

**College of West Anglia
Minutes of
The Chairs' Meeting
9 February 2022
8.30 am
Remote Meeting – Microsoft Teams**

Present	Sam Fletcher	Governor (Chair)
	Chris Ashman	Governor
	Sharon Cambridge	Governor
	David Pomfret	Governor (Principal)
	Gill Rejzl	Governor
	Hein van den Wildenberg	Governor
Attending	Stephen Halls	Clerk to the Corporation

The Chair welcomed Hein van den Wildenberg as the new Chair of the Finance & General Purposes Committee to his first meeting of the Chairs' meeting group.

1 Apologies

There were no apologies for absence.

2 Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared.

3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting – 8 September 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 September 2021 were agreed as being an accurate record.

4 Matters Arising

There were no outstanding matters arising from previous meetings.

The Principal provided an update on a previous matter – *this item was deemed 'Confidential.'*

5 Principal's Update

The Principal provided updates on several matters:

a) School of Nursing Studies – *this item was deemed 'Confidential.'*

The Principal continued, the new facility was now equipped and commissioned and provided a ward experience for students. Students on the T Level Adult Pathway were currently using the facility for simulated placements. Representatives from ARU had visited the previous week and had been impressed with the new building and its state-of-the-art equipment. The Nursing & Midwifery Council accreditation visit had been booked for 10 March 2022.

The Principal was in communication with the Queen Elizabeth Hospital and was looking to extend the contract of the secondment post for the Lead Nurse for Clinical Education. The Principal noted also that he had been working with the Queen Elizabeth Hospital that week in the recruitment of a new Board Chair for the Trust.

- b) Finance Department Staffing – The interim contract for the Head of Finance ceased at the end of December 2021 and the post was now vacant again with another recruitment campaign underway. It was likely that the College would need to offer flexibility in this post which could include a 4-day week and some homeworking. Finance staff were covering duties where possible but there were concerns in that the production of the monthly management accounts had been greatly delayed throughout the autumn term and continued, and that the quality of financial reporting was poor. The Chair of the F&GP Committee was mindful of the College's need to take the time to find the right person for this role and was accepting of the very challenging employment marketplace at the current time. At the present time another temporary engagement of an interim Head of Finance was not being considered due to the cost and the disruption this would bring to the finance team.
- c) College Finances – Expenditure concerns were noted in relation to staff costs, premises, and energy prices. Staffing costs were currently below budget but pressures were anticipated for future pay awards and staff recruitment and retention costs. Energy contracts had been purchased ahead of the recent announcements of rising energy prices and therefore would not affect the current year in full.

Study Programme income, using the lagged funding model, was set for the current year, and was not causing any concern. Recruitment was slightly lower than expected for this year, but no growth had been allowed for in the medium-term financial plan for the following year, so again, there were no concerns. Activity and income in relation to high needs learners was above budget and apprenticeships were expected to achieve £3.6m against a budget of £3.3m. However, the Adult Education Budget was now expected to under-perform by £300k with no additional tolerance to the usual 3% being offered by the ESFA. Adults Loans were currently around £50k more than budget. Commercial income was slightly down on expected levels at this time. Overall, the finances were currently looking to be around £250k better than budget in the current year.

There were challenges in utilising the 16-18 Catch-Up Funding due to current capacity reductions (Covid related absences) and the inability to recruit additional resources to help those in need of additional support.

Additional funding had been announced to provide an additional 40 hours of guided learning hours. With the College already generally providing more than the minimum level of guided learning hours it was unclear at this time how many more hours needed to be provided to each learner to gain the additional funding. The Vice Principal Curriculum & Quality and the Assistant Principal Funding & Performance were currently reviewing the curriculum plan to assess the additional staffing resources required.

- d) Wisbech Net Zero Project – this project has been included in the CPCA's Economic & Skills Strategy, although progress has been slow. It was anticipated that Fenland District Council would allocate a proportion of Levelling Up Funding (LUF) to the project. The Principal planned to meet with Fenland District Council representatives in due course. Anglian Water, through its Chief Executive Officer, Peter Simpson, had shown interest in the development of the Wisbech Campus and would be interested in a programme to support water management and sustainability.

