

**Minutes of the Corporation meeting held on  
Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> December 2023 at 9.30am  
Burslem Boardroom and via Microsoft Teams**

Present:	Jeremy Cartwright, Chair	In person
	Steve Sawbridge	In person
	Sally Garratt	Remote
	Hannah Molloy	In person
	David Rogers	In person
	David Boughey	In person
	Bernard Kumeta	In person
	Kevin Hetherington	Remote
	Tom Nadin	In person
	Jo Mountney	In person
	Lisa Capper, Principal/CEO	In person
	Chrissy Pawliszyn, Staff Governor	In person
	Jenny Scrivens, Staff Governor	In person
Pari Arian, Student Governor	In person	

In Attendance:	Cath Brierley, Deputy Principal	In person
	Antoinette Lythgoe, Chief Financial Officer	In person
	Nova Abela, Chief People Officer	In person
	Emma Brannen, Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality (item 9)	In person
	Dave Hopley, Assistant Principal Student Experience	In person
	Paul Martin, Executive Director of Finance	In person
	Helen Knowles, Beever and Struthers (item 8)	Remote
	Rob Lawson, Observer (External Governance Reviewer)	In person
	Kay Kavanagh, Observer	In person
	Jules Bridges, Clerk to the Corporation	In person

**No.**

- 1 Welcome, introductions and apologies for absence**  
Apologies for absence were received from Rob Fisher and Student Governor, Mekdes Mideksa
- 2 Declaration of Interest in any of the items on the agenda**  
The Chair reminded everyone present to declare any interests that they may have on agenda items to be discussed. No specific declarations, other than for paid positions, were made and standing declarations were noted.
- 3 Minutes of the meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2023**  
The minutes of the meeting were **approved** as an accurate record.
- 4 Action Progress Report**  
The actions arising from the previous meeting were summarised in the progress report and all actions reported had either been resolved or, where appropriate, an update had been provided on progress elsewhere on the agenda.  
  
The Transformation, Finance and Resources Committee is to consider the Race to Zero pledge at the meeting to be held on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2024.

**Action**

Chief  
Financial  
Officer

Hannah Molloy and Tom Nadin joined the meeting at 9.40am

- 5 Student Voice**  
**Talking Heads Video – Topic is 'Settling in'**  
Governors had watched the video ahead of the meeting and noted that, although students had made some less positive comments, these were useful to hear and learn from. It was also interesting to know that it is easy to engage students in participating in these videos

**Student Events and activities 2023/24**

It was noted that the enrichment and participation report will come to the February 2024 meeting of the Corporation when data will be available. The Student Council and Learner Voice Conference have been well attended and the Student Governor, Mekdes Mideksa will be attending the AoC Student Governor Annual conference. They also attended the recent Remembrance service, representing the College. New Student Governor, Pari Arian, was welcomed to the meeting.

The Challenge South Africa programme is progressing well, and Governors are to be invited to send the students off on their journey in February 2024.

Steve Sawbridge joined the meeting at 9.45am

### ***Student Voice Timeline 2023/24***

Covered in the items above.

## **6 Safeguarding and Prevent Report – November 2023**

The report has been considered by the Curriculum, Quality and Standards Committee but highlights of the report show that the monthly concerns are tracking much higher than previous years due to the increase this year in learner numbers. The top safeguarding concerns reported are mental health and home issues, with 50/50 split of issues reported by males/females and, at the request of the Curriculum, Quality and Standards Committee, further analysis by ethnicity is now included in the report. This data shows that 77% of the cases reported are by white individuals, with the remaining 23% from BME categories which matches the College population. Additional drill down by curriculum area with Heads of Learning has exposed where issues are, or are not being reported but, overall, the report confirms that 83% of cases reported are at Level 1 (dealt with in College), and 15% are reported at Level 4 involving statutory agencies such as the Police or social care.

Governors were assured that there is confidence in the statistics and consistency of trend with the issues raised by learners. The Chair asked where the College is targeting its efforts to support learners, and this was confirmed to be around mental health and wellbeing. The College has invested in a student assistance programme which offers a wraparound support package with on-site face to face support, but also a wellbeing App, 24/7/365 telephone counselling and face to face on site counselling and support/resource on site in the team. This triangulates back to the comments heard from students in the 'talking heads' videos that students feel safe.

