

MINUTES OF THE CORPORATION MEETING

HELD ON WEDNESDAY 22nd MAY 2024 AT 6.00 P.M. MEETING 23/04

IN QUAD 4, VARNDEAN COLLEGE

- Present: Nick Armstrong, Jill Arnold, Paul Herridge, Donna-Marie Janson, Ruth King, Simon Lindfield, Folayemi Oyelola, Lysander Pierce, Alan Walker, Brendan Ward, John Williams, Jason Wye
- In Attendance: James Gordon, Elaine French, Lisa Watkin-Stevens, Louise Pennington and Sarah Johnson EBR Reviewer (Stone King) – online via G. Meet.
- Apologies: Jodie Braham, Danyalle Brinsmead, Ayas Fallon-Khan, Keith Perera, Aldona Wheeler
- Welcomes: Student Governors – Folayemi Oyelola and Lysander Pierce
Sarah Johnson, Stone King
- In the Chair: Jill Arnold

1. Welcomes and Apologies for Absence

Apologies and Welcomes – as recorded above.

The meeting was quorate.

In response to a question from the Chair, all present agreed to recording the G. Meet for reference purposes.

2. Membership Matters

a) Outcome of Student Union Elections and Appointment of New Student Governors

The Corporation noted that Folayemi Oyelola and Lysander Pierce had been elected as the new Student Governors, succeeding Cizzie McGuinness and Aisha Al najjar, and their appointment as the new Student Governors was approved for a 1 year term of office commencing with immediate effect, until their successors are elected next year.

3. Declarations of Interest

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

4. Minutes of the Corporation held on 20th March 2024 Part I Main Business

The minutes of the meeting were approved by the Corporation and the Chair was authorised to sign these. **ACTION: Louise Pennington/Chair of Governors**

5. Matters Arising and Action Points – Progress Report and High-Level Risks’ Schedule 2023/2024

The Corporation noted the progress with actions to date and those which were on the agenda, in progress or would be taken forward in due course. The following points were recorded:

- James Gordon confirmed that regarding the sharing with parents, of some elements of the latest SAR, this would be included in the correspondence to Parents regarding the Ofsted Report. **ACTION: JAG**
- Governors were reminded to inform the Chair of Governors, if they were interested in joining any of the Corporation’s Committees. **ACTION: Governors**

At this point Folayemi Oyelola joined meeting

In response to a question from a Governor regarding critical incidents within the sector, the Principal confirmed that the College had a critical incident plan in place for various events, with advice also having been taken into account from the sector and the South East Prevent Team. She also confirmed that the plan sets out actions to be taken per incident and confirmed that going into lockdown wasn’t always the most appropriate action. It was agreed that all Staff should be reminded of the Plan and action to be taken should an incident arise. Nick Armstrong offered to share information regarding critical incidents in light of his experience, which was welcomed by the Principal. **ACTION: Principal/Nick Armstrong**

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

HIGH LEVEL RISKS: The Chair drew Governors’ attention to the high-level risks, reminding all to bear the risks in mind, during the various meeting items.

6. Chair’s Report

Jill Arnold referred Governors to her written Report and drew attention to the key headlines. She highlighted the following aspects:

- Attending the recent Brighton and Hove Secondary School Chairs’ meeting had proved useful as common issues relating to Student attendance and behaviour, post Covid, were reported and discussed.
- SFCA Governance Seminar on External Board Reviews, given by Ron Hill, was also very useful and in addition to Jill Arnold attending, the Principal and Clerk had also joined the webinar. Recommendations from this would be discussed and taken forward via the S & G Committee, in due course. Governors were also reminded that other Governors were welcome to sign up to the AoC and SFCA governance webinars/training events should they be of interest, noting that these were circulated to all Governors.
- During the second half of the Summer term, the Principal’s appraisal would be taking place and the Chair had emailed external Governors about this to provide feedback/comments.

