

NCG – Corporation Meeting

Main Minutes of Meeting held on Tuesday 13th December 2022 – 3pm to 6.00pm

Details			Attendance		
Full Name	Position	Initials	Attended	Apologies	No Attendance
Peter Lauener	Chair of Corporation	PL	X*		
John Widdowson	Vice Chair of Corporation	JW	X		
Mark Squires	Independent Governor	MS	X		
Caroline MacDonald	Independent Governor	CMa	X*		
Jeannette Strachan	Independent Governor	JS		X	
Andrew Cunningham	Independent Governor	AC	X		
Rob Holt	Independent Governor	RH		X	
Chris McCourt	Independent Governor	CMc	X		
VACANCY	Independent Governor				
Shirley Atkinson	Independent Governor	SA	X		
Liz Bromley	CEO – Ex-Officio Governor	LB	X		
Kevin Stach	Staff Governor	JM	X		
Diana Wiedemann	Student Governor	DW	X*		
Conor Allen	Student Governor	CA	X*		
Clerk					
David Balme	CoCo & Secretary to the Board	DB	X		
Visitors / Presenters					
Lisa Sproats	Chief Finance Officer	LS	X		
Steve Wallis	Executive Director of Quality	SW	X		
Scott Mulholland	Chief Information, Data & Estates Officer	SM	X		
Tony Lewin	Executive Principal (Curriculum)	TL	X		
Gerard Garvey	Executive Principal (People & Culture)	GG	X		

^Attended for part of the meeting / * Attended the meeting virtually

1. Chair Opening Remarks / Board Matters / Declaration of Interests / Apologies for Absence

1.1. Opening and Welcome

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed the attendees (including Kevin Stach who joined the Board as the Staff Governor for the first time).

1.2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received from RH and JS. The apologies were accepted.

The Board agreed that the meeting was quorate.

1.3. Declarations of Interest

The Board were asked if they had any interests to declare in relation to the agenda, however members confirmed that there was nothing new to declare.

1.4. Update from the Chair of Relevant Matters

The Chair provided an update covering the following relevant matters:

- MAS Records – Noting that an ‘end of investigation’ report had now been received.
- Reclassification of the Further Education sector had been confirmed with the change being backdated to 1993.
 - PL recommended to members that he had read an excellent article on the reclassification (drafted by Matt Hamnett) and that he would circulate to all members for their review.

Action – DB to circulate article to all members.
 - The changes will result in the sector being under grater control and will result in additional requirement for approval from DfE in areas where previously this would have not been required.
 - It is important that NCG attempts to track additional cost (£ and Staffing) of complying with this change.

Action – Executive team to maintain a record of identifiable cost and recourse increases drive by the reclassification agenda.
 - Significant amount of work remains outstanding to reach a point of full understanding and clarity re the impact / opportunities generated by the change.
- Whilst the Pay Dispute had (and continues) to cause significant disruption however LB will provide a further update within the CEG report.

The Board noted the updates.

1.5. Governor Training / External Activity

No information was noted.

2. Thematic Discussion

2.1. Quality & Performance Report (Including the approval of the 2021/22 SAR and QIP)

SW presented the SAR to the Board, noting that the report summaries performance and quality indicators for all Colleges (and at a group level) and assigns an 'Ofsted' style judgement for each College and for NCG.

The drafting the report had included the involvement of JW and reflects the views of SA and JS (from work undertaken by them in their Link Governors).

Within the report SW confirmed that NCG had classified itself as a 'Good' organisation (which is in alignment with the Ofsted outcome received earlier in the academic year). Specifically the report highlighted headline strengths in the areas of:

- Governors and leaders have a strategic plan to deliver exceptional learner experience and outcomes built on high quality local college delivery, supported by a national infrastructure. Corporation and College Boards continue to be strengthened to include governors with the required skillsets to support and challenge NCG's leadership teams.
- The Group has an extensive curriculum offer, intrinsically aligned to national and regional skills needs, learners' aspiration and community learning.
- The Group's extensive resource of teaching and professional support staff provides huge opportunities for the sharing of knowledge and best practice for the benefit of learners.
- Teaching, learning and assessment, has resulted in generally positive experiences and destinations for young people.
- The behaviour and attitudes of learners is frequently observed to be good; learners report that they feel safe and supported in all NCG's colleges.
- The provision for high needs learners at Newcastle College, and the academic provision at Newcastle Sixth Form were identified as being particularly 'good' by Ofsted in January 2022.
- Communities of practice for quality and TLA, safeguarding, apprenticeships and digital learning are now well established.