## **7 Principal/CEO's Report**

Since the last meeting, the new strategic plan; Skills Ready, Future Ready, has been launched and the Future Skills Pledge for employers was also launched at the event. The Principal/CEO asked Governors for any feedback from their perspective about the Strategy and/or the launch.

In summary, Governors commented that they experienced positive interaction with employers at the launch event. The College is considered to be the 'go to' College and Governors felt proud to be part of the College. MPs attended the launch event among other key employers and stakeholders and notably Governors felt that the work of everyone involved should not be underestimated. The culture of the College has shifted to a confident, outward looking organisation, with ambition and embracing outlook. Governors said that they felt stakeholders welcomed the transparency of the College, that the vision was understood, and the future direction was clear. The Marketing team were commended for their involvement to drive the plan after the event with social media and reinforcing key messages across multiple media platforms.

Other highlights from the Principal/CEO's report included:

- The College had a positive termly conversation with the ESFA focusing on student recruitment, T Levels, and Apprenticeships and a new, and shorter KPI focused report to the PMO as part of the RF Deal, was well received.
- The Accountability and Skills statement are both published on the College website and a meeting with Chairs and CEOs from the Staffordshire Colleges on

these themes will take place in January 2024. Accountability and Skills Duty Statements are to be combined next year with one submission due by the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

- The R04 return to the ESFA demonstrates the success in recruitment of Study Programme learners, with 306 more learners than last year recruited. This is attributed to growing market share across all levels of learning and not just down to demographic growth.
- Marketing and PR activity has generated a 10% increase in applications received and 21% increase in enrolments.
- The adult campaign and video received 86,000 views and over 400 downloads of the Adult Prospectus over a three-week period.
- The College sits at the top of the league table for providers and colleges in the wider area of Cheshire and Staffordshire for the most followers and most posts, with over 2,000 hits in response to the 'Hello Future' campaign.
- Adult provision is continuing on a positive trajectory against plan and Apprenticeship starts stand at 154 against 259 target with a good pipeline for potential new starts.
- The end of year financial statements are prepared. The College ends the year with good financial health awarded by the ESFA based on the July 2023 management accounts. This should change to outstanding financial health following the submission of the audited financial statements.
- The final return on achievement data has been submitted and, in summary, shows a steady state but there is more work to do around English and maths GCSEs and a clear focus on some study programme areas.
- The new strategically aligned employee recognition and reward scheme with the first 'Accolades' event held in October 2023 was well attended by staff at both campuses. A total of 22 awards were presented and this was an opportunity for staff to support each other, share good practice, and really lifted staff morale.
- Changes in staff recruitment are also positively impacting as the College is creative to attract applicants to the stubborn and hard to recruit to posts. The College is seeing some returning staff, which is positive and has also streamlined its application processes to shorten the time it takes to recruit.
- A focus area for the College is on the quality of the delivery of the new T Levels and the plan for September 2024 to ramp up the College T Level offer. This will be a topic for the Governor Strategy Day in February 2024 as well as how the qualification reforms are impacting the curriculum and strategic direction of the College.
- The key issue from the 2022/23 results was retention in Study Programmes, particularly at Level 1 in some subject areas. Strategies are in place for supporting retention including some new project-based work, curriculum design with events, trips and presentations and close working within the cohorts has been thoroughly reviewed at Curriculum, Quality and Standards Committee for achievement, retention, and attendance.
- The curriculum planning process will focus heavily on employer guidance shaping the curriculum to meet skills needs in line with the LSIP. It will also take account of the reforms, inclusion of T Levels and HTQs at Level 4.

Regarding Stakeholders, partnerships and business development, the Principal/CEO highlighted:

- The Foundation teacher finalist at Stoke-on-Trent Civic Hero's awards.
- Lots of media work with the BBC (West Midlands Today Youth Programme) and other radio and media work to promote T Levels.
- The Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Laura Trott, hosted on financial wellbeing and pensions with a group of apprentices and learners, streamed by the DWP, at the Burslem campus.
- LSIP funding of £3m with £500k awarded to the College as part of a collaboration project on Engineering at Level 4 and above.
- The Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality presented at the AoC conference on the FEC good practice in English and maths attendance gaps and picked up a

whole host of learner college partners.

