BOARD of GOVERNORS MEETING

Wednesday 11 December 2024

MINUTES

Approved 2 April 2025

Attendance:

Governors	
Joanna Davidson – Chair Amanda Blinkhorn – Teacher Governor Monika Kinasiewicz – Support Staff Governor Jon Sibson Max Silver Alice Rubbra Ben Lonsdale	Fran Fahey June Jarrett Lukas Mandangu Peter Knowland – Student Governor Tom Robins Susan Corby Dipa Ganguli – Principal
Staff	
Di Teasdale – Deputy Principal Korede Obasaju – Vice Principal Finance & Resources Jo Luff – Head of Governance	

1. Introductory Matters
The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted this was the first Board meeting attended by Jo Luff, new Head of Governance. The meeting was quorate. Apologies were received from Ben Lonsdale. Declarations of interest were noted for the confidential Agenda Item 14: Pay Award in relation to staff. Staff Governors will be asked to recuse themselves from this part of the meeting.
2. Minutes and matters arising from last meeting: 10 July 2024
The minutes were reviewed and approved. It was noted that there remains a vacancy for a Link Governor for Digital Arts. Governors were asked to consider volunteering for the role.
3. WM Strategy and Planning
a. Chair's update:

Joanna provided an update:

- Dipa and Joanna attended a recent GLA conference – it was helpful to be seen, and we are fortunate that Dipa has a high profile in the sector; key messages confirmed our shift in focus is aligned with the Mayor's thinking around adult education
- Board review – a follow up session will be held with HfL in February. Plans and actions are in place to resolve the actions identified and take forward their recommendations
- Feedback from the away day was very positive – the day was very valuable in terms of forward planning and thinking.

b. Feedback from away day

Peter presented the feedback from the away day and some draft proposals:

- Following the away day, Peter met with Dipa, Joanna and Jenny to draw together the outcomes of the day
- We looked at our current vision, mission and values – and agreed that some of the language feels dry, needing greater creativity and warmth
- Taking ideas from the away day we wanted to get us to a richer narrative with echoes of our 170-year history, social mission and campaigning edge to make it more interesting – e.g. a manifesto
- Key question is what we do regarding the branding – which will require further strategic discussion.

The Committee discussed the draft proposals. Comments included:

- Great idea for a manifesto – words sound fitting.
- Previous language is exclusive – feel our learners can respond to this language.
- Phrase: 'we don't see race or gender' could be controversial and needs to be further crafted.
- Wording shows the personality of WM, draws in the building and helps to make it more personal to us.

The Committee were in full support of the work to date, which will continue to be further developed and refined with Jenny and a small task and finish group.

4. Principal's Report

Dipa presented the report. Key points noted were:

Get Britain Working:

- We are developing our response to the Government's 'Get Britain Working' campaign – the priority being to tackle ill health and economic inactivity. We are mapping what we do and what we can do against the 5 x missions; identifying what the opportunities and challenges will be for us
- MCAs and the GLA will be empowered to create tailored plans to achieve those goals linked to local priorities. The GLA will present their growth plan in February, setting out their priority sectors. The draft does not mention essential skills – but we are lobbying to ensure they are included
- Over the coming years, the curriculum may look slightly different as we develop our response and find new opportunities e.g. how best to support those aged 50+ with skills needed for a technology driven economy; skills around AI and safe use of technology and management of information/disinformation
- We will consider resurrecting Health & Social Care courses – an area with skills gaps and mass employment opportunities. We will be speaking with employers to identify their needs and how we can best respond and develop a model of training delivery
- New partnerships and sectors will be explored such as creating links with local GPs, hospital, health practitioners
- We need to ensure that we reflect all of this when developing our manifesto.

The Board discussed the impact of the government initiative. Comments included:

- We should ensure that our strength lies not only with what we deliver but also our models of delivery.
- It is important for us to continue to challenge the GLA and ensure essential skills remain a priority.

- It is worth looking to target social prescribers regarding our offer.

Leighton Place:

- We must vacate Leighton Place by 10 January. From January, our plan is instead to be based at Rhyl Community School
- The planning application for Dean House Studios was unsuccessful. Camden Council has asked us to withdraw our application on the basis that the plan could not sufficiently justify the loss of office space
- Following further discussion on our future curriculum offer, the proposal is that we do not submit a further application for Dean House. Rhyl are very keen for us to be there and there is a huge ESOL demand within the catchment area - an opportunity for us to attract and secure more learners. On that basis, we would like to develop an alternative business case for the Board to consider.

The Board discussed the proposals:

- Any safeguarding problems?
  Dipa: We already have a presence within the school. There is a separate entrance for WM learners. So far, no concerns have been raised and we will continue to have discussions with the Head regarding this.
- Planning issues highlight the need to develop contacts within the local council and to secure a Camden Council Governor on the Board.
  Joanna: Contact was made with Camden Council at the end of November asking for a Council Member to be appointed. This will be followed up in the new year.

