

CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COLLEGE

ITEM 2

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Governors held on
Monday 29 April 2020 at 6pm
Conducted via Microsoft Teams**

PRESENT

Mr Mark Taylor (Chair)	Mr Mike Hastings (Vice Chair)
Mrs Amanda Newbold (Vice Chair)	Dr Isabel Gillis
Ms Alison Shannon	Mr Trevor Dutton
Ms Emma Bull	Mr Mal Cowgill
Ms Sally Slater (Staff)	Mr Yankho Songwe
Mr Clarence Crosdale	

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr Peter Merry – Vice Principal Business Success
Mr Ian Browne – Vice Principal Student Success
Ms Louise Fall – Vice Principal Student Engagement
Mrs Elizabeth Ball – Clerk to the Board of Governors

45/20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Ian Fegan.

There were no declarations of interest.

46/20 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (ITEM 2)

The minutes of the meeting of the Board of Governors held on 23 March 2020 were approved as a correct record.

47/20 DEFERRED ITEMS (ITEM 3)

The Clerk reminded members of the Board of Governors of the reports that had been deferred from the last meeting which took place on 23 March 2020.

It was resolved that the following reports be noted:

- Strategic Development Implementation Plan KPI's
- 2019/20 Maths and English Progress Report
- 2019/20 Apprenticeship Progress Report
- Quality of Education Report
- 2019/20 Student On-Programme Survey Report
- Management Accounts to 31 January 2020

The Board of Governors was also requested to approve the Limited Circulation minutes of the meeting of the Board of Governors held on 24 February 2020.

It was resolved that the Limited Circulation minutes of the meeting of the Board of Governors held on 24 February 2020 be approved.

48/20 IBR UPDATE (ITEM 4 (a))

The Principal provided an update in relation to the IBR process and advised that whilst discussions are continuing, no significant progress had been made during the past couple of months.

It was noted that discussions are continuing with Barclays Bank and with the ESFA but that in view of the current situation the potential for short term borrowing has not been pursued.

The Principal reported that it was hoped to finalise the IBR by 31 July 2020 and that the work conducted by BDO has now concluded. Whilst the intention had been to reach a common platform that could be relied upon by the Bank and the ESFA it was noted that things have now changed in view of the circumstances surrounding the COVID 19 outbreak with cashflow being of particular concern.

Governors were advised that recently the Chair and Principal had received correspondence from the FE Commissioner's Office offering support to Colleges. It was noted that following a discussion with the ESFA it may be in the College's interest for a member of the FE Commissioner's Team to attend the next formal meeting between the College and the ESFA.

The Board of Governors supported the involvement of the FE Commissioner which may also be an opportunity to obtain further support for the College and the CLQ project.

49/20 CLQ AND COWTECHC UPDATE (ITEM 4 (b))

The Principal reported that the Black Country LEP have released £257k for the CoWTechC development for Engineering and Motor Vehicle. This is to provide detailed designs up to RIBA stage 3 and will allow enabling works to begin in the summer if funding is confirmed.

In relation to the rest of the CLQ project it was noted that things were currently at a standstill and that the next major activity would be to go to market for contractors but that this could not happen in view of the current uncertainty around funding.

The Principal reported that it was not yet clear whether the funding would be provided by the Black Country LEP, the DfE or the Combined Authority, but that discussions and briefings about the project are continuing.

Governors noted the update and commented that it was frustrating that the project was ready to proceed but was delayed as a result of the funding and the current crisis.

50/20 COLLEGE REPORT (ITEM 5)**1. INTRODUCTION**

The Principal emphasised that the response of the students and the staff at the College to the current situation had been fabulous and that in comparison to many other Colleges the level of student engagement continued to be at a high level.

Governors and the EMT echoed their thanks to the staff for their ongoing efforts and it was agreed that the Chair of the Board of Governors would circulate a note to recognise this.

Action: Chair of the Board of Governors

2. STUDENT SUCCESS

2018/19 National Achievement Rates Tables (NART)

The Vice Principal Student Success presented the report on the College's performance against the 2018/19 National Achievement rates.

It was highlighted that the overall College performance remains above the National Average and that the College ranks 3rd out of all 15 West Midland Colleges across all levels of qualifications and ages.

For 16-18 year olds at level 3 the College ranks joint 1 in the West Midlands and 18th Across the Country and at levels 1 and 2 is ranked at number 2 in the West Midlands and Black Country.

