



GOVERNORS' MEETING

Minutes of the virtual meeting on 20th January 2022

Present: Mr Andy Clarke, Mr Peter Cooper, Miss Lois Knight, Dr David Langley,
Mr James Miller (Chair), Mr Andrew Roberts, Ms Beth Rudolf, Mr Felix Smithson,
Nicky Taylor, Mrs Danielle Thompson, Mrs Catriona Ward, Sarah Woodhall (12)

In attendance: Mrs Sallyanne Griffiths (Finance Director), Mrs Catherine Brearey (Vice Principal).

Minutes produced retrospectively in the absence of the Clerk.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Mr Rob Gorman, Rev Kina Robertshaw, Mr Philip Tranter. (1)

The Chair reported that Adrian Allan had written to him to resign his position as a Governor, due to work commitments. He regretted having to make this decision as he had enjoyed being involved as a Governor, and was very complimentary about the College, having had three children attend. He also offered his help to any prospective Vets.

Vicky Orsmond also resigned as a Staff Governor for personal reasons. Nicky Taylor has been approved as new Staff Governor and was welcomed to the meeting.

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS AND GIFTS

Nothing to declare.

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 18th November 2021

The minutes were approved as an accurate record.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

The Chair reported that the new tender for the building works had come through within budget, so had been approved.

The Principal confirmed that there would be some drilling taking place next week for foundation purposes and that work would commence in February half term, with the bulk of the work being carried out during the Easter and Summer holidays. Peter was also pleased to report that he had secured the use of two classrooms at Hereford & Ludlow College, which means some savings have been made, and would also minimize disruption, a promising start.

There were no other matters arising.

5. CHAIR'S BUSINESS

The Chair reported that the Policy for Induction of New Governors would be circulated, and as this was an item on the agenda for the next meeting, this would be discussed then.

Regarding the appointment of a new Independent Governor, after the last meeting it was agreed by the Search Committee that the Chair and the Principal should approach Ian Archer, Chief Executive

& Artistic Director of The Courtyard. Due to the strength of Performing Arts at the College and a good relationship with the Courtyard, it was seen as a benefit to both. After a very successful visit to the College, Ian Archer was keen to accept the position. His position was formally APPROVED at this evening's meeting.

The Chair said he had put out a request for an Equality Governor, but no-one had yet volunteered. A Governor felt that everyone should feel responsible for Equality & Diversity. Given also the high standard of John Pratt's Equality and Diversity report, the Governors approved the decision not to appoint a Link Governor at this time.

6. CLERK'S REPORT

The Chair reported that the Clerk, Rob Gorman, had major surgery before Christmas, and although doing well, still isn't fully recovered.

7. PRINCIPAL'S REPORT

Review of whole College targets

Copies of the Principal's Report were circulated. The Principal voiced concern about attendance and absence rates at the college, mainly caused by Covid infections and many staff & students having to isolate. At one point the College had 15 staff out.

Regarding the Trust, Attendance and Retention figures were mirrored across the region, although with different methods of collecting data being used, this comparison is inaccurate. For the Trust as a whole, it is a medium term project to harmonise data and see strengths and weaknesses across each institution.

Retention, which the Vice Principal would talk about later, also mirrored a similar pattern. There were a number of things the College had to deal with:

- Difficult for the College to find a way to balance the generous grades that people had been given at GCSEs, and giving people the opportunity to access courses.
- More people on inappropriate courses got behind.
- Some people were in an anxious position, due to the pandemic and being in a different environment.

An important issue raised by the Principal was which approach to adopt towards the exams:

- Plan A (focus on teaching & work towards taking summer exams)

This could be a risk if the exams didn't take place, but the College felt confident with being able to provide some evidence if needs be.

or

- Plan B (accumulating evidence for TAGs, a mammoth task, taking up a huge amount of teaching time, affecting both teachers and students).

The Principal felt that in order to maximise opportunities for our students to leave with the widest possible skills & knowledge base, and not waste precious time on assessments, which could take 6 weeks out of teaching to accommodate assessments being taken concurrently, then Plan A should be adopted. He didn't want to wreck the education of our students taking time out to assess students for a TAG system that might not take place. He pointed out that this could be a risk, but to take time out of teaching for the assessments, and then the Exams went ahead, our students would be at a disadvantage. Other institutions were following Plan B, but with the announcement on 7th Feb re narrowed exam scope, we should work full out expecting exams to take place, and if necessary do a handbrake turn post Easter. The Principal asked for everyone's views on this. The Vice Principal felt that the Principal had explained the situation very well, and agreed that we shouldn't waste important

teaching time doing assessments that may not be needed. We should focus on the 7th Feb announcement about the Exams.

A Governor felt that there would be evidence to substantiate that these are extraordinary circumstances and would warrant us focusing on teaching, due to the fact that at one point we were 15 teachers down.

The Principal thought that we should follow what is right for our students, not what is safest.

The Chair seconded this. A Governor gave 100% support for Peter's analysis of the situation.

A Governor said there was a need for exam experience as the students had been deprived of this so far. They would need this experience for future exams either at university or exams at a further education college. Both Student Governors and a Governor agreed with this.

A Governor asked if at the recent meeting of staff there was general agreement to adopt Plan A. This was confirmed by Andy Clarke who had been at the meeting. A Governor was in agreement, but asked if there could be a situation where our students could be disadvantaged by taking this route. (Plan A)

The Principal answered that it was the right route for the students, but yes there was a risk, but a risk worth taking. Other Colleges were taking a similar route, and the College was confident that it could supply evidence, although maybe not the evidence wanted, and this was the risk. Also, if Plan B was adopted then the exams did take place, then students could then get worse grades.

Governors **AGREED** that Plan A should be adopted.

The Principal also drew attention to a Progression Table that the VP would talk about later. He felt it held no validity as local context hadn't been considered.

The Principal was also pleased to report that to date 9 students had received

Oxbridge offers, with Cambridge offers yet to arrive. HSFC had been also listed 4th in the increase number of Oxford places since 2017.

The problems students had had using Transport for Wales – This seems to have been resolved thanks to the joint efforts of Vice Principal Phil Tranter & a Governor.

The Principal then ran through the list of Action Points on the Report being covered by the Trust.

With the Principal spending more time outside of HSFC he wanted to give credit to both Phil & Catherine & the CMT for doing a great job. The Chair agreed, and accepted that the Principal couldn't be in college full time.

The Principal had attended a SFC conference where the DFE made clear that it wanted Sixth Form Colleges to be system leaders. HSFC is the strongest institution in the county to take this on. We are seen in a positive light in the region, and with large competitors from as far away as London looking to approach schools in the local area, he felt that we should take on this significant role and embrace it on our terms.

Governors **NOTED** the Report.

8. FINANCE REPORT

The Finance Director presented the Summary Financial Results for the 4 months to 31 December 2021. At the period end, the actual position for the MAT was £1.5m ahead of budget. This was due to ESFA income received in advance for pay awards, pension contributions and the bursary. In addition, autumn term transport invoices have not been received and exam invoices for the summer 2022 sittings are not due until March.

With regard to Hereford's position, the strength in the MAT's balance sheet is due to Hereford's accumulated reserves. Expenditure on professional fees in relation to the new building is approximately £50k. We are expecting the first instalment of our capital funding in February 2022.

Overall Earnings before Interest, Tax, Depreciation and Amortisation (EBITDA) was £1m, well in excess of the £187k budget due to income in advance and the timing of major expenditure. Governors **NOTED** the Summary Results for the period to December 2021.

The Principal added that during the disruption caused by teacher absence due to Covid, the College had actually saved money by investing in people to go into classrooms and set up lessons where tutors could teach from home on screen, rather than pay for supply teachers. The Vice Principal added that it was an added benefit for the students to be with their own teacher on screen, rather than a supply teacher. Both Student Governors agreed.

The Governors **NOTED** the Report

The Finance Director left the meeting at this point.

9. COLLEGE SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT

(i) Summary of SAR

The Vice Principal asked if there were any questions on the attached Summary.

A Governor asked for the Virtual College Programme to be explained.

The VP said this is a MAT project with a reduced launch in Sep 22, with a bigger launch in Sep 23. It would harness skills picked up and use strengths across the 3 institutions to build up enrichment, which is hard to provide when short of funding. The first model would be in financial one, giving support to students in various aspects of finance that they all should know. All kinds of other topics would gradually come on board, e.g. preparation for some of the harder university entrance exams & some of the topics from General Studies, that we have lost, but didn't want to lose. Eventually students could be given a certificate of so many units.

The Principal thought this was very exciting, and the Governor saw this as a huge step forward, as it provides a solution for things that have ebbed away to continue in a well thought out and enhancing way.

The Chair asked the Vice Principal which areas she was least confident in.

These were:

- Work related learning
- The Gatsby Benchmark
- Work experience

The VP then explained what we were doing to answer these problems:

- Hire a Work Experience Co-ordinator for September 22
- Launch a supportive work experience programme during a 2 week period in the summer for 1st years
- Vocational course students, where it is even more relevant, do module exams so they would be able to have that 2 week period too.
- A student applying to a Russell Group University may take a 1 or 2 day experience

A Governor commented that she was disappointed that out of 14 work experience students that she had taken during the pandemic, only 4 had come from HSFC, and that 3 out of the 4 then decided to change their choice of degree, which were quite fundamental switches.

The Chair added that a big problem with work experience was the complicated work involved with risk assessments that had to be done. The Chair asked if this situation had improved, but unfortunately it hadn't.

The Chair recommended reading the first 88 pages of the SAR Report. Governors should contact Steph Berry, who will send this out to you.

The Chair acknowledged that it was difficult to prepare a Self Assessment review without evidence, and that the College didn't have that evidence for the last two years. However, he knew that two years ago there were concerns with two Departments, and asked the VP about this situation.

The VP acknowledged that two years ago there were concerns about two Departments, but now there were only concerns about one Department, which wasn't a concern two years ago. Steps being taken to remedy this situation were:

- Learning Walks which were introduced again last September
- Strong mentoring in this Department
- Extra lessons timetabled.

The Chair asked the VP if she felt confident, despite the lack of evidence, that she was sufficiently close to the ground to be able to pick up where there may be issues. The VP responded:

- We are very lucky to have very supportive parents and students who are quick to point out any issues.
- A rapid return to Learning Walks in September

The VP made the point that we are Grade 1 in overall areas, but hadn't graded the departments as it would be hard for a HoD to defend this without any data. On the other hand, a concern that the VP and the Principal had discussed, is that without that data, Ofsted could ask what evidence we did have. We believe that we are a 1, we don't want to 'argue up'.

The Principal confirmed this by adding that since the last lots of data were available, they supported that judgement. Is the College better or worse than it was then? There is no data, but all that has happened since in an abnormal environment shows the strengths that we have risen to, so therefore haven't got worse. We have sorted out the areas that were of concern, so therefore, we can't be worse than we were.

The VP added that Ofsted would have to prove that we are not a 1, opposed to us having to prove that we are not a 2.

The Chair asked AJC & NT what evidence they would be able to show to an Ofsted Inspector that their Department was outstanding. AJC responded that all structures were in place, including SARs and Quality Assurance Folders, and with training that they have had in terms of Ofsted preparation, he would be confident in showing an Inspector around his Department, and confident that his staff would mirror what he is saying. Hopefully the students would mirror this too, but what teachers say and what students hear can be two very different things.

Although there is a lack of data for last 2 years, AJC felt that there was a massive amount of evidence to show how they had supported students throughout the pandemic, and that should count for a lot. The Chair asked NT for her views on this. NT said that as hers was a relatively new course and a new start up, the department had a lot of information, which they had been gathering as they went along. She shared AJC's view regarding students, but didn't feel that there would be any problems.

(ii) Destination data

The VP felt that as a Mathematician, she would suggest that destination data is nationally inconsistent as different methodology is applied practically every year. This makes it incredibly difficult to draw any kind of real conclusion from this data. However, as it is literally the only thing published, an Ofsted Inspector or prospective parents might well focus on this.

The VP shared a screen showing the official Government website, which allows comparison between any school or college.

2021 - only progression data published

2019 - progression to HE or employment

2018 - progression to HE or training

The VP found the 2018 data very frustrating as the government had swapped their methodology. In 2019, where the methodology had changed again, the figures were much better. For this reason, the VP didn't believe that this data was highly significant, but we have to acknowledge that it exists.

The destination data for HSFC gives a better picture, and most pleasing was the 'Progression in University':

- 1st & Upper 2nd Degree - 89% (higher than State & 6th Form sector)
- Don't complete Degree - 0.2% (lower than State, 6th Form & Independent)
- Oxbridge numbers really improved over last few years

The Chair asked if anyone had any comments.

