilst understandably, Student applications from Asia are down.
- Bottom line – 1-2% growth in Student numbers, which the College will be able to accommodate owing to the addition of the STEM centre, but Staffing may have to increase slightly. SLT is also aiming to invest more time in the Year 1 tutorial programme, providing twice as much time as the current offer, in order to improve integration. It was also explained that the staffing details were more difficult to predict and that the College had taken advantage this year in the small group funding grant provided to Colleges, but currently it's uncertain whether the ESFA will continue to offer this for next year.
- Conversion rates are more difficult to assess for this September's entry, as the deadline was extended from the usual early December, to January, although subject to availability, late applications may still be accepted.
- Year 1 to Year 2 transition – from the October census date for Year 1 to the October census date for Year 2, the College usually loses about 12-15% of Students which is on a par with the national expectations.
- Teaching implications – as mentioned above, it's expected that there will need to be a slight increase in staffing hours (and costs), although the additional hours required in respect of the increased tutorial time, may depend upon the employment of some specialist tutors (who would be paid on a different (lower) rate to teaching staff. In response to a question from Governors, regarding the likely increase in FTE, Pete Bailey confirmed that it was difficult to predict at present, until contracts have been finalised, but indicated that it was likely to be in the region of an addition 1 FTE, with the final figure available in September 2021.
- Regarding the point raised by the Student Governors earlier in the meeting, in respect of pressure on Student social space, it was noted that there had been additional pressure this year as some of the social spaces had been shut e.g. canteen and common room and that this would be rectified for next year, along with the additional study space offered in the STEM centre.

b) Process of Teacher Assessment Grades – verbal report

- A 50 page guidance document has been issued to Colleges for the purposes of setting Teacher Assessment Grades per College.
- There will be no examinations this year, so all grades for GCSE and A levels will be centre assessment and at Varndean College, this will be based on the evidence per Student, per qualification from 6 or more pieces of work, 2 of which must have been completed within the period 26th March to 14th May 2021.
- Summary of the Teacher assessment process:
 - basket of 6 pieces of work are considered by the relevant member of Teaching Staff and from this a grade is calculated.
 - The process is complicated owing to the requirements to show the processes and measures utilised, taking into account mitigating circumstances e.g. scribe/extra time etc, followed by moderation prior to the final sign off.
 - All the evidence has to be provided to the regulators, in digital format, which is a significant administrative task for the College, samples of which will be tested. However, the JCQ (Joint Council for Qualifications) guidance confirms that they are content for Students' work books to be used up until 26th March, after which, and until 14th May, they may want to see digitalised versions of the evidence.
 - Pete Bailey explained the significant administrative task by using mathematics as an example, noting that there were 2 mock examinations (each of which were 20 pages in length) per Student, which totals approximately 8,000 pieces of paper to digitalise for this one subject area.
 - Once the assessments have been completed for all Students and all subjects, the College is required to complete an internal moderation exercise and the College has established Staff Panels to action this, post half term. It was noted that not all Staff were happy to assign a grade per student where there are more difficult personal circumstances e.g. difficulties experienced during lockdown and bereavements etc, hence the Panel may help to assist such assessments.
 - Week beginning 14th June Pete Bailey and the Examination Officer will enter all the grades into the online system – deadline 18th June and after this the JCQ reviews the entries and will liaise with Colleges between 23rd and 28th June requesting samples to be submitted within 48 hours eg 1 A level and 2 GCSEs per Student, representing the external moderation element of the process. Once the JCQ has completed their sampling review per College, if they are not satisfied with the assessments made, they will seek further evidence.
 - Results will be issued on 10th August and anyone may appeal a grade awarded, the process of which is free to Students this year. Guidance regarding the appeals' process has not yet been issued but it is likely to include both administrative and teacher assessment criteria. It's recognised that if many Students do challenge the grades awarded, then it will be a huge administrative burden upon Colleges and Staff and this will be an anxious time for Students, Parents and Staff. Part of the appeal process will be to check that Colleges have followed the 50 page guidance/policy document issued by the JCQ.
 - The Student guide was issued yesterday and has been circulated.
- The Governors thanks Pete Bailey for his detailed explanation which provided insight into the complicated and time consuming process involved, which it was agreed

would place significant pressure on Staff and Students. Thanks were recorded to Staff for all their hard work in taking forward the assessment requirements.

- In response to a question from governors regarding the appeals process, timeline, penalties etc, Pete Bailey explained that the priority for processing appeals would be focused on those Students who require grades for their University applications which would probably need to be resolved within a couple of weeks. Other appeals would be expected to be resolved in September. However, before the timeline can be established, the appeals process itself still needs to be issued together with confirming the criteria for appeals. Pete Bailey agreed to keep Paul Herridge (Chair of Risk Management Group) informed of potential risks to the College regarding the appeals process. **ACTION: Pete Bailey**

10. Finance

a) Financial Updates and Management Accounts

The contents of the papers were received by the Corporation and Elaine French highlighted the key aspects within the documents, including the year end projection, predicted EBITDA and financial indicators and reminding Governors that the detailed breakdown of the latest accounts had been discussed at the March 2021 Corporation meeting.

b) Property Update

Elaine French reported on the small refurbishment plans across the College for the Summer and that quotations were being sought at present. Referring to the last meeting at which the College's very limited capital expenditure budget, was discussed, she explained that SLT would have to prioritise the refurbishment projects, dependent upon the quotations received; an update will be given to Governors at the July 2021 Corporation meeting.

SLT is also working on a proposal for submitting a bid for the latest CIF grant funding (College Improvement Fund), due in December 2021. SLT would like to replace the remaining temporary huts on site, with a new building and noting that this was at a very early stage of discussion at present. Again, more details proposals will be brought to Corporation at the July meeting and that it wouldn't be necessary to convene an Accommodation Working Group meeting at this stage, to discuss the details. Currently SLT have held initial discussions with an architect and also intend to make enquiries into professional bid writers, in order to have a better chance of achieving success with the CIF bid.

Although at a very earlier conceptual stage, SLT would like to replace the huts with a more substantial replacement in terms of square metres, with a more effective use of the space available and to include some Student social space.

Governors queried the potential project size and it was noted that the maximum funding available per College was £4M.

11. Audit Committee

Elaine French provided an update to the Corporation on the appointment of the new Internal Auditor, also referring to item 15a) below – confidential record from the last Corporation meeting regarding the Internal Audit appointment. She confirmed that Wylie and Bisset had been appointed and that SLT had met online with them earlier today to discuss the draft internal audit assurance strategic plan for the next 3 years; the draft plan will go to Audit Committee in June 2021. The new auditors will also be taking forward the various outstanding internal audit items, with the aim of completing some of these, before the end of the Summer Term.

12. Policies and Other Documents

The following two policies are required to be approved by Corporation and Governors noted that there were no changes to either policy, apart from the link updates to some of the guidance and regarding the Admissions Policy – there were some minor housekeeping changes to the curriculum offer wording. It was also noted that the appendices to the policy were available on request.

The policies were approved.

a) Fees and Charges for 2021/22

- b) **Admissions Policy 16-18** – in addition to the above note, Pete Bailey confirmed the minor housekeeping changes to the entry requirements in respect of the curriculum, together with new additions e.g. the new double BTEC in Forensic Science, reflecting the demand for this type of new subject.

13. Date of Next Meeting - Wednesday 7th July 2021 at 6.00 p.m. – it was confirmed that the meeting would be held remotely via G. Meets.

Apologies for the next meeting were submitted by Katharine Travis.

14. Any Other Business

The Chair confirmed that the Mid-Term seminar scheduled for June this term and included in the Calendar of Meeting dates for this academic year, would not now be needed, but she advised that this date would be used instead for her annual 1 to 1s with Governors.

15. Part II Confidential business

- a) **Part II Minutes from Corporation Meeting held on 31st March 2021 – Internal Auditor appointment. – approved.**

At this point, Staff and Student Governors, SLT and the Clerk left the meeting owing to the nature of b) confidential meeting.

- b) **Report from SPH Remuneration Committee 12th May 2021** – only external Governors and Parent Governors remained for this item and the meeting remained quorate.

Refer separate confidential record – available to external Governors and Parent Governors only.

Chair.....

Date.....

Louise Pennington 12/05/21