The Board agreed to support the move to and use of Rhyl Community School - that it could be a useful model for the future, providing greater outreach into the community and with the potential to move other classes out such as health and fitness, then releasing hall space for creating income opportunities and agreed with the recommendation not to re-submit a further planning application for Dean House.

Other items noted from the report:

- The College has been accredited achievement level for Mayor of London's Good Work Standard employer
- Enrolments for the current academic year are positive and have surpassed the comparative figures for the same time in the previous year
- SLT discussed and agreed that College use of X/Twitter will now cease as the platform does not align with the core values of the College.

5. College Self-Assessment Report 2023//24 & 2024/25 (SAR)

Jon and Di presented the SAR:

- It is the CQSC's role to review and recommend to the Board the outcomes of the self-assessment
- The self-assessment was externally moderated with peers from Richmond, Redbridge and Mary Ward Colleges – all concurred with the report and gradings
- Grade descriptors were used from the Ofsted rating 'Good' and were tightly matched to ensure nothing was missed and all is in line with the inspection framework
- Overall assessment grade across the 4 x sections is a Good 2: Quality of Education, Behaviour and Attitude, Personal Development, Learning and Management
- Slightly lower than last year but Ofsted has recalibrated the grading to mean you must reach at least a 2 in all areas (plus outstandings) to establish an outstanding grading.

The Board discussed the SAR. Questions included:

- What is the next stage in the process?
  Di: Areas for improvement are incorporated into the overall college plan and cascaded through departmental plans and individual objectives. Once approved, a summary report will also be written for the website.
- How does this link with the QIP and how do key themes get addressed?

Di: Big themes that arise via the QIP are raised with the CQSC – such as attainment gaps. This also feeds into the SAR.

- Ensuring ALS is targeted – is there an issue?
  Di: We are looking closely at this, and it was part of our detailed discussion at CQSC. There is an achievement gap for learners with additional learning needs on accredited courses and we are looking at ways to address this.

The Board formally approved the Self-Assessment Report.

6. Year End: Audit, Annual Report & Financial Statements 23/24

Tom, Chair of the Audit Committee presented this item:

The Audit Committee reviewed the Governor's Annual Report and Financial Statements 2023/24 (including the Regularity Self-Assessment and Letter of Representations) at their meeting on 28 November and recommended their formal approval along with the Corporate Statement of Going Concern to the Board.

Key points brought to the Board's attention were:

- The auditors (Buzzacott) stated the accounts are true and fair
- In their opinion, the audit went generally well for most areas and the timetable for overall completion was met
- Observations and recommendations from last year's audit have been satisfactorily dealt with
- This year's observations and recommendations related to petty cash control, Barclays Bank account and Governor's Declarations of Interest forms – all of which were consistent with those identified by KO and the new Financial Controller Ayodeji Ajasin and down to the timing of when the audit was completed. With the onset of new staff these have now essentially been cleared.

The Board reviewed and discussed the Annual Report & Financial Statements and agreed for the Chair to formally sign the reports. Korede will then submit them in line with requirements to the Charity Commission, Companies House and the ESFA.

The Chair thanked Korede and his team for their work.

Action	Lead	By
Annual Report & Financial Statements submitted to ESFA; Companies House & Charity Commission	Korede	Jan 2025

7. Staff Forum Report

Amanda presented the report. Key points noted were:

- Closure of Kentish Town site has created some concerns – open conversations with Dipa have been welcomed and have been re-assuring for those members of staff
- Uneasy time for staff: some eyebrows were raised on the expense of a strategy away day, held so near to a staff restructure; a lack of teacher lunch breaks continues to be an issue and the ongoing mismatch between pay and cost of living were raised
- Staff welcomed the extra space created in the staff room, Christmas Lunch, Christmas tree and the exhibitions/sale and the move from sessional to fractional pay
- The forum is very welcomed by staff and seen as a positive forum where staff see and feel that they are being heard
- Greater and more diverse staff attendance is needed at the meetings – Dipa, Amanda and Monika looking at ways to encourage wider and greater attendance e.g. nominations from staff departments.

The Committee discussed the staff forum report and staff engagement. Questions included:

- What was the staff survey response and what is a usual rate of response?
  Dipa: we received a 39% response = 71 replies. Average response rate is 50%.
- Why was the response lower than average?
  Dipa: It was the 1st survey for 6 years. May be due to timing and that staff had not been asked for a while to complete a staff survey.
- Any way of benchmarking ourselves against other colleges?
  Dipa: Yes – we used the York University Survey and as part of that they also provide benchmarking data. Once we establish our survey and have increased response, we can then poll on specific issues/explore key areas/trends.
- Anything that can be done to encourage a greater response?
  Dipa: Yes – we will do some marketing to encourage engagement with the survey and ask managers to create times in their meetings for completion; and try and ask some open questions resulting in more qualitative answers. Timing of the survey is difficult to manoeuvre as it is dependent upon York. The next staff survey will be carried out at the start of the Summer Term.
- Is the report circulated to staff?
  Amanda: Yes.

The Board discussed the value of the recent away day and noted concerns raised via the staff forum of the cost implications. All agreed that the away day for the Board was VfM – it was timely; integral to developing and strengthening good governance; and provided the space and time to focus on longer term strategy and oversight.

8. Safeguarding

a. Safeguarding Policy

Jon informed the Board that the timing of DfE guidance being issued in August means that the policy is required to be updated in line with any changes in time for term start dates. The policy was amended, reviewed and approved under Chair's actions with input from June Jarrett – Safeguarding Link Governor. This year there was very little change; some Covid related information was removed with guidance regarding online learning left in.

The Board formally approved the policy.

b. Safeguarding Report

June as Safeguarding Link presented key items from the report, reminding the Board of their duty and responsibilities regarding safeguarding. Points noted:

- June had met with Caroline, Director of Learner Services and Designated Safeguarding Lead to discuss the report
- This year there have been 15 x safeguarding disclosures (10 x last year). There's been an increased number of vulnerable learners and some serious incidents (previously reported)
- All feel frustrated in the lack of places within the local area where people who need support and help can be signposted/referred to – this is mainly due to lack of funding
- As part of the student survey, learners said they felt safe and knew who and where to go to regarding safeguarding matters.

The Board discussed the update. Question:

- Do we trend cases/concerns raised?
  Di: Yes – this is looked at in detail by SLT and any serious concerns in relation to incidents or trends would be escalated accordingly.

9. Audit Committee Chair's Report

Tom provided the Chair's report. The Audit Committee met on 28 November 2024. Substantial items from that meeting were covered earlier. Other points noted by the Board were:

- External audit: in line with best practice - the plan is to change our external auditor. This will go out to tender in the new year
- H&S issues – 2nd internal audit was completed and while there is still room for improvement, the high priority issues are resolved
- Following City Lit's recent cyber-attack/experience an internal audit is being conducted in this area. Preliminary response from the internal audit is positive and very complimentary about our management of this
- Focus for internal audits 2025 are agreed as: H&S, Cyber Security, MIS, Procurement, Business Continuity Plan (BCP) and once this is in place, the internal audit will help test how workable the plan is; complete an ESG benchmarking exercise.

10. FPDC Chair's Report

Max provided the Chair's Report. The FPDC met on 20 Nov 2024. Substantial items from that meeting were covered earlier. Other points noted by the Board were:

- Financial outturn for 2023/24 was in line with budget with a good financial health – and maintaining that is a high priority
- Question of tuition fees to consider – and it was agreed a more constructive approach is needed
- The recent estate works are all successfully completed
- Consideration is being given to moving support staff pensions from Aviva across to LGPS, who provide a Crown Guarantee.

11. CQSC Chair's Report

Jon provided the Chair's report. The CQSC met on 4 December 2024. Substantial items from that meeting were covered earlier. Other items noted by the Board were:

- CQSC set aside time in their agenda to have deeper review of attainment gaps across 3 x strands: gender, disability and ethnicity and how they can and are being addressed
- As part of that discussion the Committee looked at the need for securing better and more effective data – the use and collection of information and benchmarking; the difficulties in collating meaningful data from small cohorts and the capacity and resource constraints to do so
- Also discussed were the needs/benefits of increasing learner engagement, developing greater/better assessments and support processes that will help identify individual need with the aim of reducing those gaps in attainment.

12. Governance:

Website biographies: Governors were reminded to submit any updates for their website biographies by Monday 16 December – it will be assumed that if no changes are sent through, the biography needs no amendments.

Training: Governors will be asked to complete refresher training on Safeguarding, Prevent and GDPR in the new year – details will be sent out prior to the Christmas holidays.

Governance schedule: Governors were asked to note the schedule of meetings for 2024/2025/2026. Diary invites will be sent out shortly.

Governors were requested to save the date of Saturday 4 October 2025 for a Board away day, and it was agreed on that day to set aside a disciplined 1 x hour Board meeting for business critical to the start of term/academic year.

Committee Membership: Membership of Committees and their terms of reference will be reviewed to ensure an appropriate balance of membership across the various committees and that business flows though in line with levels of delegation/authority, effectively and efficiently.

13. Confidential Items - WM College Pay Award

Due to conflict of interest, Amanda and Monika (Staff Governors) were asked to recuse themselves from this part of the meeting.

This item is recorded separately under Part 2: Confidential Items.