In relation to 19+, whilst achievement rates at level 2 are below NART these are above the weighted national average on ProAchieve and are a result of the mix and match of courses offered by the College.

Governors commented that this was a fantastic achievement for the College and that they were very impressed with this part of the report.

Learner Engagement

The Vice Principal Student Success reported that staff had adapted exceptionally well to the need to develop their digital skills and deliver face-to-face online learning.

Governors noted the percentage attendance at online teaching session for each faculty, with many being over 60%, however it was also noted that the message that GCSE's and A levels were to be cancelled had caused many learners to disengage.

Governors asked about the impact on the students' qualifications and whether the low take up was due to a lack of access to technology. They were advised that the College was emphasising that learning should continue as usual and that the lack of IT is an issue for some students.

It was noted that some students do not even have access to the internet and the College was trying to identify and provide help for these students, including access to Government support for disadvantaged students and the bursary scheme.

Governors also asked about the position where courses could not be delivered online and were advised that staff continue to engage with these students on a one to one basis.

Grading of Assessments

The Vice Principal Student Success reported that there remains a lot of confusion about the grading of assessments, but that it was announced in March 2020 that GCSE and A level examinations would be cancelled. As a result, the College will need to provide information in relation to each student which will be used to standardise judgements across all schools and Colleges.

It was noted that this will be particularly difficult where students commenced their studies in February 2020 and Governors asked whether some students may be disadvantaged where they did not have a positive classroom experience.

The Vice Principal Student Success advised that the College will be relying on the professionalism of staff to make those assessments and that there will be a transparent process to evidence that these are based on performance and are not affected by relationships and individual personalities. Governors were assured that if any assessment appeared not to reflect a student's performance this would be challenged and reviewed by the Curriculum Manager.

The Principal commented that the cancellation of exams would probably have unintended consequences for the future and may result in a considerable number of resits for the College and the sector.

Impact on Apprenticeships

The Vice Principal Student Success reported the COVID 19 outbreak was significantly impacting on the majority of employment sectors and particularly on staff employed in the Service Industries.

Governors noted the national response to the Government's Job Retention Scheme and the number of apprentices that had been furloughed and the number that have been placed on a break in learning. It was reported that currently, only 61% of the College apprentices remain in learning. Governors were disappointed to note that 16 apprentices have already been withdrawn due to redundancy or dismissal and that this number may increase.

The Vice Principal Business Success reported that he would be updating Governors on the impact on the College's financial position as part of his report, but that the position will impact on 'carry in' and the ability to achieve the target next year.

3. STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Support and Monitoring of Vulnerable Students

The Vice Principal Student Engagement emphasised the effort that is being made by staff at the College to support vulnerable students and that since the full College closure support and monitoring of all 165 EHCP students has been a priority in terms of their well-being and curriculum engagement.

Governors noted the regular contact that was taking place and the risk assessment which had 'rag' rated students based on concerns. It was also noted that the College has weekly

meetings with the Local Authority to review the position and that the City Council have recognised and praised the work of the College teams.

The Vice Principal Student Engagement reported that all safeguarding referrals remain in contact with their safeguarding link and that since full closure the College continues to provide students with food vouchers although so far only approximately half of eligible students have accessed this support.

Governors asked whether the College was confident that the support and monitoring of students will continue to be effective for as long as the lockdown is in place and were advised that there was confidence that this would be sustained.

It was reported that staff have changed their way of working and are continuing to do case conferences via telephone or video conferencing and support is being provided for students who are transitioning to college.

Governors noted that some students are making contact with staff just to talk to them and Governors asked whether in view of the potential for an increase in domestic violence, there is an opportunity for students to discuss any domestic pressures.

It was also noted that across the NHS it had become clear that agile/home working can lead to increased safeguarding concerns for adults and Governors asked whether the College was checking with students and promoting contact services.

The Vice Principal Student Engagement confirmed that the safeguarding team are dealing with this and if any student has had an issue in the past they are contacted regularly.

She confirmed that referrals continue to be made through the College's internal services and social services are liaising with the Safeguarding team.

It was emphasised that students are continuing to engage in a variety of ways and Governors noted that social media is also being used to promote the wellbeing of students and staff.

Applications

The Vice Principal Student Engagement confirmed that since the report was written the College has received more applications with interviews being carried out via telephone or virtually.

It was noted that applications overall are higher than at the same point last year, with some areas including Business and Management, Health and Social Care, Public Services, Art and Design and Performing Arts showing increased numbers. Some areas however are showing a decrease and Governors asked when the College would implement the marketing campaign.

