

NCG – Corporation Meeting

Minutes of Meeting held on Tuesday 2nd June 2020 – 3pm to 6pm

Details			Attendance		
Full Name	Position	Initials	Attended	Apologies	No Attendance
Peter Lauener	Chair of Corporation	PL	X*		
Chris Roberts	Vice Chair of Corporation	CR	X*		
Mark Squires	Independent Governor	MS	X*		
Caroline MacDonald	Independent Governor	CM	X*^		
John Cuthbert	Independent Governor	JC	X*		
Jeannette Strachan	Independent Governor	JS	X*		
Liz Bromley	CEO – Ex-Officio Governor	LB	X*		
Cameron Hartley	Student Governor	CH		X	
Jennifer Mitchelson	Staff Governor	JM	X*		
Visitors/ Presenters					
Chris Payne	Deputy CEO	CP	X*		
David Balme	Executive Director Governance, Assurance & Risk	DB	X*		
Mike Wilmot	Chief Finance Officer	MW	X*		
Steve Wallis	Executive Director of Quality	SW	X*		
Tony Lewin	Principal – Newcastle College	TL	X*		
Nicola Taylor	Assistant Director of Governance (minutes)	NT	X*		
Denise Williamson	Principal – West Lancashire College	DW	X*^		
Annette Cast	Principal – Southwark College	AC	X^”		

*Attended via Microsoft Teams / ^Attended for part of the meeting / “Attended by telephone

1. Meeting Administration

1.1. Opening of Meeting and Welcome

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed the attendees. It was noted that interviews for Corporation Board Members were currently taking place and the recommendations from the Search Committee would be circulated to the Corporation Board for approval.

1.2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from CH, and CM noted she needed to offer apologies from 4pm. The apologies were accepted and the Board noted that the meeting was quorate.

1.3. Declarations of Interest

There were no additional declarations made.

1.4. Review of Minutes from the Previous Meeting – 5th May 2020

The Board reviewed the minutes of the previous meeting and agreed that they were a true and accurate reflection of the meeting.

It was noted that the meeting heading needed correcting.

Action: NT to amend.

1.5. Register of Board Actions

The Board reviewed the register of actions and noted that relevant actions were to be covered within the meeting agenda or closed as per the document.

[REDACTED]

It was noted that the Safeguarding Link Governor role remained vacant.

Action: PL to speak to Board Members outside of the meeting.

The Board noted the updates.

1.6. Matters Arising

N/A

1.7. Governor Activity

The Board were asked if they had any relevant activity to report.

JS confirmed she had attended webinars following COVID-19 in relation to Student Mental Health and Careers, both of which were hosted by Universities UK, however it was noted that the information was relevant to the FE Sector.

CM confirmed she had attended a webinar in relation to HE following COVID-19.

Action: CM and JS to send details to NT.

2. Substantive Items

2.1. Chief Executive Group - Report

LB presented the Chief Executive Group report, specifically noting the following points:

- Work continues to finalise the IT and Digital Strategy which is critical for the reopening of the Colleges.
- [REDACTED]
- There is an Interim Principal vacancy at Newcastle College following TL taking up a secondment opportunity. This opportunity is open to internal candidates.

The Board noted their thanks and offered their best wishes to TL in his new position, and TL noted his thanks to NCG for agreeing to the secondment opportunity.

The Board queried the project title of “Reboot and Restore”, suggesting that restore could be seen as continuing with how things were done previously rather than aiming for continuous improvement. LB explained the wording in greater detail however confirmed that she would reflect on the views expressed.

The Board asked as to whether the option to furlough staff had been maximised. LB confirmed that once the guidance was issued, this was explored fully and staff have been furloughed where possible up to the allowed allocation.