Further SW highlighted to the Board that:

- Learner destinations are generally strong across all colleges.
- Observations and deep dives demonstrate that teaching and learning is 'good'.
- Learner behaviour is 'good'.

- Safeguarding across the board is 'good'.
- There is a need to improve attendance.
- Retention & Achievement for learners on 'longer' provision (especially in Carlisle, Lewisham, Kidderminster and West Lancashire) needs to improve.
- In recent years there had been excellent progress within Newcastle 6th Form, however that had slipped this year (resulting in the college only making 'average' learner progress within the ALPs system).

SW explained that this was believed to be at least partially impacted by 21/22 being the first year where examinations had been reintroduced and that management were working to ensure the college returned to previous higher standard.

- There have been further improvements in apprenticeships, where the results for learners on 'standards' were now 7% above average levels for the sector.
- In response to the above:
 - PL thanked SW for the reports and for the work that had gone into the drafting and finalisation (both at a College and NCG level).
 - JW noted that College Boards continued to monitor and contribute to academic quality within each of the colleges.

Further JW suggested to SW that as the curriculum model varies between colleges his reporting needs to reflect this to ensure that College Boards fully understand and can interpret the information they are receiving.

Action – SW to revisit the effectiveness / understanding of College Boards in this area.

- PL commented (in relation to 'Item 4 – Lines of Enquiry') that to identify the Sixth Form specifically at an NCG level felt out of alignment with the other points noted.

SW responded noting that it had been included due to the regression noted over the last 12 months in relation to academic performance, however he was comfortable to delegate to the 6th Form College Board for future monitoring.

As a replacement Line of Enquiry, PL suggested that given the potential importance of T-Levels they could be included within the 22/23 'Line of Enquiry'.

Action – SW to ensure action is reflected within the 'Lines of Enquiry' monitored by the 6th Form College Board.

Action – SW to add T-Levels to the Corporation 'Lines of Enquiry' for the forthcoming year.

- MS commented that he felt the SAR was an honest and transparent reflection of NCG, however he felt further narrative was needed re page 21 and 22 of the document.

In response SW explained that a colleges achievement rate can be significantly impacted by English & maths functional skills (which have a low success rate) and Enrichment aims (which generally have an exceptionally high success level).

Action – SW to revisit the current document and add additional narrative as needed.

- In addition, MS noted that he had also fed back to SW several small editing points.

The Board approved the 2021/22 Self-Assessment Report (SAR), the Quality Improvement Plan and the Key Lines of Enquiry.

3. Strategic Items

3.1. CEG Report

LB presented the report and highlighted the following:

- Reclassification
 - Rising issue around the loss of autonomy is a significant risk.
 - Executives, Corporation Board and the Department for Education may not align.
 - Increases the difference between the level of control and influence operated within FE and HE.
- Capital receipt – NCG have been notified that they are to receive circa £1.3 million in capital funding from DFE.
- Pay Award
 - Following an interim payment of £500 (reduced for staff not on a full-time contract), outline agreement has now been reached with the unions where all staff (again, reduced for staff not on a full-time contract) will receive a pay award of £1,000 and that this payment will be included in the December 2022 pay run.
 - Overall payment made to staff will result in an increase of between 3% and 7.8% for all staff employed on a full-time contract and paid less than £90,000.
 - Note – Colleagues paid more than £90,000 will receive no additional payments.
 - Further, as a result on the introduction of the newly increased Real Living Wage, all fulltime staff will now receive at least £21,000 (and higher for colleagues based in London).
 - LB further provided assurance that whilst structured in a different way the revised pay offer does not increase the cost to NCG.

- In response to the above and the wider content of the report:
 - PL asked if LB could confirm if the settlement outlined had now been fully agreed by the unions.

In response LB stated that this is an interim settlement as the Unions are yet to ballot members and that whilst it is possible that the members may reject the offer it is currently considered unlikely (as it will be recommended by the Unions).
 - PL further congratulated LB and all the staff who had been involved in this process and who had played a key role in reaching this agreed position.

- MAS Records

Covered under a Confidential Minute.

- LSEC and Lewisham

Covered under a Confidential Minute.

- Deptford

Covered under a Confidential Minute

The Board noted the report.

3.1.1. People Plan

GG presented the people plan and highlighted the following:

- That the plan had been developed with input by the Chief Executive Group and College Principals.
- That this was the first plan of its type for NCG, and it was intended to document NCG's commitment to its staff.
- That there are a couple of further 'benefits of working for NCG' are still to be added to the document.
- The plan looked to address the challenges faced by the business in relation to the recruitment and retention of staff.

In response to the above, and the document provided, the Board queried the following:

- MS confirmed his support for the document however was surprised that it made no specific commitments to career development. GG responded to the observation and confirmed whilst he believed this to be implicit within the document, a further amend would be made to make our commitment to career development' clearer.

- KS raised that he felt the document lacked metrics, especially in relation to exit interviews (which he believes should always be undertaken face to face). GG confirmed his agreement that this is a fair reflection, and the document would be updated to address.
- CMA further noted her support for KS's comment, going on to suggest that further analysis is required to understand (and act upon) the data coming from the interviews as this may show that departure is not just financially driven.
- PL further noted that the document could be stronger in relation to:
 - The opportunities and possible career pathways available to colleague within the professional services teams.
 - Our use of recruitment pathways (including the use of apprentice levy).

GG thanked governors for their input into the document and confirmed that NCG needs to position itself carefully to sell its value and to make NCG an employer of choice

In summary PL concluded that:

- The high turnover levels noted across the business remain a concern and that he is hopeful that this document can go some way to addressing the issue.
- **Action:** Given the importance of this area, GG is to provide termly updates to the Board.
- **Action:** GG to make the amendments noted above prior to finalising the document.

The Board approved (subject to the changes noted) the People Plan.

3.1.2. Relationship Report

DB introduced the report noting that it was intended to allow governors to:

- Maintain an understanding of engagement with stakeholder being undertaken by the senior team.
- Ensure there is collaboration with employers (and others) to ensure the range and content of provision is aligned with local, regional and national priorities.
- Ensure there is evidence of working with local and regional bodies to ensure provision takes account of their priorities.

PL thanked DB for the report and went on to ask for clarity as to whether a 'Skills Build Competition' was being hosted by Lewisham College in May 2023. In response GG confirmed that this was the case.

Action: It was agreed that an invite to this event would be circulated to all Corporation Members.

KS shared his view that construction is an important area for NCG and that he believes there is a real opportunity if we were to look outside of sector to incentivise modern ways of development and links with more established organisations.

Action: DB to link KS with Brett O'Reilly.

The Board noted the report.

3.2. Lewisham Update

Item covered in full under agenda item 3.1

3.3. Finance Report

LS presented the report to the Board and highlighted the following:

- Accounts remain in line with the 22/23 budget.
- Q1 results showed initial shortfall however following review of spend they are now expected to return to budget.
- Initial in year themes noted include:
 - Payment of £500 (£1.2m) included within forecast (but not initial budget)
 - Close management of, and challenges within the recruitment market to recruitment, has resulted in staff to income costs being circa 69%.
 - RO4 student number recruitment target exceeded.
 - HE Income down by £1.2m because of lower than planned recruitment.
 - International student recruitment numbers higher than planned.
- There will continue to be a real 'push' on the management of costs and a reminder of the need for compliance remains.
- Financial dashboard issued by the EAFA received and confirms NCG's continued financial health as being 'Good'.

In response to the above (and the point made re staff to income specifically) PL requested that LS provide further analysis of this change and of how the reduction to this number can continue to be achieved.

Action – LS to provide further detail on staff to income.

The Board noted the report.

3.4. Approval of Annual Accounts and Financial Statements (21/22)

Covered under a Confidential Minute.

4. Items for Approval / Noting

4.1. Audit Committee Annual Report (21/22) and

4.2. Internal Audit End of Year Report (21/22)

DB informed the Board that the reports had previously been presented to Audit & Risk committee (and received endorsement for onward presentation to the Corporation Board) however due to an administrative error the documents themselves had not been attached to the agenda for this meeting.

DB offered his apologies for this oversight.

Action – Audit Committee Annual Report to be circulated for approval by members post meeting.

Action – Internal Audit End of Year Report to be circulated for approval by members post meeting.

4.3. Environmental Strategy Update

SM presented the report to the Board noting this is currently a very busy area linked in part the launch of the public sector decarbonisation activity.

To support the work that was currently ongoing / planned SM confirmed that as detailed in the paper NCG had submitted several bids which if successful would provide additional and unbudgeted funding.

PL asked SM if the bids that had been submitted had included Lewisham College. In response SM confirmed that they had not however that NCG had received £1.3m of DFE funding which may be able to be used in Lewisham.

4.4. Refresh of Subcontracting Plan

DB presented the report, highlighting the changes of note to the Board.

The Board approved the update.

4.5. Corporation Matters

DB presented the report and informed the Board that post publication an error had been noted in relation to the heading of point 4 (where it should have read West Lancashire College and not Kidderminster College).

DB offered his apologies for this oversight.

The Board approved the update.

4.6. HR Annual Report

GG presented the report for approval. In his overview to the Board GG confirmed that the restructure plan for HR had now been finalised and would be released to the business at the end of the following week. In addition it had been agreed that HR teams would now be based onsite at least 4 days per week.

PL confirmed that he was very supportive of the move to bring these staff back on site and provided his support to the work currently being led by GG.

The Board approved the update.

4.7. Health & Safety Annual Report

SM presented the report for approval. As an overview SM highlighted to governors that the reported demonstrated the significant improvement made over recent periods and demonstrated the positive direction of travel within the service area.

The Board approved the update.

4.8. Estates Committee Disposal

SM presented the report to the Board, noting that it has previously received endorsement from the Estates Committee.

The Board noted the update.

5. Minutes or Previous Meeting / Matters Arising / Register of Actions

5.1. Minutes of Previous Meeting

DB presented the minutes to the Board for approval. On review however it was noted that in error the minutes referred to 'CM' when it should have been either 'CMc' or CMa'.

The Board approved the minutes subject to the above correction being made.

5.2. Register of Actions

DB presented the Register of Actions.

The Board approved the register with the following observations.

- **Actions 3.1.3 and 3.3 from the meeting on the 13th September 2022 should have an action deadline of March 2023 and not March 2022 as shown.**
- **Action 4.5 from the meeting on the 8th February can now be closed as it is no longer relevant.**

- The report provided on HE activity was accepted as written however PL requested time in a future meeting of the board be allocated to allow a more detailed discussion.

Action – HE activity to be included on the agenda of a future meeting.

5.2.1. Kidderminster Recruitment Update

The report was **accepted** by the Board as written.

5.3. College Board Minutes

DB confirmed to the Board that copies of the minutes from the term1 meetings of the College Boards had now been made available via the Knowledge Base.

5.4. Evaluation of Meeting

PL summarised the meeting and noted that:

- Appropriate time had been made available to discuss MAS Records, Lewisham College and Deptford.
- It was disappointing that it had not been possible to sign off the accounts however the Board understood the basis for this and that it remained out of the hand of LS and her team.
- Clear agreement had been reached in relation to Lewisham College and Deptford.

6. Any Other Business

Letter from UCU – DB presented the item, informing the Board that the attached documentation had been sent by UCU along with a request for it to be shared with Corporation Members.

The Board noted the update.

6.1 Deptford Campus

Item covered under in full under agenda item 3.1

7. Time and Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for the 7 March 2023.

Approved: