

HARLOW COLLEGE FURTHER EDUCATION CORPORATION

CORPORATION MEETING

Minutes of the virtual meeting held on Zoom – Thursday 20 May 2021 - 9.30am

Membership:	* Liz Laycock (Chair)	* Eddie Johnson	* Brian Spencer
	* Sotirios Adamopoulos	* Brian Keane	* Karen Spencer
	* Paul Bartlett	* Ray Levy	* Paul Taylor
	* Julian Bedford	* Lily Lin	* Michael Travers
	* Jon Bouffler	* Peace Oduware	* Gail Wootton
	* Rod Bristow	* Eva Scott	

* denotes present

In attendance: Will Allanson, Deputy Principal
Paul Whitehead, Vice-Principal
Becky Jones, Vice-Principal
Deanne Morgan, Executive Director – Finance and Facilities
Ruth Lucas, Head of Governance

Annual Governor Safeguarding Update Training

Before the Corporation meeting commenced, Marian Hollingsworth, Harlow College's Safeguarding Manager, delivered safeguarding update training to the following Governors: Sotirios Adamopoulos; Julian Bedford; Paul Bartlett; Brian Keane; Michael Travers and Gail Wootton.

1 Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence.

2 Declaration of Interests

Jon Bouffler declared that he is employed by Anglia Ruskin University, Rod Bristow declared that he is employed by Pearson and Eddie Johnson declared that he is an Essex County Councillor.

3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes and the confidential minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2021 were approved by the Corporation as a true and accurate record of the meeting and were signed remotely by the Chair.

4 Matters Arising from the Minutes

4.1 Thank You Card for Jo Breen (minute 1 – Apologies for Absence refers)

Liz Laycock confirmed that a thank you card was sent to Jo Breen.

4.2 Approval of Loan Facility (minute 9.2 – Approval of Loan Facility refers)

Deanne Morgan reported that the loan facility agreement has been signed by Liz Laycock and Karen Spencer and has been accepted by Clydesdale Bank.

Karen Spencer reported that the College received official communication on 19 May 2021 from the ESFA, confirming the College's "good" financial health rating for 2019-2020 and 2020-2021. Karen Spencer reported that the ESFA had raised the following "*The financial statements note a material uncertainty related to going concern due to the refinancing of a loan still being negotiated at the time of the financial statements*" and asked the College to provide an update. Karen Spencer provided an update to the ESFA confirming that the loan facility had been signed by the College and accepted by the bank. The ESFA confirmed that no further action is required.

4.3 Stansted Airport College Recruitment Strategy (minute 11 – T Stansted Airport College Advisory Group Meeting – 25 February 2021 refers)

Liz Laycock asked if the recruitment strategies for Stansted Airport College had seen an improvement in applications. Becky Jones reported that currently the College is 90 students short of target however this was originally 115 short, therefore the gap is closing. Engineering recruitment is harder than aviation operations at present. A good recruitment event was held this week.

Will Allanson reported that two significant employers have contacted the College as they are looking to employ a number of apprentices this year.

4.4 FE Commissioner Financial Benchmarks (minute 12 – FE Commissioner and ESFA Correspondence refers)

Deanne Morgan confirmed that the financial benchmarks set out by the FE Commissioner's Office have been incorporated in the management accounts.

4.5 Annual Strategic Conversation (minute 12 – FE Commissioner and ESFA Correspondence refers)

Karen Spencer reported that the annual strategic conversation with the College, the ESFA and the FE Commissioner's Office will take place on 23 June 2021. A broad agenda has been agreed and Governors were asked to highlight any other issues during this meeting that they would like to be added to the agenda. The Corporation agreed that the material uncertainty with the loans should be raised. The Corporation agreed that Paul Bartlett and Eddie Johnson, in their roles as Chairs of the Audit Committee and Resources Committee, should be invited to attend the strategic conversation.

5 Feedback from the Coronavirus Governance and Leadership Group

Liz Laycock provided the Corporation with a verbal update and feedback from the Coronavirus Governance and Leadership Group.

Liz Laycock reminded the Corporation that this group meets once a fortnight. Topics discussed have included self-testing for staff and students; the following of the

College's roadmap for increasing onsite delivery; assessment arrangements and funding, including core funding and bids for additional funding,

The Corporation noted the feedback from the Coronavirus Governance and Leadership Group, noted the huge demand on staff and students in a short period of time and thanked staff and students for their hard work.

6 Quality and Curriculum

6.1 Centre Policy for GCSE, AS and A-Levels

The Corporation received and noted the Centre Policy for GCES, AS and A-Levels, presented by Becky Jones, Vice-Principal.