The Board asked about the purchase of student laptops, and it was confirmed that this equipment had been purchased to ensure students were able to access learning and support. MW confirmed that £0.5m was set aside for this which was leftover CAPEX, plus additional funding from the job retention scheme which wasn't originally included in the Q2 forecast. It was noted that some bursary funding (following a reduction in travel bursary spend) could also be used for this in certain circumstances. The Governors asked if the laptops were to be returned by the students and MW confirmed that they would and that that IT were in the process of setting up policies and procedures around this. The Board asked about potential government funding for the buying of equipment, however MW suggested that this funding was made available to schools. CP noted that the need for laptops was linked to the progression of the Digital Strategy.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
The Board noted the report.

2.1.1. COVID-19 Update

LB presented the COVID-19 Update, and the Governors asked if NCG were looking to continue to top up the salary of staff members once the furlough contribution reduces. LB confirmed that in some cases, the value would be made up to 100% however NCG would not be spending unnecessarily, and HR will be having conversations with those whose salary would not be topped up. The Board agreed that the topping up of salaries once the furlough amount decreases would be costly and may not be fundable.

LB confirmed that the Colleges are preparing to open from 15th June with the relevant measures in place; however only a small number of the learners would be returning. The return of staff has been monitored carefully with conversations having taken place with regard to arrangements for returning. The Board asked about interactions with the Unions and LB confirmed that this had been mixed and noted a Union meeting was taking place the following day to discuss the return plans. Specifically a request has been received to suspend teaching observations however it has been confirmed that these will continue to ensure the quality of teaching for the benefit of learners.

The Board noted the update.

2.1.2. Revisit of Strategic Objectives

CP presented the Revisit of Strategic Objectives paper.

The Board noted previous conversations around the need to implement a tool to look at courses to ensure viability when agreeing the curriculum offer. CP confirmed that this is something the Curriculum Strategy Group (CSG) are looking into, and projects are ongoing around the collaboration of online learning resource. CP noted that the portfolio of study programmes is being considered in terms of how NCG's offer could differ from that of other providers. CP further noted that the Business Development Team have been researching the AEB market in different sectors with a view to respond to new opportunities.

Action: NT to circulate AEB Research paper to the Board.

The Board noted the update.

2.1.3. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Update – Verbal

LB provided the Board with a verbal update on EDI, noting that a mapping exercise is due to take place over the Summer with regard to the objectives and strategy. LB also noted the potential link with Equality Works.

The Board noted the update.

2.2. [Redacted]

2.3. Leadership Hub

LB presented the Leadership Hub update, along with the supporting papers which included further information on the 3 programmes. LB confirmed that these programmes are to support succession within leadership, increase the ambition of senior management and facilitate project work whilst experiencing learning. LB noted that these programmes would offer the opportunities for internal and external networking, as well as developmental opportunities across NCG.

LB noted that the programmes would also be used to tackle specific issues in relation to team or project performance, linking with the objective setting process and appraisals.

The Board asked if candidates suitable for the aspire programme would be identified, as some may not wish to put themselves forward. LB confirmed that this was the case.

LB confirmed a series of 3 webinars would be hosted in the Summer which would act as a soft launch of the Leadership Hub, getting middle leaders in the frame of mind that leadership is key. LB noted that the programmes would encourage entrepreneurial thinking; thinking of new ways of working, opening new opportunities and encouraging change. LB confirmed a further update would be available in July.

Action: NT to add update to July 2020 agenda.

The Board noted the update and welcomed progress.

2.4. FE Sector Realignment Options

CP presented the FE Sector Realignment Options paper and the Board discussed the paper at length with regard to the potential changes in education and the possible opportunities which may arise from this. The Board agreed that this was an interesting paper and noted the report.

2.5. Chief Finance Officer – Finance Report

MW presented the Chief Finance Officer Report, directed the Board to the Executive Summary, and highlighted the following points:

- P9 accounts were positive and income hadn't dropped as steeply as thought in light of COVID19. The main concern was around apprenticeships, with the suggestion of a large amount of Breaks In Learning (BILs) or redundancies, however this is currently only at 8%. The number of furloughed apprentices has reduced, and this hasn't created an increase in BILs or redundancies to date.
- Commercial income is stronger than expected at £1.9m above forecast. The Q3 reforecast was roughly on budget, and this would continue the track to receive a "good" financial rating from the ESFA.
- The Q3 covenant indicators had been passed. This was mainly due to the prompt action with the wind down of the Training Providers. It is expected that the Q4 covenant would also be passed.