- e) Elite Sixth Forms – the FE sector was very concerned about the government’s announcement to support new 16-19 free schools, set out in the recently published Levelling Up paper.
- f) Staffing Matters – *this item was deemed ‘Confidential.’*
- g) Covid-19 - case numbers were currently rising in the West Norfolk, Fenland and Cambridge areas; this had been noticed by Public Health-Norfolk. Circa 100 students were currently absent each day due to Covid. Face coverings were now being requested in the classrooms and all communal areas and face to face meetings were only being held if necessary.
- h) Apprenticeships - Mandy Lakey (Sub-contractor partnership working) had recently been appointed to oversee and manage the necessary changes within apprenticeships, including improving the reporting of data and the setting up of a new customer relationship management system. The development of this area could lead to a staff restructure in due course. The Chair of the Audit Committee asked if Mandy Lakey would be reviewing the areas of concern noted in the recent internal audit apprenticeship funding report; the Principal confirmed that this would be the case. The Chair noted her concerns regarding the pending retirement of Vicky Mann, Head of Apprenticeships and Work Based Learning but was pleased that Mandy Lakey was stepping into this new role for the College.
- i) Job Evaluation - a number of appeals had been received following the finalisation of the job evaluation exercise in December 2021. Unison would be supporting Paul Harrison in the interviews with individuals but due to Unison’s delay in arranging its staffing for this the interviews were only now happening (February 2022).
- j) WorldSkills - The Principal had applied for and had been successful in receiving a £5k grant from WorldSkills for its Ambassador Programme, used to access workshops, coaching and other resources with the aim of boosting interest and participation in the scheme. Funding would need to be spent in the current year. Sarah Smith, Hair & Beauty, would be leading this project for the College.
- k) RCVS Accreditation - Weekly progress meetings continued to be held with ARU with Ruth Harrison and Alison Barber attending from the College. The RCVS had now backtracked on its earlier decision and was no longer requiring the Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) to be repeated for recent students who had already graduated or those current students who had already completed their OSCE. The process for the re-accreditation of the vet nursing programme had begun with plans shared with the RCVS and was likely to take a full academic year.
- l) CPCA Opportunities – *this item was deemed ‘Confidential – Restricted’*
- m) Mental Health – the Principal noted the growing number of mental health concerns being raised across the College by students and the impact this was having on staff resources and staff members’ own wellbeing.

Governors acknowledged and congratulated the Principal on his recent appointment to the Further Education Principals’ Reference Group, to challenge and advise the FE Commissioner and to contribute to policy development for colleges in the FE sector. The Principal advised that the role would provide benefits to College including an early awareness of opportunities and of any concerns from the FE Commissioner.

The Chair reflected on the issues raised during the Principal’s update report and commented that it had been a difficult and challenging first half of the spring term for the staff and

members of the senior management team and offered her thanks to the Principal and his team.

6 Update from Committee Chairs

Search & Governance – the Corporation Chair reported on the Search & Governance Committee meeting held on 8 February 2022 at which the issue of sustainability was discussed, following the successful training morning governors attended in November 2021 led by Steve Frampton, AoC and Sue Brown, the College's Environment Officer. The Chair considered that all committees should begin to consider the impact of their decisions on sustainability, adding that this topic would become a priority area for the College in future strategic plans. The Corporation Chair also reported that the Committee had reviewed the directive relating to the external review of governance within colleges and had agreed that the Board should begin planning for its external review now, with a view to this being undertaken in the 2023/24 year.

7 Any Other Business

The Chair recorded that this would be the last meeting of the Chairs' Meeting Group that Sharon Cambridge, Corporation Chair, would be attending before her retirement from the Board in May 2022. The Chair noted Sharon's significant impact and support for the College, as well as the loss that would be noticed once Sharon stood down.

8 Chair's items for briefing to the Corporation

- a) Sustainability and the need for this to become a focus of strategic priority for the College, with targets to be set across all areas of its activities.

9 Date and time of next meeting

Wednesday, 25 May 2022 at 8.30 am.

The meeting closed at 9.49 am