A Governor thought it was baffling and difficult to believe that the Government couldn't gather basic information. The VP added that the Government data wasn't consistent due to methodology changing year on year. The Chair agreed with the VP.

A Governor asked if the change of methodology in collecting data had been challenged. The VP said that this could only be done through Ofsted, and would raise this matter when they came to inspect the College. The Principal added that they would also be challenging this through the Sixth Form Colleges Sector.

Re Destination Data, the Chair then listed the most popular subjects that people studied at university, and the most popular HEIs that people attended. He offered to print this out & add it to the agenda for the next meeting.

Governors **NOTED** the Report.

10. DEPARTMENTAL TARGETS FOR RETENTION AND ACHIEVEMENT

The VP reported that she had departmental target figures, but whether we would be able to use them next year remains to be seen, depending on the data.

- Value Added (if it is back)
- Retention – would want to compare with benchmark retention from the Sixth Form sector
- Attendance – Target set at 95% which won't meet this year, but would want to compare to the sector averages.

The Chair agreed that target setting in the current climate was extremely difficult.

11. ATTENDANCE AND RETENTION MONITORING

The VP reported that attendance was still low, but this was the same situation across the sector. The follow up actions discussed at the last meeting had been carried out. The College was still holding a firm line on remote lessons. This had been discussed at length in SMT and

SMG meetings, and although online lessons would boost attendance, it was felt that they wouldn't boost engagement. Students having to self-isolate were the only exception.

The Chair asked the VP if these figures meant anything. The VP replied that they were disappointingly less useful than have been historically.

Regarding Retention, the VP said that it is difficult to analyse patterns as we would normally do. Retention at the moment is 97.8%, way down on this time last year, but figures then were artificially boosted by blended learning. However, they are in line with the 19/20 year. Although in line with the 19/20 year, the average GCSE point scores of incoming students for this current year compared to 2019 cohort is 0.53 higher. Because these GCSE grades are likely to be inflated, this may not be an accurate reflection on retention. It also makes it very hard to match trends against previous year's trends and come out with a sensible comparison.

The Chair said he had noted that there had been a higher fall off of students in the 2nd Year than in the 1st Year, which was unusual. The VP responded that with most of last year being remote learning, this may have helped the students who would have traditionally left for mental health reasons, or the journey to college. In normal times, these students would more likely have dropped off in the 1st Year.

The Chair asked the Principal what was the situation with applications. The Principal responded that the numbers were in line with the years ago, so he had no concerns.

Governors **NOTED** the Report.

12. REVIEW OF RISK MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

The Principal reported that a couple had been downgraded, and that the College had much more staffing resilience than we used to have. He said that there was very little to comment upon other than what was written in the Report, particularly as this had been discussed recently.

13. DISASTER RECOVERY PLAN UPDATE

The Principal felt that this was very important, but hoped we didn't have to use it often. However, he noted that one of the benefits is learning new skills, and as a college, we have been able to test this, because all the notion of working remotely and closing down, we have actually put through a test. We have managed to continue to function, proving that we could do this for a period of time, so is quite encouraging. Also, all of the backup for IT for bringing in mobile classrooms had been tested and was going well.

Important points about the plan are:

- We have one
- It is thorough
- You don't have to know it thoroughly
- Compliant with what we need
- VP Phil Tranter 'is on to it'

The Chair asked about contacting Insurers.

The Principal reported that the College had recently changed Insurers, and taken out a new FE Policy. This had been done across the Trust, which saved money, and gave us a greater degree of specialist cover, with a rapid response, once contacted. VP Phil Tranter had arranged this.

Having talked in the past about using Hereford & Ludlow College in a crisis, the Chair asked whether this was a reciprocal arrangement. The Principal said that it was, but in practical terms it was unlikely either college being able to house the other one.

Governors **NOTED** the Report

14. AOB

Student Governor Felix reported that he had been invited as an observer to our local Beacon College, and was going through the process of perhaps joining their Local Advisory Board, possibly encouraging strong relationships in the future. The Chair and the Principal were both delighted about this, and the Principal felt that if the Trust was expanding, this could be very beneficial for both colleges in helping the way we function as a community.

Two Governors praised the incredible work that the College does.

15. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 10th March at 6.00pm.