The Vice Principal Student Engagement reported that there has been dedicated marketing to increase numbers in these areas and that this marketing is ongoing.

It was reported that applications for the College's part-time provision remain buoyant with some areas showing significant growth including Health and Social Care and English. Governors were advised that the College is able to provide online courses in Health and Social Care and as a result some of these students may be able to commence their studies straight away.

Governors asked whether the College was taking action to engage with year 11 students and considering how to provide the necessary input about future studies, particularly when the College open evenings had been so successful in the past.

The Vice Principal Student Engagement reported that the College is continuing with its marketing campaign and that Curriculum areas will be holding question and answer sessions for which students will register. It was noted that for safeguarding reasons however the College will not be using a drop-in tool and students will be provided with an invite to the session.

Governors commented that whilst some companies are not being supportive, the interest in the College's apprenticeship provision has increased and they asked what action the College was taking to support these students.

The Vice Principal Student Engagement reported that the College would keep in contact with these students and provide them with support in preparing their CV and in developing interview skills.

It was noted that for the sector there will be a need to consider the additional skills that learners will require in the workplace e.g. the use of video conferencing tools and a decision had been taken prior to the COVID 19 outbreak that all students at City of Wolverhampton College will complete an online module as part of their course.

Governors asked whether any consideration had been given to the provision of additional training for individuals who were unemployed or who had been made redundant as a result of the current situation.

The Vice Principal Student Engagement advised that a series of short sessions had been launched as part of a toolkit to support individuals that does not involve coming into college and that this will be promoted to students and local communities alongside the support and courses that the College can provide.

New Student Records System

The Vice Principal Student Engagement advised Governors that implementation of the new student records system remains on track with support and training for staff being provided remotely using Microsoft Teams.

Governors asked whether College staff have developed the skills to use the new technology that is being introduced and were advised that in addition to the training that is being delivered, staff are being supported by Learning Innovators and by the Business Learning and Technologies Manager via videos. It was noted that the skills level of all staff are increasing as individuals become more confident.

It was also noted that there is a need to review the way in which the College delivers its future provision and that these discussions are already taking place in relation to CLQ.

4. PEOPLE ENGAGEMENT

The Principal presented the report which provided an update on activities which were taking place to support the well-being of staff during the College closure and the monitoring of staff sickness.

Governors recognised the activity that was taking place to support staff but asked whether there were any particular issues that staff may be experiencing that may need further support to be put in place.

The Principal reported that the number of staff that are self-isolating, shielding or are sick for other reasons continues to be monitored and that the Vice Principal Student Engagement is providing information on a regular basis via email highlighting 'The College Team' site, the welfare support that is available and general information about student engagement and performance.

Governors asked whether the College anticipated that it would have any difficulties in the recruitment of staff particularly where the role would involve interaction with students.

The Principal reported that currently the College was not recruiting and had not placed any staff on furlough. There was a view, however, that technology can speed up the recruitment process and there will be a need to act quickly to support the Curriculum Plan.

5. BUSINESS SUCCESS

March Management Accounts

The Vice Principal Business Success presented the management accounts to 31 March 2020 and highlighted key points including the improvement in the operating surplus, the position in relation to apprenticeship funding and commercial activities and the increase in pay costs relating to 'cross-college' staff and agency staff.

The Vice Principal Business Success reported that importantly when the minimum cash position was reached in April 2020 the College retained a positive cash balance.

Governors noted the position in relation to Key Financial Performance Indicators and the Bank Covenants together with the review of the full-year forecast in view of the COVID 19 outbreak and the College closure.

COVID 19 Financial Update

Income

The Vice Principal Business Success reported on the impact of the COVID 19 outbreak on the College funding streams. He advised that based on the College's projections it is anticipated that 16-19 funding will be secured and that there will be no reconciliation of Adult Education funding provided that the College is on track to have delivered its allocations and continues to execute its best endeavours to support learners.

Apprenticeships

It was reported that the impact on apprenticeship funding is likely to be considerable due to apprentices being furloughed or laid off resulting in breaks in learning in their apprenticeships or withdrawal. Income will also be affected by a reduced number of 'rollover' learners.

Governors were advised that the Government had been slow in providing support but a recent notification indicates that provider relief will be available for non-levy funded apprenticeships which accounts for approximately half of the College's provision.

