

MINUTES OF THE CORPORATION MEETING

HELD ON WEDNESDAY 18th MAY 2022 AT 6.00 P.M. MEETING 21/05

IN ROOM 5, VARNDEAN COLLEGE

Present: Cintha Archer, Jill Arnold, Belinda Dutch, Thomas Dyer, Ayas Fallon-Khan, Jane Farrell, Donna-Marie Janson, Simon Lindfield, Martha Rayner, Janice Robinson, Katharine Travis, Alan Walker, Brendan Ward, Aldona Wheeler,

In Attendance: James Gordon, Elaine French, Lisa Watkin-Stevens, Louise Pennington

Apologies: Paul Herridge, John Williams, Jason Wye

Welcomes: New Student Governors – Thomas Dyer and Martha Rayner

In the Chair: Janice Robinson

The meeting commenced with a Safeguarding Training session given by Lisa Watkin-Stevens – Vice-Principal, followed by questions. Governors were reminded that the Designated Lead Safeguarding Governor was Katharine Travis and that she attended termly meetings with the Vice-Principal. It was noted that various documents would be circulated electronically after the meeting, to all Governors. **ACTION: Lisa Watkin-Stevens and LEP**

It was also noted that there were weekly safeguarding Team meetings, with a record of meetings held within the central safeguarding calendar via STS. In addition to this, Staff safeguarding training was provided regularly, which was tailor made to suit the Staff members, an annual Safeguarding Report to Corporation and regular, termly meetings, between the Designated Safeguarding Lead Governor (Katharine Travis) and the Designated Safeguarding Staff Lead; after half term the Safeguarding Leads will be meeting to commence the process of reviewing the College's safeguarding policies.

At this point the Student Governors reported that Students had been given a talk on Prevent at recent Tutor Group meetings, including information and reporting processes for Students to follow when necessary.

1. Welcomes and Apologies for Absence

Welcomes and Apologies – as recorded above

The meeting was quorate.

2. Declarations of Interest

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 30th January 2022– Part 1 (Non-Confidential)

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

ACTION: Louise Pennington

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 in due course over the year, together with the following two updates:

- Investigating sponsorship options: it was noted that a policy was being drafted which would be presented to a future Corporation Meeting – this will be presented to the July 2022 Corporation meeting. **ACTION: Elaine French**
- STEM Centre Opening: The Principal reported that a new date had been fixed for **15th September 2022** and that Professor Lord Robert Winston, has been invited and Governors were asked to put the date in their diaries. **ACTION: Governors**
- Equality Duty Annual Data Report – Staff – to be included in the July 2022 Corporation meeting papers, noting that an interim HR Director had been appointed for 6 months, to manage the HR Department, in the absence of the current HR Director. **ACTION: Principal**

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

SIGNIFICANT RISKS 2021/2022– the Corporation noted the risks for 2021/2022 and agreed to bear these in mind with reference to the Meeting's business.

5. Membership Matters - none

6. Chair's Report

Janice Robinson gave the following report to Corporation:

a) Skills Development Fund Round 2 – Proposal, IT/Digital Focus and Governance

Governors were reminded from previous Skills Development Fund reports that all Sussex Colleges were working collaboratively to develop new courses for the purpose of meeting the FE skills needs within the local economy, based on research led by the local Chamber of Commerce and input from local employers.

It was reiterated that following the first round of funding, the local Colleges were successful in bidding for funding to support green technological developments, such as the Carbon Literacy project.

The Chair reported that Round 2 was underway and the College, had submitted a bid (along with other Sussex Colleges) to establish and develop digital centres of excellence, focusing upon establishing and progressing digital skills. If successful the College will utilise the funding towards acquiring the necessary IT hardware and software to take forward the digital skills project in line with the College's Strategic Plan. Regarding the funding offered, the Sussex consortium was able to submit a bid overall totalling approximately £1M, of which Vardean College's proportion is £188k.