- College Chromebooks: Governors were informed that if they would prefer to use their own devices, they'd be welcome to return College Chromebooks which would be reallocated in the College. IT would be able to set up Governors' own devices accordingly. **ACTION: Governors/LEP**

The Report was received by the Corporation.

7. Principal's Report - Executive Summary

The Principal presented her Report to the Corporation the details of which were noted:

a) Feedback from Sector meetings including annual Strategic Conversation 26/4/24

- Annual conversation but may become termly at some point, based on risk assessment.
- Since the introduction of the Skills Act, there is a strong focus upon skills, including seeking assurance on how the College meets its legal requirements and work undertaken in relation to the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP). At this point, Governors were reminded that the Principal was the Sussex Colleges' representative on the Local Skills Improvement Board.
- Useful opportunity for the College to discuss the various financial challenges the costs associated with inclusivity (including high needs students and additional needs) and the foundation provision (those Students who stay on for a 3rd year which broadly equates to £250K in lost income as 3rd year Students attract much reduced funding). The College is acting as a case study for the SFCA in order to provide recognition and justification for additional funding, so that the College and others in a similar position, are not financially disadvantaged owing to their inclusivity.
- At this point reference was made to the Individual Learner Record (ILR) which has become complex owing to the many types of provision and qualifications. SLT will be investigating whether it's worth appointing a consultant to review the ILR to ensure that the College's funding is maximised. In response to a question from the Governors, James Gordon confirmed that the first ILR entry for a new Student would be in September/October and that this was updated throughout the year and re-submitted; destination information is also included in the Record which the ESFA will reference when it publishes Colleges' destination data.

b) Accountability Statement

The new document was noted and that this was required to be updated annually. It's due to be published/submitted to the regulators in July and the final draft will be presented to Corporation at its 10th July Meeting for approval. Governors are invited to comment on the draft.

There is reference within the document on how the College is meeting the new Skills Act and information about meeting local skills needs and the LSIP.

Attention was also drawn to the following:

- Page 10/11 – collaborative projects with other Sussex SFCs, including working with FE Sussex on unique projects in the area enabling access to the Local Skills Improvement Fund for equipment etc, including creative/digital media (bespoke project providing modular programme of short courses), employability app for Students, immersive classroom work due to be installed in late July ready for September.
- Targets are due to be reviewed each year, with progress/completion recorded.
- In addition to the broad explanation regarding mapping of the College’s main curriculum, the Adult Education provision details are also included taking into account the slight change in strategy in this area and mapping this to the LSIP – meeting local and national needs.
- Reference is made to the latest Ofsted Report, noting that the College received a “reasonable” grade in respect of Skills, which reflects the fact that Varndean is a SFC and a significant part of the curriculum (being A Levels/IB) is not planned by employers. The College is developing its curriculum mapping incorporating liaison with local employers to take into account local needs associated mainly with the College’s BTECs and some A Levels, notwithstanding that A Levels are prescribed by the examination boards.
- In response to a question from the Corporation regarding the College’s Adult Education proposed restructuring, it was confirmed that currently this was at the consultation stage which closes on Friday this week.
- Local Needs Duty has also been referenced in the document noting that Ofsted validated the College’s reasonable contribution to both local and national needs, with further work to be done by the College to improve this further. The College has successfully engaged with employers, stakeholders and students, compared with engagement pre the Skills Act.
- Following a request from Governors regarding the comment on page 2/3 on high levels of deprivation in Brighton and Hove, clarification was sought on this with reference to the recent local public health reports. SLT agreed to review this and update the wording as necessary. **ACTION: SLT**

In conclusion, subject to the points raised about, the Corporation gave its support for the document, noting that the final draft would be presented at the July Corporation meeting for approval, prior to submission and thanked SLT for their work on this. **ACTION: SLT**

c) HR – Update on national pay negotiations

The Principal advised that there was nothing to report at this point but that she’d keep Governors updated when there is progress.