It was reported that approximately 40% of the College apprenticeships will have breaks in learning of more than four weeks and that as a result funding will be suspended.

Loans and HE

Whilst the Student Loans Company has provided assurances payments would continue to be honoured, the College will lose income if students choose to no longer participate.

Other Income

It was noted that the income generated by the College's commercial operations will be significantly impacted by the restrictions posed by the lockdown.

Pay Costs

The Vice Principal Business Success reported that the College had not yet furloughed any staff, and that guidance in relation to the furloughing of staff continues to be updated.

Whilst there are some concerns about the potential for double funding, where employees are not able to contribute remotely in roles that are not directly linked to core FE funded activities it is possible for the College to access the Government's Job Retention Scheme.

Governors asked how long the process of analysing staff who could be furloughed would take and were advised that those staff who are furthest removed from students in the classroom are easy to identify but it will also apply to some staff who deliver apprenticeships and in the classroom and this is more difficult.

Having identified the individuals that can be furloughed it is anticipated that the College would be able to claim approximately £50k per month.

He advised however that when staff were furloughed the intention was for the College to supplement the grant to ensure that all staff continue to receive 100% of their salary.

Governors agreed that the College should supplement the salaries of furloughed staff to ensure that they continue to receive 100%.

Agency Costs

Governors asked how many agency staff had been released as a result of the current situation.

The Vice Principal Business Success reported that approximately half of the College's agency staff had been released but that the agencies are expected to access the Government's Job Retention Scheme in order to mitigate the impact.

Governors noted the position in relation to agency spend prior to the College closure and asked whether this budget would always be overspent.

The Vice Principal Business Success reported that whilst the Curriculum Plan is in place at the start of the year and vacancies are planned, things can change very rapidly and group sizes and staff to student ratios can change putting pressure on staffing.

It was reported however that the position is now been managed effectively and that EMT consider a weekly report identifying levels of cost to ensure that there is no uncontrolled overspend.

Non-Pay Costs

The Vice Principal Business Success reported that in relation to non-pay costs the position was variable and would depend upon how long the College closure lasted.

Key areas of potential savings were indicated including utility costs and exam costs but it was noted that the position relating to bursaries remains uncertain. It was reported that discussions are continuing with the catering contractors to reach a mutual agreement.

Governors asked why, if there was only a 50% take-up of meal vouchers by students, there would be additional costs.

The Vice Principal Business Success reported that whilst the take up has not been as high as anticipated, the College has issued digital vouchers to all students and it is anticipated that the cost will increase.

Governors commented that it was important to ensure that students knew how the codes could be used and the Vice Principal Business Success reported that the College is able to monitor how the vouchers are being used and that information is being provided on how to access them.

Governors stated that this was reassuring, especially in relation to those vulnerable students who are currently considered to be high risk.

Cash Flow

The Vice Principal Business Success referred Governors to the cash flow table included in the report.

It was noted that the position is changing on a daily basis and that there is an expectation that there will be a negative variance at the year-end and that the College will require additional support to rebalance the position at 31 July 2020. It was also noted that a further level of support may be required in 2020/21 depending on the impact of the pandemic on trading into the new year.

Telford Unit B2 Lease

The Vice Principal Business Success referred Governors to the report and the proposal to approve the new lease for Unit B2 at the Telford Campus.

Governors noted the report and the key terms of the proposed lease which would commence on 1 August 2020 and end on 1 August 2022, which is the same time as there was a break clause in relation to Unit B3 at the site.

Governors also noted that the proposed lease does not include a schedule of condition, thus reducing the risk of punitive dilapidation costs. An agreement had also been reached in relation to the replacement of the roof.

RESOLUTIONS:

It was resolved that the Board of Governors note:

- **The significant work being undertaken by staff and students in response to the COVID 19 circumstances.**
- **The continuing high levels of student engagement in learning with the College.**
- **The outstanding 16-18 achievement rates for 2018/19.**
- **The support in place for all staff.**
- **The positive financial position at the end of March 2020 and the negative impact forecast to date on what would have been a significantly improved year-end.**

It was resolved that the Board of Governors approve the Telford Unit B2 new lease in accordance with the Heads of Terms detailed in the report.

51/20 CONFIDENTIALITY

There were no items which would not be made available for public inspection.

52/20 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Governors requested that the Executive Management Team give further consideration about how Governors could continue to support and engage with the College during this period e.g. with Governor links.

53/20 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

18 May 2020 at 5pm