Secondly, Sussex Colleges are developing their collaborations with local employers via the Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs). However, it was reported that a governance

process for managing this work, had not yet been established for individual College Boards, noting that currently the initiatives relied on Colleges' Principals/CEOs to participate in discussions and make decisions, within the consortium of Colleges via FE Sussex. Investigations are underway to resolve the best way forward for all Colleges with regard to ensuring that governance requirements are met and that Management are held to account. College Chairs have discussed the matter and agreed that specific governance processes should be investigated so that strategic (course options etc) and financing decision making is discussed and approved at Board level. Accordingly, Colleges Chairs and Principals/CEOs will be meeting next week to discuss this at a workshop and they will be considering different governance options and frameworks. Once this has been taken forward and discussed at Colleges' Board, proposals will be raised with Government for input. At this point the Corporation considered the matter and discussed various suggestions; it was agreed that the governance aspects should be kept as simple as possible and within each College Board's remit, rather than establishing an additional layer of governance for the Sussex Consortium of Colleges via a forum structure etc, and without the need for the individual Colleges within the Sussex Consortium, to cede authority to an overarching Board/additional governance structure.

The Chair agreed to raise this point at the workshop and report back to the Board after the workshop had taken place. **ACTION: Janice Robinson**

It was also queried how much funding per Student would be granted and whether the grant allocation would be influenced by a College's subject focus and priorities. The detailed per Student funding was not known, but it was recognised that the larger GFE Colleges, would receive a greater proportion of the funding compared to other smaller FE Colleges. However, noting the importance and relevance of digital skills across all subjects including those at SFCs, all will have the need for a centre of excellence, hence the focus in the second round of funding upon Digital Skills, rather than areas which might only be relevant within some of the consortium of Sussex Colleges. Reference was made to the first round of funding achieved for carbon literacy and noting that some Colleges in the Sussex area, including Plumpton and the Chichester Group, which had ecosystems courses and hydrogen technology respectively, had received a higher bid allocation, compared to Varndean College.

b) Appraisal of Outgoing Chair (pilot)

Following discussions held last term, the Chair informed Governors that in order to comply with the requirements of the AoC Code of Good Governance, a trial Chair appraisal questionnaire would be introduced this term, based on the outgoing Chair. The intention will be to issue a 5 point questionnaire to Governors and SLT members in the first instance.

ACTION: Chair/S & G Committee

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 aspects were highlighted and additional points and questions were also recorded:

a) **Copy of Annual Strategic Conversation**

The verbal report given at the last Corporation meeting was referred and the contents of the formal letter from the DfE were noted, including reference to the College's strengths, areas to develop and support provided by the Department, recording the discussions held by the DfE and the College at the meeting last term.

It was noted that this would be an annual event.

b) **Nationally Agreed Pay Negotiations Update – It was resolved that this part of the minutes would be transferred to confidential Part II Minutes – refer separate record**

7. Student Governors' Report

Thomas Dyer and Martha Rayner introduced themselves and reported the following update to Governors:

Thomas Dyer who is studying A Level Psychology, Law and English, stated that he was interested in ensuring that all Students, whatever their background, culture or ethnicity should always feel included within the College community. He added that he would like to introduce a policy dealing with cultural sensitivity and embracing changes to ensure that all Students feel welcome, notwithstanding the already very welcoming College community.

Martha Rayner who is an IB Student, informed the Corporation that she would like to focus upon two main issues during her term as a Member of the SU Executive, including the environment and equality. It was noted that she is a member of the Student Climate Group, so intended to raise increased awareness of the key issues. Regarding equality, Students recognised the supportive network at College which compares very well against other Colleges. She said that she would like to see ongoing Student mental health support and personal development, in order to improve the overall College experience for every Student.

SU Activity and Events:

- a) A Cultural Appreciation Day is being organised, with the intention of raising the community spirit combined with fund raising activities and it is planned that this will be launched in September 2022 in readiness for the new Year 1 Students. It's hoped that Students will be able to share their own cultures which will also help improve community relations. In response to questions from Governors, the Student Governors noted the suggestions made that food and music were always very popular options and offers of help from Governors were noted, which the Student Governors welcomed. The Student Governors confirmed that to date the 3 main activities identified for the event, were food, music and fashion. Other events are being planned before this, with the aim of generate funding for this event.
- b) Environment Group event is planned to raise further awareness of the various "Green" issues, including encouraging participation in the Big Plastic Count.
- c) The SU is working on proposals to overhaul and improve communications with Students, in addition to the existing weekly Student bulletin, including an online communication forum to post SU updates, extra curricula activities and other information which may be of interest to Students. It's intended that the forum will be managed by Students, particularly those interested in a career in journalism.

9) Curriculum and Standards

The Deputy Principal and Vice-Principal updated Governors as follows, referring to the respective meeting papers, the latter of which were taken as read:

a) QIP Review

Reference was made to the QIP reported to Governors earlier in the year which has since been updated to the version included in the latest meeting papers and James Gordon highlighted the targets and progress made, including commentary, since the targets were set at the beginning of the year, focusing on the 3 main operational areas – Curriculum (JAG), Student experiences (LJY) and resources (DMJ).

b) Student Application Numbers

Lisa Watkin-Stevens reported to the paper and reminded Governors that the figures in the paper had moved on as there were still some late applications which were still being processed. There has been an increase in the number of applications, but with a slight reduction in applications from both Dorothy Stringer and Varndean School.

The restrictions arising from Covid were noted including limitations to the College's liaison visits to local schools, which may have had an impact on applications from each of the various schools. During this period, the College has been able to carry out some liaison visits, but has also focused on events for prospective Students on the College site.

Following a question from Governors querying the numbers of applications per school, the Vice-Principal highlighted the applications analysed via postcodes rather than feeder schools, which showed more clearly where Students lived and their journeys to College.

The application numbers won't be finalised until later in the year as the College continues to carry out interviews for those interested in enrolling at Varndean College.

The challenge of managing the increase in numbers on the existing site was highlighted too but SLT were confident that the numbers enrolled would be catered for, within the College's existing estates.

c) Curriculum Costing Model

The Deputy Principal referred to the Costing Model and drew attention to the following:

- Reviewing the site to ensure effective utilisation within the block timetable to identify any further efficiencies which could be considered.
- Monitoring of spaces in curriculum areas – to ensure new Students are allocated where there are spaces, to manage costs and improve efficiencies.
- The potential increase in Student numbers for next year will bring in additional funding, but noting that this may well be offset by the increase in Staff pay, once the national pay award has been agreed.
- The curriculum costing analysis is enabling SLT to identify which subjects provide good value for money and to identify where applications are increasing and may need to consider adding another group.
- Next year SLT will review how much flexibility is available for Students wishing to make late subject changes. Last September (2021), 330 Students changed their

programmes and it was noted that each year the numbers of Students wishing to change their subjects, was difficult to predict. It has been made clear in the College's Admissions Policy making it clear that should Students wish to change their programmes, this won't be guaranteed and only if there's space to do this. Going forward SLT will aim to manage this aspect more closely, and it was emphasised that enrolling Students on the right courses for them at the outset, was a key priority, without impacting retention; hence the importance that Students should attend open evenings and other College events (taster sessions etc) and have a detailed discussion with Staff at interview etc.

- The new Students' day in July was noted at which emphasis will be placed upon Students being on the right programme and action to be taken to facilitate any changes before September, to avoid late changes.

At this point the Deputy Principal referred to the costing dashboard and drew attention to the summary expenses in key areas, together with the forecasting spreadsheet for year 1 and year 3.

- Year 1 – the conversion facility will be used based on course applications and historical trend analysis. A history of the last 10 years, shows that as a percentage of Students which apply for a subject and then enrol in September each year, gives an average of 82% conversion rate. The conversion rate is higher in Year 1.
- SLT has also investigated projecting trends for each course offered in terms of numbers increasing or reducing (year 1) – and the analysis shows that most areas are positive (green shading), with very few red areas.
- Costing – each lesson delivered by Staff costs £1,600 and a 2% pay inflation has been incorporated into this calculation, which may increase subject to the outcome of national pay negotiations. This new facility enables SLT to cost courses and also generate forecasts basing on the number of groups and periods required to then determine overall expenditure per subject. The rationale will then lead to determining subject earnings and hence calculate income per lesson, per Student etc Attention was drawn to the costings dashboard and the summary expenditure data, noting that the current figures had been compared with last year's data.
- Staffing costs' forecasting for Year 1 – projected to increase by £130K owing to additional Students/classes, which will be offset by the increase in income funding rate (and additional Students) predicted to be approximately £800K for next year, notwithstanding that there will be an impact owing to lagged funding payments from the ESFA (although increased funding will be paid in year).
- To gain the increased funding, reference was made to the requirement for the College to add 1 hour per week to each Student's timetable, thereby increasing GLH by 40 hours (guided learning hours) to 580 and noting that this will be met via enrichment/personal development options. The additional funding will provide for the associated increase in staffing required, including management time.

At this point Elaine French provided some explanation regarding the financial details incorporated into the costing model:

- A contribution rate per course has been calculated so that costs for each course can be demonstrated and she explained the reasoning and rational supporting this, noting that the main aim was to be able to establish the contribution per subject,

calculated after the deducting of teaching costs to assist the College's future planning. Broad assumptions were applied based on average funding, average costs etc, rather than applying specific course costs to the contribution rate. A report will be presented to the next Finance Committee in June.

James Gordon referred Governors to the Year 1 figures and quoted the Criminology subject line showing that there were 224 applications. The College will aim to accommodate 9 groups of 22 Students per class, representing an 85% conversion rate. This has meant an increase by 2 groups with associated increase in Staff costs, but the overall course is predicted to be more efficient with the contribution rate for criminology improving from 0.62 to 0.65 for next year.

On the schedule the red shading, highlights the set size if it's below the optimum of 22 Students. The Deputy Principal drew Governors' attention to the pinch point subjects, including engineering and computer science, both of which would need to extend to a 3rd Group if more Students are enrolled.

There were also one or two courses which had a lower than average set size, which will therefore have a lower contribution rate and SLT will continue to monitor the applications. However, it was explained that it was accepted that some subjects were included in the overall curriculum offer, as they attracted Students to the College. In response to a question from Governors regarding the subjects within this category and the Deputy Principal reported that 3D graphics had between 13 and 14 Students at present and also noted that some IB classes were smaller than the average.

The courses highlighted in dark orange were noted being those which were being discontinued (eg Applied Science – 12 applications last year and only 11 applications this year), whilst the yellow highlighted subjects were new for next year such as A Level PE and Level 2 Sport. Despite some courses no longer being offered, it was noted that there were several alternatives, such as other Science courses. Business Studies double BTEC will also be discontinued as not only were numbers below average (15/16 Students last year and reduced to 13 Students in the second year), the subject also required higher levels of staffing. The College will continue to offer the single Business Studies BTEC course. The need to balance efficiency whilst at the same time provide a broad curriculum which meets Students' needs.

Following a question from Governors regarding the calculation of the contribution rate, Elaine French explained the broad process, and also referred to the Criminology course as an example. James Gordon reported that the income calculation was based on all income per Student. It was noted that a more detailed explanation and discussion will be held at Finance Committee

As reported earlier, Corporation noted that the details would be discussed further at the next Finance Committee.

In response to a question about the introduction of new T levels, James Gordon advised that the College had plans to introduce a T level in Design and Craft wef September 2023 and that the College's Visual Arts' Lead had met with the ETF (Education and Training Foundation) representatives on this. He agreed to include an update on

BTECs/T Levels in his curriculum report at the next Corporation Meeting. **ACTION:**
James Gordon

d) Careers Update

Lisa Watkin-Stevens referred to the paper and confirmed that SLT used the Gatsby careers' benchmarking data for the College's framework; the 8 career benchmarks were noted as listed in the paper, together with a record of what the College is doing to meet the criteria.

The College's careers' programme which is based upon Students' interests and aims, has been substantially developed over the last year and has been embedded into the tutorial programme. It also runs through the curriculum schemes of work and is incorporated into the curriculum self-assessments too.

Information from Students for the careers' programme, is obtained during the admissions process, so that the programme meets all Students' needs as soon as they are enrolled at College. Careers preferences and interests were then reviewed with the Student during their enrolment interviews, to ensure that the record of Students' interest was up to date and would be used to direct Students to relevant work experience options and career talks.

The Vice Principal also referenced the College's employer engagement initiatives including the festival of progression, held last Summer, which was well attended by Students. On the day, there were 1,537 interactions with employers. Following this event, the new Staff Careers Advisor/Co-ordinator has developed some spotlight events, providing a more bespoke programme of careers related information and events for Students. To date, this has proved to be popular with Students – this academic year so far, there have been 695 interactions with employers arising from spotlight careers events.

All Year 1 Students are offered work experience opportunities which are allocated for a week at the end of term and will also be offered at the beginning of the next academic year; there are also work placements available over the Summer which are organised for interested Students.

Students will have the opportunity to return to Sussex University for their Higher Education day, which is open to the whole Year 1 cohort who will gain an understanding of higher education and talks on subjects such as how to complete your personal statements. The University staff also provide guidance for Tutors on writing good references and assisting Staff in the best ways to provide support to Students, preparing their personal statements.

The Vice-Principal referred to the section in her report on careers' appointments, reporting that the wording was misleading and would be amended as the number of "appointments" given as 1,916, actually related to "interactions" with the Careers Department rather than specific "appointments".

Other career related information offered to Students, include workshops and tutorial talks, which also help in motivating and raising aspirations.

The Corporation thanked the Vice-Principal for her report and congratulated the College for its excellent progress in taking forward careers' development for Students, with the wide range of opportunities and experiences.

At this point the Student Governors reported that from a Student perspective, the Careers Department were in a good location to access careers' information and support (near the Library and Study area).

Thanks were recorded to the Deputy Principal and Vice-Principal for their papers and reports.

10. Finance

The Vice-Principal (Resources) presented the following to the Corporation:

a) Financial Updates and Management Accounts for the period 9 (to end April 2022)

- i) Commentary to Management Accounts**
- ii) Detailed Income and Expenditure**
- iii) Balance Sheet**
- iv) Forecast Cashflow**

- The commentary confirms very little movement since the last set of Management Accounts were issued.
- The budget preparatory work is on-going, with the final draft going to Corporation next half term, via Finance Committee
- Account will be taken of the DfE benchmark figures in the next set of Management Accounts.
- The only major change to the forecast figures was highlighted, relating to the income from adult education, which has not met the budget set last year. This was not unexpected owing to the impact from Covid, but has only had a small impact on the overall forecast.
- Governors asked about the impact on the International Student income and it was noted that it continued to be challenging to find sufficient host families in the local area. The outcome of this is that the College has had to close applications in respect of short-term International Students and instead have prioritised the single term and full year applications. Adjustments have also been made to the travelling criteria for Students based with host families, and account is now taken of local transport, whereas prior to this, there was a 30 minute walking distance limitation. The Principal informed Governors that the applications from International Students remained strong and that improvements have been made to some extent following on going work with host agencies. The College has also benefited from Students from Switzerland via an arrangement with a Swiss School.
- In response to a question about depreciation costs of £72K (more than budgeted) set in last year, Elaine French explained that this reflected a year end accounting adjustment in respect of capital expenditure.
- The Governing Body congratulated the Vice-Principal for managing the cash flow carefully during the usual February/March funding difficulties, noting that the College had remained in a positive cash position, despite this.

b) Property Update

Since the last report to Governors at the March 2022 meeting, when the architects presented the draft accommodation master plan, Elaine French confirmed that an update will be provided at the July 2022 Corporation meeting. It was noted that the Plan was progressing so that the College will be ready when the next round of ESFA funding is made available to SFCs.

Regarding the annual Summer works, the Vice-Principal advised that the proposals were being reviewed by the Site Manager to ensure that all essential works have been identified and currently this is likely to cost in the region of £60K, which has been included in the draft budget.

11. Policies and Other Documents

- a) **Tuition Fees and Charges for 2022/23** – minor changes relating to international charges which now apply to Students from the EU, owing to Brexit and secondly details regarding Adult Education refunds have been clarified via the appendix to the policy.

The revised document was approved by Corporation

b) Admissions Policy 16-18 – entry criteria

James Gordon explained that this policy had been re-written with the main change based upon clarifying the programme of study to include non-qualification activity (16-18 enrichment programme for next year).

Other wording updates included additional wording added in respect of EHCP (Students with an Educational Healthcare Plan) and disability matters. A diversity statement has also been added.

The Policy format has also been re-structured in order to better align this with the College's timeline in respect of admissions – application process, enrolment process etc.

Broadly the entry criteria have seen limited change, although there have been some updates in respect of subject specific requirements (included within Appendix 1).

The revised policy was approved by Corporation.

c) SU Constitution – revision

Lisa Watkin-Stevens summarised the various revisions recorded in the document as tracked changes, noting in particular the minor changes to reflect the rebranded core studies as tutorials and updating SMT references to read SLT (Senior Leadership Team).

Some of the language has also been revised with a focus upon gender neutrality.

Regarding references to Student Governors, the wording has been revised to read - must identify as male or non-binary or female or non-binary etc.

The Student Governors confirmed that the SU Executive had revised and agreed the changes last week. The revised document was approved.

d) New SEND Policy

Lisa Watkin-Stevens summarised the revised policy including the new policy statement which provides clarity on the College’s commitment to learner support and to Students.

The policy also records the relevant legislation and provides definitions, roles and responsibilities etc of various staff new roles, and a paragraph relating to EHCP and exams access details, together with a more detailed referrals process.

Reference was also made to the information capture in respect of Students’ educational needs, rather than waiting until enrolment. Information is now taking place at the application stage after which relevant Students are invited into College and a support plan is devised in readiness for the September start, including staffing requirements.

The Vice-Principal explained that the College had introduced a triage service so that Students had discussions with the most appropriate member of staff depending upon their specific needs, as identified via the initial application process. The revised policy was approved by Corporation.

12. Date of Next Meeting: Wednesday 6th July 2022 at 6.00 p.m. – room 5

13. Any Other Business

Reminder mid -term seminar – 7th June at 6.00 p.m. until 7.30 p.m. which will be on the subject of Ofsted and the Principal has organised a speaker for this event, to which all Governors were encouraged to attend. **ACTION: Governors**

On the subject of Ofsted, the Principal reported on feedback from S7 Colleges which had undergone an inspection on the new Ofsted framework, including Collyers and Reigate, noting the importance placed by Inspectors on support for high needs students and Students’ destinations.

In response to a question from Governors, the Principal agreed to provide an agenda for the Seminar with a link to the 12 page Ofsted summary, from the website (noting also that the framework would be revised during the summer). **ACTION: Principal**

The Chair of Audit Committee referred to the final versions of the Risk Management Policy and the Information Security Policy and it was confirmed that the final versions would be presented via the Audit Committee in June and then once endorsed, circulated with the Corporation meeting papers in July for final approval. **ACTION: Elaine French**

14. Part II Confidential business – refer separate Part II Confidential record.

15) Enclosures: noted remaining meeting dates for the 2021/2022 academic year to be included in Governors’ diaries.

Chair.....

Date.....

Louise Pennington 18/05/22