- The College has entered a new partnership concord with Keele University with a commitment for the College to use their resources, and guest lecturers for example. This collaboration and link is working well.
- The College was a VIP guest of Tristram Hunt at the V&A for Stoke Creates and Made in Stoke and the Minister for DCMS event. The College is a key partner enabling young people to access the arts.
- Ofsted have produced their annual report with positive sections on FE and learning points on T Levels.
- The College will seek to arrange a visit with the 4 prospective labour MP candidates for a briefing together with other providers.
- The next steps (December into January) include a continued focus on retention and attendance, apprenticeships, capital projects, pay, retention and recruitment.

The Chair summarised by commenting that it was great to see the College growing and the reputation expanding and impacting. As a Board, he reminded Governors that this changing landscape is good to reflect on, but the focus of the Board is much broader now and more about the longer term and longer strategic vision. The key is to develop with confidence, see and embrace the external horizon but keep a close eye internally to ensure that cracks do not appear in quality.

The meeting was postponed for a break at 10.25am and resumed 10.35am. Proposed Student Governor, Pari Arian, left the meeting at this time

Helen Knowles, Audit Director for Beever and Struthers joined the meeting for item 8

## **8 Financial Statements and Annual Report for the Year Ended 31 July 2023** ***Annual Report of the Audit Committee***

The Audit Committee has been central to this process and had received the assurance and comprehensive reporting. The Chair of the Audit Committee reported that there was confidence and comfort that due consideration had been given. Audit Director, Helen Knowles, confirmed a clean audit for the College and no adjusted or unadjusted differences arising from auditors work or matters to draw to the attention of Governors from auditors' regularity work, or any internal control recommendations arising. Based on the findings of the audit work, an unqualified opinion will be provided on both the financial statements and regularity audit aspects of work. The Corporation **approved** the Annual Report of the Audit Committee for submission with the Financial Statements to the ESFA.

Chief  
Financial  
Officer

### ***2022/23 Financial Statements Audit Management Letter***

The Chief Financial Officer highlighted the disclosure of information to auditors made by Governors (page 13), to be signed by the Chair, that confirms that there is no relevant audit information of which the College's auditors are unaware. On page 14, this details the Statement of Corporate Governance and Internal Control which confirms the Committees and membership of the Board, drawing Governors attention to page 23 which states that the Corporation is of the opinion that the College has an effective framework of governance, risk management and control, and has fulfilled statutory responsibility for the effective and efficient use of resources, the solvency of the institution and the body, and the safeguarding of their assets.

Finally, on page 25, the Statement of Responsibilities of the Members of the Corporation, this confirms the Corporation has ensured a true and fair view of the Financial Statements, outlines the fundamental basis for the preparation of the Financial Statements, ensuring of proper accounting records, maintenance of the College website, and a statement of regularity which ensures that the funding received has been used for the purpose it has been given. The Financial Statements and audit management letter were **approved** by the Corporation to be signed and submitted to the ESFA and published by the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023 deadline.

Chief  
Financial  
Officer

### **Going Concern**

In auditing the Financial Statements, it was concluded that the Governors' use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the Financial Statements is appropriate. No material uncertainties relating to events or conditions that, individually or collectively, may cast significant doubt on the College's ability to continue as a going concern for a period of at least twelve months from the date of signing the accounts were found.

### **Reconciliation with July 2023 Management Accounts**

The reconciliation between the July management accounts and the Financial Statements show little movement. The position remained unchanged from the consideration of both the Audit, and the Transformation, Finance and Resources Committees, who had both received, scrutinised, and considered the reconciliation report.

### **Letter of Representation**

Given the consideration of the Financial Statements and responsibility of the Board discussed above, the Corporation was content to **approve** and for the Chair sign the Letter of Representation as presented

Chair

### **Regularity Self-Assessment Questionnaire**

The Corporation resolved to **approve** the comprehensive assessment questionnaire for submission with the Financial Statements to the ESFA.

Chief  
Financial  
Officer

### **Letter of Support for EBS (Stoke) Ltd**

The Corporation received assurance of EBS (Stoke) Ltd balances, and it was further confirmed that the company does not trade with any third party as it just trades with the College. The Corporation was content to **approve** for the Principal/CEO to sign the letter of support.

Principal /  
CEO

Helen Knowles left the meeting and Emma Brannen joined the meeting at 10.45am

## **9 SAR 2022/23 and QIP 2023/24**

The Corporation was asked to approve the key judgements of the SAR as follows:

Quality of Education	Good
Behaviour and Attitudes	Good
Personal Development	Outstanding
Leadership and Management	Good
Skills Needs	Reasonable
Study Programmes	Good
Adults	Good
Apprenticeships	Requires Improvement
High Needs	Good

There are nine key priorities arising from the SAR and Ofsted inspection that inform the development of the 2023/24 QIP. These being

1. Overall attendance, including Apprenticeship attendance on maths and English
2. Progress and achievement of Apprenticeships, with a focus on starting points, maths and English, and progress monitoring
3. Progress and high-grade achievement in GCSE maths and English
4. Quality of education in underperforming areas; Accountancy, Electrical, Engineering, Hair and Beauty, Health and Social Care, and IT
5. Meaningful work placement opportunities for High Needs Learners
6. Pass rates on 16-18 Level 3 programmes, in particular Childcare, Electrical, Engineering, Health and Social Care, and IT
7. Retention on 16-18 Level 1 and 2 programmes, in particular L1 Art, L1 Business, L2 Hair and Beauty, L2 Construction, L2 Engineering, L2 Health and Social Care, L2 Sport and Public Services, L2 IT
8. Retention and pass rates on Adult L1 and L3 programmes, in particular L1 ESOL (pass rates), L3 Accounting, L3 Childcare, L3 Health and Social Care, L3 Plumbing

## 9. Achievement of learners in receipt of free school meals

Noting that Apprenticeships is still an area for improvement, Governors asked when the College would expect to self-assess Apprenticeships as good. The Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality confirmed that there needs to be consistency in practice across the provision first. The legacy issues are reducing relatively quickly but it is harder to apply consistent practice to those that have been on longer programmes; however, the College has set a KPI to self-assess this area as good this year.

Acknowledging that retention has been a difficulty, a Governor asked what the College intends to do differently to improve retention rates. There are lots of initiatives being deployed, particularly around enhancements for learners to offer them a rich curriculum to keep them in learning with project-based ideas, peer work and 3-day employer emersion scheme for example. Retention is improving as a direct response to this across the College and it is recognised that retention is a College-wide area for improvement not just on maths and English.

Another Governor wondered whether low retention on Apprenticeships correlated with an unengaged employer. The Deputy Principal confirmed that the College only works with employers who are committed to provide a learner with the opportunity to achieve and progress. The College has also improved its processes around learners at risk of withdrawal, capturing those who are not attending quickly to support them back into learning. The management of withdrawals has improved as there are notably fewer withdrawals this year than at the same point last year.

After due consideration and scrutiny, the Corporation **approved** the SAR and key judgements as presented.

Sally Garratt left the meeting at 10.55am

## 10 Strategic Plan 2023-26 and KPIs

The Deputy Principal highlighted the progress made to date against the five strategic objectives, noting that some areas are slow to progress given that this is the first term of the academic year and release of the new strategic plan.

## 11 Governor update including Staff and Student Governor Appointments / Governor Recruitment

The report to the Board asked for the Corporation to consider a number of appointments, the first being the appointment of Student Governor, Pari Arian. The Corporation **approved** the appointment.

A campaign to find successors for the Academic Staff Governor, who has now left the employment of the College, and the Business Support Staff Governor, whose term of office came to an end in October 2023, completed in November 2023. The Corporation **approved** the two Staff Governor appointments of Chrissy Pawliszyn, and Jenny Scrivens as Staff Governors.

The Board was informed that Sibgha Amin has decided not to take up a second term of office due to work and life commitments. This leaves three independent Governor vacancies on the Board and the College has engaged the services of FE Associates to support the College with its search. They will seek to find two independent Governors with strategic expertise in curriculum and quality or corporate services. It is hoped this recruitment campaign may identify a third independent Governor that the College could look to approach.

Sally Garratt rejoined the meeting at 11.05am

## 12 Chair's Reports *Audit*

The Chair of the Committee commented that there was nothing financial to bring to the attention of the Board. The Committee also has oversight of the Corporate Risk Register and risk management framework and confirmed that the Risk Registers for the capital projects are now included in their focus. The risk management system is

working well, and tier two operational Risk Registers are currently being developed giving increased stability of the Corporate Risk Register.

### **Capital Projects**

A confidential meeting of the Corporation will be held today to update the Corporation on the progress of the FE transformation capital build projects at Cauldon and Burslem.

### **Curriculum Quality and Standards**

The Chair of the Committee thanked everyone involved in the creation of the SAR and arising QIP, noting that this is a big undertaking and has been approached differently this year. It is also good to see the other side of day 42 census point and stability of student numbers and quality of provision.

### **Governance**

The items considered by the Governance Committee at their last meeting were shared in the presentation slides and notably were covered on the agenda of the Corporation meeting today.

### **Transformation, Finance and Resources**

The Chair of the Committee confirmed that subcontracted agreements have been agreed with NSEG and Learning Curve for the 2023/24 academic year.

## **13 Education Business Services (Stoke) Ltd**

### ***Minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2023***

The minutes of the EBS (Stoke) Ltd meeting of the Board of Directors held on the 27<sup>th</sup> November 2023 were shared with the Corporation for information.

### ***Company Secretary Appointment Recommendation***

The Corporation approved the appointment of Bernard Kumeta as company Director for EBS (Stoke) Ltd and for Kay Kavanagh to replace Jules Bridges, as company secretary for both subsidiary companies of the College (EBS (Stoke) Ltd and Stoke on Trent College). These appointments are to be filed with Companies House.

Clerk

## **14 Risk Management**

### ***Risk Register, Heat Map and Board Assurance***

The Chief Financial Officer confirmed that risks R001 and R016 of the Corporate Risk Register have increased in score due to the retention issue (reported above) and due to the deregulation and qualification reform, which will be the focus topic for the morning of the Governors' Strategy day in February 2024, with a risk appetite workshop, delivered by RSM in the afternoon.

## **15 Clerk Recruitment/Appointment**

The Clerk to the Corporation leaves the employment of the College at the end of December 2023. The Corporation **approved** the appointment of Kay Kavanagh, experienced and qualified Clerk who will commence in post on the 18<sup>th</sup> December 2023 as the Director of Governance.

## **16 February Governor Strategy Day – draft agenda**

The draft agenda for the 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2024 Strategy day was shared with Governors. As discussed above, the morning will look at the skills and qualification reforms and how these impact (footfall and income) the curriculum and strategic direction of the College. The afternoon will be a risk appetite workshop led by risk expert Matthew Humphrey of RSM.

## **17 Governor Link Feedback**

The Chair invited Governors to comment on their recent Governor link visits. It was confirmed that, absent member, Rob Fisher had visited and spent time with the Marketing team. The Safeguarding lead Governor had visited the welfare team and attended the Safeguarding Board meeting, spending time analysing trends and looking at emerging themes and concerns. They had also spent time with HR looking at the single central record and HR processes.

Another Governor had visited the Careers team and reported on the update and refresh of the 2023-2026 strategy and was interested in the work with learners to improve CVs and LinkedIn profiles and use of advanced technology and how AI can help build and advise on what a CV should contain. Discussion ensued around the notion of guaranteed interviews with employers who have signed up to the Future Skills Pledge and it has been recognised that practice interviews with employers is a better initiative, together with use of the AI interview bot that can give immediate feedback on interview skills enabling candidates to develop skills to be successful.

The Chair had two visits around Capital and Digital and the Learner Voice. The Capital and Digital visit looked at the transformation that has taken place around the College's investment in IT infrastructure and security. The Chair hopes to introduce a Learner Panel or Committee to enable improved learner engagement at Board level by providing a platform that directly reports into the Corporation, joining up the Learner Voice and bridging this into the strategic vision of the College.

**18 Review of Meeting**

Governors commented that the meeting had completed in good time, felt succinct and that the links all worked well. The meeting was well attended in person and, if good numbers are anticipated at future meetings, it was noted that the conference room at the Cauldon campus could be used as an alternative venue.

**19 Any other items of urgent business**

There were no other items of urgent business.

**Date and time of next meeting**

Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> February 2024 at 9.30am

The meeting ended at 11.30am