Becky Jones confirmed that the Policy had been submitted to JCQ in advance of the deadline and outlined the College's approach to assessment for GCSE, AS and A-Levels.

The Corporation asked for feedback from Peace Oduware and Eva Scott, in their capacity of Student Governors.

Eva Scott reported that there was a feeling of being rushed, with mocks having been pushed forward and some subjects not having been finished being taught. It has been hard for all students and many are expecting to achieve lower grades than they originally anticipated.

Karen Spencer reported that it is not necessary to teach the whole syllabus and Sotirios Adamopoulos highlighted that the deadlines had been set by the Government and are non-negotiable. He further highlighted that adjustments have been made and new content had stopped being delivered before Easter, with this term focusing on revision and topics not previously covered were removed. The approach to assessment and its impact on the mental health of students has been taken into consideration and appropriate weighting has been put on grades. The College is doing everything possible to award students the highest possible grade based on the expected evidence available.

Karen Spencer reported that some guidance was released the day before the Easter break however further guidance was issued by Awarding Organisations after Easter. The timescales to submit assessments and grades are tight, with a normal six week national examination window changing to a two week window because of moderation requirements. Karen Spencer further reported that the process looks at where previous student cohorts with similar profiles would have been and ensures that the best possible grades are achieved by students this year based on evidence, with students not being expected to be penalised by the system this year.

Eva Scott reported that teachers have confirmed that topics not covered will not feature in the exams therefore some protection is in place and this had reassured her.

Karen Spencer asked if there is anything more the College could do to provide more reassurance to students. Eva Scott reported that mock results counting

towards the overall grades was reassuring. Karen Spencer reported that a broad range of evidence, not just exam results, would be taken into consideration when determining grades.

Sotirios Adamopoulos confirmed that students are sitting mini-assessments, not exams and that there has been a clear message to staff that they should be looking for opportunities, with evidence, to reward not penalise students.

Rod Bristow highlighted that the issue is less around the Policy itself and it is more around how the Policy is implemented. This is a national challenge, which is difficult for teachers and leadership teams and all parties need to recognise that everyone is doing their best. There is a large amount of evidence required therefore a lot more assessment is taking place which is understandable however there is an issue with timing. Students should be assured that teachers are doing everything possible to ensure that the process is fair.

Becky Jones reported that it is stressful time for staff facing the weight of importance in allocating grades and staff and students are working incredibly hard.

Karen Spencer reported that there is a short window for appeals and that the College is expecting to have to also deal with queries from awarding organisations over the summer.

The Corporation noted the Centre Policy for GCSE, AS and A-Levels.

6.2 T-Levels Update

The Corporation received and considered the T-Levels Update, presented by Becky Jones, Vice-Principal and Paul Whitehead, Vice-Principal.

Paul Whitehead informed Governors that enquiries and applications are reported on a monthly basis and Governors noted the figures to date.

Paul Whitehead reported that the College is looking to run Transition Programmes which will be Level 2 feeder programmes to T-Levels however they will be different to the College's current Level 2 provision.

Governors noted that recruitment to the Science T-Level was not strong and part of the issue is that the College has well-established A-Level and Vocational Science provision. Recruitment for other T-levels is progressing well.

Becky Jones reported that many students studying science progress onto university and currently universities are being slow to report whether T-Levels will count towards the entry requirement for university. The College is honest in the information, advice and guidance it is giving students and where it is not yet known if a T-Level will count towards UCAS points, the College is advising a different route.

Becky Jones also reported that that early indications shown that students need to be 18 years old for science work placements and this is currently a barrier.

Karen Spencer highlighted the micro-managed approach by the DfE and monthly reporting requirements which has not led to a reduction in bureaucracy as originally stated. Rod Bristow highlighted that T-Levels are a big investment by the Government therefore close scrutiny is not surprising.

Paul Taylor asked about the 15 technical routes and why health and science is listed separately under T-Level pathways. Paul Whitehead confirmed that there are 15 technical routes, which are then split into T-Level pathways which are then further split into T-Level specialisms.

Rod Bristow asked to what extent the low numbers are due to T-Levels not being very well known or whether it was due to other issues. Karen Spencer reported that there are a number of issues. T-Levels are not being piloted but in effect are pilots in action. It is thought that teachers in schools probably do not know the full details of T-Levels. The Association of Colleges has reported that students recruited to T-Levels have already achieved a grade 4 or above in English and maths however the majority of FE students studying at Level 3, particularly those progressing from Level 2, have not achieved the required English and maths grade. T-Levels are being offered in sectors which has a rich history of BTEC qualifications which are well-known with employers. There are additional staffing requirements to deliver T-Levels however no additional per hour funding for this. Karen Spencer reported that despite these issues, T-Levels will progress more over time and will become more integrated into the education system.

Becky Jones reported that a national T-Level recruitment and advertising campaign has been delayed twice and that the College had planned a variety of onsite activities with feeder schools to promote T-Levels. Online events have taken place however these are not as effective as face-to-face events. The biggest feeder to the College's T-Level programmes will be those on a Transition Programme next year.

Liz Laycock asked what happens if students want to study a T-Level route which is not offered by the College. Paul Whitehead reported that a phased opening of routes is taking place and more routes will be opened up once they are released nationally.

Liz Laycock asked if the College was concerned about the conversion rate of enquiries to applications. Paul Whitehead confirmed that the enquiry figures include engagement with social media and the website therefore it is a wide pool. Not every enquiry is a direct contact or a direct question therefore the conversion rate is not of concern.

Liz Laycock highlighted that the age requirement for the science work placements will be an ongoing issue. Becky Jones reported that the placement is planned for after April in the second year therefore a number of students will be 18 years old however some will not be. The College will need to work around this and find an alternative. Paul Whitehead confirmed that if any element of the T-Level is failed, then no UCAS points are awarded for the whole T-Level therefore the College needs to be open and transparent, including the potential issue with the work placement, when providing information, advice and guidance to students.

The Corporation noted the T-Levels update.

7 Finance and Resources Committee Reports

7.1 Minutes of the Resources Committee Meeting – 13 May 2021

The Corporation received and noted the minutes of the Resources Committee meeting held on 13 May 2021.

7.2 Item 1 - Management Accounts for the Period 1 August 2020 – 31 March 2021

The Corporation received and considered the management accounts for the period 1 August 2020 – 31 March 2021, presented by Deanne Morgan, Executive Director – Finance and Facilities.

Governors were informed that the management accounts were considered and discussed in detail at the Resources Committee meeting held on 13 May 2021.

Governors noted that bank covenants continue to be met, the College's financial health rating remains "good" and there are significant challenges with the Adult Education Budget funding for 2020-2021.

The Corporation noted the management accounts for the period 1 August 2020 – 31 March 2021.

7.3 Item 2 – Financial Planning 2021 – 2022

The Corporation received and considered the report on Financial Planning for 2021 – 2022, presented by Deanne Morgan, Executive Director – Finance and Facilities and Paul Whitehead, Vice-Principal.

Governors noted that the report had been considered and discussed in detail at the Resources Committee meeting held on 13 May 2021 and that the Resources Committee endorsed the approach the College had taken for financial planning for next academic year.

Governors were informed that a new template is being released by the ESFA and that the figures will be presented to the Resources Committee and the Corporation at their next meetings in the required template.

The Corporation noted the report on financial planning for 2021 – 2022.

7.4 Item 3 - Capital Projects and Estates Update Report

The Corporation received and noted the Capital Projects and Estates Update Report and approved for the College to submit and be the lead applicant for the Strategic Development Fund on behalf of Essex FE colleges.

8 Academic Code of Conduct for Staff on Student Assessment

The Corporation received and considered the Academic Code of Conduct for Staff on Student Assessment, presented by Becky Jones, Vice-Principal.

Governors noted that reference to Anglia Ruskin University has been removed and that additions to the Code are based on the last two years of the College awarding grades. There have also been minor changes to reflect line management responsibilities.

The Corporation approved the Academic Code of Conduct for Staff on Student Assessment.

9 Governor Training and Development

Julian Bedford reported on his visit to Downing Street to discuss further education with the Prime Minister, highlighting its value to small and medium sized enterprises.

Liz Laycock has attended module 2 of the Chair's Leadership Programme and an ETF seminar on the FE White Paper.

Sotirios Adamopoulos has completed a 10 week Level 2 Safeguarding and Prevent course.

10 Strategic Planning Activity

The Corporation took part in a strategic planning activity in which Governors were split into three groups, each group looking at a particular element of the College's Strategic Plan and identifying where updates were required in light of the FE White Paper.

Feedback from the groups were as follows:

Group 1 Career Led Curriculum (Will Allanson, Rod Bristow, Eddie Johnson, Ray Levy, Lily Lin, Peace Oduware, Paul Taylor)

Developing sector-based employer boards are important.

Large employers are mentioned in the Strategic Plan however the College should not lose sight of small and medium sized enterprises.

National and global trends should be considered as well as the local economy.

There are cross-cutting themes across all sectors, such as digital, health, green and low carbon technologies and sustainability.

There is a need to ensure that the College's curriculum is designed with clear pathways for learners to enter the system at every level and succeed.

Group 2 Quality of Education (Becky Jones, Paul Bartlett, Eva Scott, Brian Spencer, Michael Travers, Gail Wootton)

The lifelong learning entitlement needs to be incorporated into the Strategic Plan and the College needs to work out the best offers to promote as part of this.

More specific reference to advance and higher technical qualifications, such as T-Levels, and the Institute of Technology should be made in the Strategic Plan.

Reference to other projects, particularly around digital and English and maths, should be made in the Strategic Plan.

The Group suggested that the Strategic Plan should cross-reference documents such as the Quality Improvement Plan and the Key Performance Indicators. After much discussion it was agreed that the Strategic Plan is a public document whereas the others are internal documents therefore detailed reference to these documents in the Strategic Plan was not appropriate.

Some points in the Strategic Plan need a general review and update.

Group 3 Resources (Paul Whitehead, Sotirios Adamopoulos, Julian Bedford, Jon Bouffler, Brian Keane, Liz Laycock)

Some points in the Strategic Plan need reviewing and updating, eg references to Stansted Business case which has been achieved..

There is a lack of mention in investment in local skills needs aligned to the White Paper.

Engagement and collaboration with employers are key to maximise funding opportunities and the College needs to ensure the best use of these relationships are made.

Staff efficiency and efficiency through digital technology needs mention. .

The point around i-Pads should be wider and include a wider, sustainable focus on the College's whole IT infrastructure.

Reference to funding at Stansted Airport College needs to be updated or removed now a lagged funding model has been implemented.

Rod Bristow asked if the changing political landscape would have an impact on the Strategic Plan in light of the FE White Paper. Karen Spencer reported that this is of discussion throughout the FE sector. The DfE is not saying in the White Paper that colleges need to be in groups or merge however they are encouraging collaboration like the Strategic Development Fund. There is limited evidence at present that mergers are successful.

The West Midlands Colleges Group is a good example of the sector working collaboratively to present a common voice to their Combined Authority. A more collective and collaborative approach, rather than groups of colleges, would be relatively simple to implement in Essex.

Karen Spencer further reported that there are a number of colleges which are considering whether they should be part of a wider group and explained that an informal approach has been made by Chelmsford College which has been discussed with Liz Laycock, Chair of Governors, and it was agreed that more information is

required before the Corporation could consider it. Karen Spencer to request this information.

Liz Laycock highlighted the value of the College's collaboration with employers. The FE sector does not have the resources to continually bid for funding and a long-term strategy is a concern.

Karen Spencer reported that consultations on funding and accountability will be launched soon.

Rod Bristow asked if the lifetime guarantee and loan funding offered a growth opportunity for the College. Karen Spencer confirmed that the funding has been committed in the next Parliament from 2025 therefore the sector is not benefiting directly from these at present. Currently the College is working on seven funding applications for Government funding, which are being launched individually without a joined-up, holistic approach. There is a push for a three to five year funding window for the sector and it is hoped that Government will be prepared to put some investment into the sector and simplify the processes. Paul Whitehead highlighted the challenges of yearly financial planning when longer-term investment is needed to be made.

Karen Spencer reported that it is hoped across the sector that action will follow as a result of the White Paper and that accountability and regulation will be made as simple as possible.

The Corporation agreed that the Principalship and Head of Governance should review the feedback from the strategic plan activity and update the Strategic Plan as required.

11 Any Other Business

11.1 College Collaboration Fund Application

Karen Spencer provided Governors with an overview of the College Collaboration Fund application which focuses on digital technologies, student well-being, growth mindset and preparing students to take the next steps. The College is the lead applicant and is working in partnership with Cambridge Regional College, Chelmsford College, Colchester Institute and South Essex College.

The Corporation approved the College to be the lead applicant and submit the application to the College Collaboration Fund.

11.2 Equality and Diversity Steering Group

The Corporation was asked to nominate two representatives to sit on the College's Equality and Diversity Steering Group.

Liz Laycock asked for volunteers and Sotirios Adamopoulos, Lily Lin, Michael Travers and Gail Wootton nominated themselves for the role.

The Corporation agreed that any of the nominees could be appointed to the Equality and Diversity Steering Group and delegated the authority for the Principalship and Head of Governance to complete the appointment process.

11.3 Confidential Corporation and Committee Papers

The Corporation was informed by Ruth Lucas, Head of Governance, that confidential Corporation and Committee papers will now be password protected prior to distribution.

12 Dates of Future Meetings

Summer Term 2021	Thursday 8 July 2021	9.30am
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