At this point Jason Wye (Governor (Teaching Staff category and NEU representative (also on the negotiating committee), reported that there had been a meeting between NEU and the SFCAs and discussions included Staff workload commitments.

8. Student Governors’ Report

The new Student Governors, Folayemi Oyelola and Lysander Pierce, introduced themselves and provided the following update to Governors on various activities involving the SU and Student Governors:

- SU Elections – highest votes cast this year compared to previous years and there were also a significant increase in the number of candidates too, which is encouraging as more Students are participating in the election process. SU Executive has been in post for 1 month.
- SU Executive – handover has taken place from the outgoing SU Executive.
- The new Executive will be focusing on a number of areas including social media marketing and to date this has resulted in the creation of a Tik Tok account. Links have also been created with Staff and relevant SU Officers.
- Other SU priorities which have already been communicated to SLT, include canteen improvements and managing identified micro-aggressions in College relating to inclusivity.
- Initial discussions regarding the canteen improvements, have been held with SLT
- SU Executive is also aiming to look at seeing some changes within the Library – to incorporate some social spaces where group discussions etc could be held, rather than just quiet space.
- Attended Citizens Assembly meeting and aiming to become more involved within this organisation. It's hoping that with further work with Citizens U, the pilot campaign which has resulted in mental health funding for local Secondary Schools, will be extended to SFCs.
- Student Events – the SU is working on a number of Summer term events including a Dance for Mental Health event, picnic etc
- The Student Council is meeting tomorrow and the canteen improvements will be discussed here, together with the planning for the Leavers' Event etc.
- Further improvement to the quad areas is being investigated by the SU Executive Environment Officer in terms of planting options, with the possibility of introducing a September planting event.
- Student feedback form – the form has been revised to encourage more Students to feedback.

9) **Lead and Link Governor Update**

The Chair introduced the new item and informed the Governing Body that the intention would be to have a standing item on the Corporation agendas for some of the Lead/Link Governors to provide regular updates and assurances in respect of each Lead/Link area.

a) **Nick Armstrong SEND Link Governor**

It was noted that as Nick Armstrong had only recently been appointed as the SEND Link Governor, apart from the Governors' Link Meetings in February, he hasn't yet met with the Staff SEND lead, but this is due to be set up in the next few weeks; therefore, a report will be given at the next meeting.

b) **Jill Arnold EDI Link Governor**

Jill Arnold reported that since her recent appointment as the EDI Link Governor, she had met with George Marshall (Director of Student Engagement), to discuss EDI matters. The following points were noted:

- Jill met with George Marshall, who has responsibility for coordinating EDI work in the college last week and we discussed the activities in this area and how this fits in with George's general role in the college (fits well with enrichment coordination role)
- George works with a team of staff EDI champions who meet half termly to discuss data and issues and respond to these
- There are student groups within college to promote EDI, such as the Ethnicity, Identity and Culture group and Pride Group
- There have been events to promote EDI with students, such as Culture Day
- The tutorial programme is used to promote EDI issues
- EICDG students met with Police and participated in a Listening Circle as part of the Sussex Police Race Action Plan Insight and Deliver (RAPID) board
- There is an EDI section on the staff intranet to support staff with EDI issues, which has info and links to issues such as race, culture and faith, LGBTQ+, disabilities, age
- George has completed training with staff on EDI issues, including the use of inclusive language
- The college is linked into external networks to support its work
- George's priority for the next year is working with boys, particularly boys of colour, as these are underrepresented currently in support groups
- George would be happy to contribute to a mid-term seminar or produce an on-line training video for governors, in the future.
- Governors discussed the option for EDI training (including inclusive language/current issues) and whether it would be preferable to receive a video training facility or hold a mid-term seminar and Jill Arnold agreed to investigate this further, noting also that this would be in relation to both Staff and Students' EDI. **ACTION: Jill Arnold**
- Jill Arnold confirmed that her meeting with George Marshall had provided her with reassurance on the activities and management actions in connection with EDI developments within the College.
- Interested Governors were invited to let Emma Cotton know via email if they'd be interested in accessing the various EDI resources available to Staff. **ACTION: Governors/Emma Cotton**

c) **Brendan Ward Designated Safeguarding Lead Governor**

Brendan Ward provided the following update report to the Corporation on his role as the Designated Safeguarding Lead Governor:

- Appointed as the Lead Governor with effect from Autumn Term 2023, in light of his experience of safeguarding within his NHS employment.
- He has met with Lisa Watkin-Stevens initially to agree parameters for the role and expectations from SLT, including how the Governor Body could add value. He has since met with Lisa on several occasions together with meetings with the wider safeguarding team on a half-termly basis which has included observing the Safeguarding Team's weekly meetings (covering strategy, policy, case review, risk assessment, training etc).
- On a termly basis, Brendan carries out a sample review of the Single Central Record (SCR) and a sample review of Staff files, to ensure that all the appropriate documentation is in place and that processes have been followed.

- From his experience and observations since his appointment, Brendan Ward confirmed that he was very impressed by the Safeguarding Team’s approach and professionalism, including the way in which the Team reviewed its own activities, supported other Staff and Students. Furthermore, he had noted the thorough monitoring and reporting, with actions taken forward and completed.
- Following an observation from Brendan Ward, SLT confirmed that the CPOMs System (Child Protection Online Management System) – a system used by numerous schools in the UK, was in the process of being implemented at the moment, and this is on track to be completed this Summer. Regarding the digitisation of staff records, this was not currently planned, noting the workload already within the HR Department combined with budget limitations and other priorities. It was noted that this would be kept under review by SLT and may be revisited at some point. **ACTION: SLT**
- The Corporation was reminded that the responsibility for safeguarding rested with all Governors and not just the safeguarding lead.
- In response to questions from the Corporation relating to the recent Ofsted visit, it was reported that the Inspectors had scrutinised the College’s safeguarding work meticulously and that Lisa Watkin-Stevens had spent day 1 of the inspection with the Lead Inspector, solely on Safeguarding (examined and reviewed policy, prevent risk assessments, student records, discussed cases, checked referrals and follow ups, Staff files and SCR). The Inspector also had a meeting with Brendan Ward and asked similar questions to those put to SLT, to ensure consistency and verification. Inspectors also asked Students how safe they felt on site, with good feedback received.

10) a) Curriculum and Standards

James Gordon presented the various papers to the Corporation, the contents of which were noted and the following key aspects were highlighted as recorded below, followed by questions from Governors:

i) Ofsted

SLT was pleased with much of the report commentary including Student Experience, Enrichment Support and Extension activity and it was noted that some of the grades were very close to being outstanding – refer executive summary.

Skills development/employer engagement and reflection on work done to date: As reported earlier, the College was disappointed in receiving a “reasonable” grade, but the work here also contributed to the Ofsted “personal development grade, which was ‘outstanding’.

Retention: various themes noted in the report but in essence the main issue identified by Ofsted was the number of Students who changed their programme after the first census point (at 6 weeks post enrolment) and reported via the ILR. Such changes include reducing to 2 A Levels or replacing an A Level with a lower qualification, which is reflected in the College’s retention figures. SLT explained that post pandemic the focus had been on improving retention, but at the same time adapting programmes to help and support Students who wanted to make changes and also in some cases such changes enable

Students to continue with their Studies, without the changes, they would drop out. However, although early days, retention has improved with the current Year 1 cohort being 95% (compared to 83% nationally). The main retention challenge for the College is the progression from Year 1 to Year 2.

At this point the Student Governors gave their thoughts on the Ofsted visit, reporting that Students thought that the experience was good with a positive atmosphere, but also thought based on both the College's results and support for all Students, the overall grade should have been outstanding.

SLT confirmed that the report/excerpts from the Report would be used in the College's marketing and publicity and the full Report is already on the website.

In conclusion the overall Ofsted visit was a positive experience for both Staff and Students and the Report reads very well, with many outstanding references, despite being graded "good" overall. Congratulations were recorded to Staff and Students for their hard work and achievements.

ii) QIP Review

Governors were reminded that the QIP review was usually carried out annually at this time and reference was made to page 33 which includes the targets and actions agreed at the beginning of the academic year, and shows progress.

Regarding the strategies established to improve attendance, these have had a positive impact so far.

Adult Education – the focus is upon provision to meet the local skills gaps.

Retention and Achievement – various strategies are being considered for implementation.

VESPA – set of Student skills to support learning and having impact on retaining Students at College combined with making good progress.

iii) KPIs

It was recorded that these were reviewed twice per year and reference was made to the updated table, noting that there were 3 data collections regarding Student progression, retention and achievement at each of the 3 points in the academic year. Broadly the figures were positive, with retention improving in respect of Year 1 to Year 2 Student progression. Furthermore, regarding intermediate level Student retention, this is slightly lower overall and the College has been re-branding this aspect in order to generate improvements; additionally, there a Staff awayday has been held on the subject of how to support foundation Students, plus progression.

Current predicted grade Student outcomes from Staff feedback are also looking promising and attendance is also starting to improve, which provides reassurance for the work implemented by Staff to date.

In response to a question raised regarding the slightly lower retention overall at February 2024 compared to November 2023, James Gordon confirmed that this reflected the ongoing retention issues between Year 1 and Year 2 and the foundation Students, which the College is continuing to address. James Gordon also explained some of the changes made to improve progression and retention reporting that for the new cohort of Students (2023/2024), the enrolment, advice and guidance had been revised with the aim of improving the retention figures overall, the outcome of which will be reflected in the figures when the current Year 1s progress to Year 2.

In response to a question from the Corporation regarding the reasons for the lower retention in respect of intermediate Students, it was noted that when students complete the foundation year they don't all continue to advanced level study with us. We support students to access a number of progression routes including apprenticeship or vocational training with the FE sector. James Gordon reported that the College recently developed data that tracks our students more closely through their learner journey. SLT are currently reviewing and analysing to determine trends.

At this point Nick Armstrong left the meeting owing to another commitment. The meeting remained quorate.

a) Student Application Numbers' Update

- i) Executive Summary**
- ii) Comparison Table 2023 & 2024**

Lisa Watkin-Stevens introduced the item and the following points were highlighted:

- Applications have increased from Brighton and Hove Schools this year and with a more focused recruitment campaign the College's aim was to increase numbers. This has included the provision of bespoke campus days/year 11 assemblies for local Schools, with a specific Staff Team allocated to each school; additional preparatory/training work with Staff involved in enrolment with the aim of improving the conversion rate; Student Ambassadors attending the Schools Liaison days.
- In response to a question from Governors regarding the predictability of conversion rates for new Students, it was explained that the figures calculated were broadly based upon many years of data acquired. As noted above, this year's application numbers are much higher than previous years and it was also recorded that a higher proportion of applicants had submitted their entry by the application deadline, indicating that this is probably their final/preferred choice.
- There will be further applications received, post deadline, between now and enrolment which is also being tracked.
- Notwithstanding the above, there are always some application withdrawals.
- The current number predicted stands at 1,507 but this will almost certainly increase by September.

- Assemblies have also been organized for Year 10 and some year 9s in the local Schools, to inform pupils at an earlier stage of their education about post 16 options.

11) Financial Updates and Management Accounts

- i) Executive Summary**
- ii) Detailed income and expenditure**
- iii) balance sheet**
- iv) cashflow forecast**

Simon Lindfield, Chair of the Finance Committee, confirmed that the Committee was meeting later this term at which the budget and other key documents will be considered prior to the July Corporation Meeting.

Elaine French provided the following update to the Corporation:

- challenging financial year, with very close monitoring of cash flow and regarding the latter where curriculum areas have a positive balance in their budget, budget holders have been asked to avoid any non-essential spending until after the year end, when any balance will be transferred to next year's budgets.
- forecast for year end – some additional in year funding has been received in respect of Teachers' Pension Scheme contributions (College's required contributions having increased from 23% to 29%). The additional funding has not yet been received, but it was noted that this does not cover the overall additional figure which the College is required to meet in full.
- Additional funding has also been received in respect of the Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) project and has already been utilised.
- In response to a question from the Corporation regarding IT lease extension costs, Elaine French confirmed discussions were underway with the external auditors regarding this, noting that following the appointment of the new Head of IT, a review of the College's IT assets and the completion of an equipment audit has been carried out. As a result of this, it's been recommended that there shouldn't be an automatic renewal of IT leases and that following further investigation it may be more financially efficient for some IT equipment to be purchased.
- Regarding Energy costs, the Corporation queried whether the new contract had been finalised and Elaine French confirmed that this was in place, with both a contract providing both gas and electricity, with a 10% saving on the rates negotiated and fixed for 3 years. Details will be presented to the Finance Committee in June.
- Governors also questioned whether a value for retention release should be included in 2024/2025 in respect of the funded project and it was confirmed that this would be included as a creditor in the balance sheet amounting to approximately £70K – awaiting funding allocation from DfE.
- Referring to the I and E account and tuition fees, it was confirmed that Level 4 related primarily to counselling courses.

It was confirmed that the budget for next year would be presented to the Finance Committee for consideration and recommendation to the Corporation at its July meeting, for approval.

b) Property Update

SLT provided a summary of the property matters confirming that the Quads' project works had been completed.

It was also confirmed that in respect of discussions at the last Corporation meeting on the 2 capital bid submissions, the College had been informed that they had not been successful this time. SLT had reviewed the feedback received with the consultants, the latter of whom confirmed that there were no grounds for appeal.

There will be minimal annual property works over the Summer, noting that a significant amount of time had been spent on the preparatory work for the 2 capital bids, combined with managing/overseeing the Quads project.

The Estates Management Strategy is being worked on by the Estates Manager and this will be reviewed in due course by SLT.

The documents were received by the Committee and those which required approval were endorsed by the Corporation. **ACTION: SLT**

12. Policies and Other Documents

a) Admissions Policy - approved.

- i) Executive Summary**
- ii) Policy**

It was noted that there were only minor revisions to the policy relating to entry criteria, with detailed specific curriculum area criteria given on the website.

b) Fees and Charges Schedule – it was noted that this was deferred until the next meeting. ACTION: July 2024 SLT

c) Student Bursaries & Free School Meals Policy – approved.

Attention was drawn to the fact that the household income threshold had been increased in order to be consistent with other providers in the sectors. Elaine French reported on some of the issues within the sector whereby owing to the complex rules and guidelines, some Colleges had not used all of their bursary funding and the DfE were in the process of raising awareness to ensure that funding is allocated per year.

d) Information Security Policy – deferred until Summer term 2024, via Audit Committee.

e) Anti-Bribery Policy – ditto.

f) Anti-Fraud & Irregularity Policy – ditto – ACTION: Elaine French

13. Date of Next Meeting: Wednesday 10th July 2024 at 6.00 p.m.

14. Any Other Business - none.

15. Part II Confidential business - refer Part II Confidential Minutes

Taking into account the confidential nature of the business, it was resolved that all Governors should remain for this session.

a) Minutes from last meeting 20th March 2024 - approved

b) Matters Arising – None.

c) Other Confidential business - none

17. Enclosures for Information – Meeting dates for Summer Term 2023/2024 –
Governors were encouraged to put the dates relevant to them in their diaries.

Louise Pennington 22/05/24

Chair.....

Date.....