- [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The Board queried as to whether the lesser amount of BILs could be due to an admin delay, which could result in a spike in numbers at a later point. MW confirmed that this would be possible however he is working alongside GG who has contacted each of the Colleges to gain a clear understanding of the situation. MW noted that there is guaranteed income for apprenticeships, and there would be protection from the post-16 relief fund up until the end of June 2020.

[REDACTED]

Action: NT to add to July 2020 agenda.

The Board noted the report.

2.5.1. Budget Background Paper

MW presented the Budget Background Paper and the Board discussed the potential opportunities for FE as a result of COVID19 as there may be an increase in unemployment and the need to retrain and educate. MW confirmed that the 16-19 funding is currently secure, however there are number of other challenges such as the lack of starts in Apprenticeships, a shortfall expected in HE numbers because of heightened competition, and the devolved Adult Education budget from the Tyne Authority at Newcastle College.

MW confirmed that the college budgets are in the third stage of their review and would be locally approved at College Board level before coming to the Corporation Board for final approval. EBITDA is showing at around £5.5m, and this will present a challenge around spending capital for the new financial year. MW confirmed that there will inevitably be uncertainty about the budget position in 2020-21 due to Covid 19 but there would be greater clarity after the Q1 period.

LB noted that there is a need for the budget to align to the new NCG strategy to ensure there is the capacity to reach the goals and KPIs set. MW confirmed he had asked departments to keep a list of items which they haven't been able to include within their budget so that there is a pipeline of work when funding becomes available.

The Board requested a budget with different scenarios for income, costs, investment and EBITDA so that they are able to judge where best to set the budget for 2020-21.

Action: MW to include different scenarios within the July 2020 budget presentation.

The Board noted the report.

2.6. Executive Director of Quality – Quality and Performance Report

SW presented the Quality and Performance Report and highlighted the following points:

- The work around GCSE and A Level prediction has been done and is ready to upload. Staff have been conscientious. Improvement can be seen across the Colleges, apart from Kidderminster where results are likely to remain in line with last year. SW noted that some of the improvements look a little higher than expected and this is being looked at in detail with the evidence base being recorded.
- At NSFC the A Level results look to be in line with predictions of Alps 3.
- The latest Apprenticeship return is inline with predictions which is an improvement.
- Retention has dipped marginally (from 95.1% to 94.2%) in the last 2 months - challenges remain at Carlisle, whilst the rate at NSFC reflects a 2-year course duration (most GFE courses are 1 year). Retention rates at Lewisham, Southwark, Newcastle and West Lancashire are currently on / above 95%, with Kidderminster just marginally below.
- Attendance reporting remains static from the 20th March and replaced with a new weekly engagement report. Attendance for the year will be reported at 85% (using the in / out measure) and 88% taking into account authorised absence (reported as a neutral mark). A new report for missed registers is available to identify the source and number by college department. The report will also be used locally to help understand the root cause of absence and to reduce the number in 2020/21.
- Learner engagement is a rudimentary measure that seeks to record at least one positive interaction between a tutor and learner each week during home study. This could be in the form of an online teaching session, guidance tutorial, use of VLE or email exchange, submission of workbooks etc. The use of the UnitE (student record system) to capture a new 'S mark' (supported home learning) is very new and staff are currently transitioning to a new process. Engagement is low for English and Maths, but engagement for main aims remains high, with around 8 out of 10 learners being engaged per week.
- Progress review #3 is now complete. This was largely consistent with the previous review, although an increase was observed at LC and a slight dip at SC. The working group is reviewing the progress cycle to achieve higher levels of consistency and sharing best practice. The work here is indicative of the excellent collaboration that is now regularly taking place across the Group.
- Sustained Destination survey capture has been deferred by J2P, who are not able to support at present, the results are likely to be heavily influenced by factors associated with the pandemic; however the intention is still to proceed at the appropriate time to evaluate the impact of the outbreak on 'leavers' from 2019, in comparison to 2018.

The Board noted the report.

2.6.1. Careers Guidance (report included within main Quality Report)

SW provided the Board with an update of the progress made against the NCG Careers Framework and Gatsby Indicators.

The Board noted that the scores for Lewisham were low in relation to a number of the indicators and SW suggested that they may have been harder on themselves with their scores, however there is work being carried out to ensure a consistent standard of work across the Colleges which will drive improvement.

The Board noted the report.

3. Principal Portfolios

3.1. Communication, PR, Marketing and Branding

DW joined the meeting.

DW presented the update paper on Communication, PR, Marketing and Branding. DW confirmed that this project work is timely and aligns to the new strategic plan. DW confirmed that there are number of quick wins to be made, including the promotion of the NCG branding across the colleges. As part of this work, the marketing leads from each of the colleges are working together with plans to create economies of scale across the group and to encourage collaborative working.

The Board agreed that they liked the idea of staff feeling part of the NCG community, and DW confirmed that a culture change would be encouraged to achieve this where necessary.

The Board noted the report.

DW left the meeting.

3.2. Professional Services Review

AC joined the meeting via telephone.

The report was presented, and the Board were advised that this review is to take place to provide clarity between professional and college services, identify and share best practice, identify best value for money, ensure correct levels of resource and to provide first class services.

The Board noted the update report.

AC left the meeting.

4. Items for Approval / Discussion

4.1. Corporation Matters

DB presented the Corporation Matters update and provided an update on Governance matters across the group. There were no appointments to approve.

The Board noted the report.

4.1.1. Governance Review Update

DB provided an update with regard to the Governance Review and noted that the initial costs had been reduced, however a further proposal had been received from Stone King.

The Board considered the proposal and agreed that they would prefer to go ahead with the proposal from Stone King.

MW noted that as the proposed costs would exceed £10k, the Financial Regulations required 3 quotes.

The Board noted this and agreed the need for compliance with the regulations.

Action: DB to take matters forward appropriately, with a view to moving ahead with Stone King (subject to clarification of compliance with Financial Regulations).

4.1.2. College Board Annual Report

DB presented the updated version of the College Board Annual Report, noting this included additions from Newcastle College. It was noted that NSFC were now the only college not to complete their College Board Annual Report.

The Board noted the update.

4.2. Policies / Annual Reports / Terms of Reference

4.2.1. Modern Slavery Statement 20/21

LB presented the refreshed Modern Slavery Statement for 20/21.

The Board approved the statement.

4.2.2. Code of Conduct for Suppliers and Contractors

MW presented the refreshed Code of Conduct for Suppliers and Contractors for 20/21.

The Board approved the code.

4.2.3. Whistleblowing Policy

DB presented the Whistleblowing Policy and noted that this document had undergone an update to include the provision of whistleblowing from outside of the organisation.

The Board approved the policy.

Action: NT to process approved policies.

5. Risk

DB confirmed that work continues around Risk. The College Boards are due to have a training session on Risk at their Meeting 6 to ensure clarity of the College Board role and requirements.

The Board noted the update.

6. Items for Note / Information

6.1. College Board and Committee Minutes

The Board noted the following minutes:

- HE Governance Committee – 5th February 2020
- Newcastle Sixth Form College Board Minutes – 16th January 2020
- Kidderminster College Board Minutes – 6th February 2020
- Carlisle College Board Minutes – 21st January 2020

6.2. NCG College and Student Updates

CP presented the NCG College and Student Updates report.

The Board noted the report.

6.3. Information Flows

The Board reviewed the Information Flow received from Newcastle College Board and asked NT to respond positively.

Action: NT to respond and return.

PL confirmed that he was in the process of carrying out one to ones with the College Board Chairs, and he would be developing plans for PL and LB to host a meeting with all of the College Board Chairs at the start of the next year to create a forum of working and collaboration.

7. Any Other Business

N/A

8. Date and Time of Next Meeting – 21st July 2020

Signed:

Name:

Date: