



MINUTES

BOLTON COLLEGE BOARD

Minutes for the meeting held on Tuesday 2 May 2023 – (PART A)

Time: 5.00pm

Venue: Boardroom / Video Conference

Members present:

Dr Andrew Roberts (Chair)

Mr Andrew Fawcett (Vice Chair)

Dr Adrian Brooks

Prof. George Holmes

Mrs Kate Flood

Mr Tom Martin

Dr Tony Unsworth

Mr Michael Walker

Ms Sharon White

Mr Chris Ball

Dr Gill Smallwood

Dr Bill Webster (Principal)

In Attendance:

Mr Mark Burgoyne (Deputy Principal)

Ms Deborah Bradburn (Clerk)

Mr Garry Westwater (Executive Director of Finance)

Mrs Karen Westsmith (Assistant Principal, Curriculum and Quality)

Mrs Catherine Langstreth (Assistant Principal, Curriculum and Stakeholder Engagement)

Mrs Tracy Clarke (Assistant Principal, Curriculum Development, Information & Technical Services)

Mr Tim Openshaw (Assistant Vice Chancellor, Planning & Student Experience) (UOB)

Miss Jill Hebden (Minute Taker)

1. SECTION A - BUSINESS MATTERS

1.1 WELCOME TO MEMBERS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, which commenced at 5.08pm. He confirmed that the meeting was quorate.

Dr Gill Smallwood was welcomed to her first Board meeting as a Governor.

1.2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Gulnaz Brennan, Dr Sue Lomax, Dr Gill Waugh and Fardean Farooq.

1.3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair reminded everyone present to declare any interests that they may have on matters to be discussed. Standing declarations were noted particularly in relation to the University of Bolton reciprocal governance arrangements and also paid positions.

A declaration of interest was noted for the Clerk to the Board (Item 2.7(iii) – Conflict of Interest Policy).

1.4 REQUEST FOR AN ITEM TO BE UNSTARRED

Members were reminded that starred items on the agenda would be taken as read rather than being presented. However, Members could ask questions of the report author, or ask for any item to be unstarred for full discussion.

There were no requests for items to be unstarred for discussion.

1.5* MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS:

Minutes of the Meeting held 7 February 2023 - general publication

The minutes of the meeting held 7 February 2023 had been previously circulated to members for consideration. The Clerk to the Board noted an amendment to the minutes to include Mr Chris Ball as in attendance at the meeting.

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes be approved as a correct record and authorised for publication (Part A) following amendment.

1.6 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

Members had received a summary of actions arising/outstanding from previous meetings, noting that all actions had been completed.

It was **RESOLVED** that the matters arising be noted.

1.7 MINUTES (SUB-COMMITTEES):

1.7 (i) Standards & Performance Committee of 15 March 2023

Members had received the minutes of the meeting held 15 March 2023.

Members of the Standards and Performance Committee informed the Board that extensive discussions had taken place around key strengths and weaknesses, the progress made in relation to English and maths and the intensive support action plans.

Committee Members were content that staff were adequately prepared for Ofsted with those preparations continuously revisited via an action plan. There had been extensive sector focus on safeguarding themes. It was discussed that the College may want to consider an external review of safeguarding.

ACTION:

- Senior Management Team to consider an external review of safeguarding.
- Section 175 of the Education Act 2022 to be sent to Dr Gill Smallwood.

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes be received as detailed.

1.7 (ii) Resources Committee of 23 March 23

Members had received the minutes of the meeting held 23 March 2023.

The Resources Committee had completed a 'deep dive' into the matters for consideration that would also be considered under the Board agenda. It was acknowledged that the reports were clear and detailed with appropriate challenge provided.

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes be received as detailed.

1.7 (iii) Audit Committee of 29 March 23

Members had received the minutes of the meeting held 29 March 2023.

The Chair of the Audit Committee informed the Board that the Committee meeting was inquorate with a single internal audit review report presented in relation to recruitment and selection.

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes be received as detailed.

2. SECTION B - COLLEGE MATTERS

2.1 PRINCIPAL'S REPORT

The Principal presented the twentieth report under the 'Designated Institution' Bolton College, which provided an overview of key issues. The following points were highlighted:

External Environment:

- The DfE and FE Commissioners Annual Strategic Conversation had taken place, which had been a positive and helpful discussion. The FE Commissioner had provided the College with additional information regarding sustainability.
- Feedback following from the ONS reclassification had been positive with responses provided promptly to questions raised.
- Three T Levels that the College had been recruiting to had been deferred until September 2024 and one T Level (catering) deferred to a date beyond 2024.

Ofsted

- Ofsted had recognised the ongoing challenges faced by apprenticeships as a result of the pandemic. The DfE recently conducted a review of the College apprenticeships against the apprenticeship accountability framework and although the College provision was categorised as 'at risk' the DfE noted that it was content with the rationale provided, actions taken and progress made.

Skills Agenda

- The accountability statement was a separate agenda item for Board consideration. It was noted that there may be some additions to be made to the statement as the Greater Manchester Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) had yet to be published.

Staffing:

- The pay award had been agreed by all three recognised trade unions with the pay increase to be implemented from 1 April 2023.

Governor Questions:

How big a risk is it to the College where employers do not allow apprentices to attend college?

This relates in the main to 'out of funding' learners with work-based tutors working with apprentices and their employers. The College might have to withdraw two learners as a result.

From the 'out of funding' learners reported at the last Board meeting, around 40 are still active from the initial 95. The best case for achievement was 76%, the 'out of funding' learners would reduce that achievement rate to 72%.

Is there a financial detriment to the College due to the deferment of the T Levels?

The funding for a Level 3 programme is £1,500 less than for a T Level. However, the most important thing is the reputational damage this has caused to T Levels and the College. The parents and carers of the learners enrolled onto the T Level courses had been invited into the College and provided with a full explanation of the current position and to discuss alternative options. All learners have been secured onto alternative Level 3 programmes.

Are those staff on long-term sickness in business-critical areas?

The level of long-term sick is decreasing with relatively small numbers on very long-term sickness which is being managed.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Principal's Report be noted.

2.2 FINANCIAL UPDATE INCLUDING LOAN COVENANTS

The Executive Director of Finance presented the Financial Update and Loan Covenants, the following key points were highlighted:

- The College continued to report a deficit position of -£500k. This would mean that the College would not pass the banking covenants and may alter the College ESFA financial health grade to 'Good'.
- The Principal and Executive Director of Finance met with the Vice-Chancellor, Assistant Vice Chancellor (Resources) and Barclays bank. The meeting with Barclays bank was very positive.
- The College had c.£2.9m available for capital expenditure over the next three years with plans being developed. £0.6m was unrestricted for learning and teaching with the remaining funding conditional on energy efficiency and building infrastructure.
- The College would seek to present a 'break even' forecast for 2023/24 at the next Board meeting.

Governor Questions:

Is there a chance that ESFA will consider re-banding the financial health grades considering the current climate?

It is possible as there is a high proportion of colleges looking to be graded as 'good' or 'inadequate' under the current banding system.

Are there any economies of scale across the Group?

The utilities contracts do not align and there would be marginal differences within the market.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following be noted:

- (i) the forecast of a significant operating deficit for 2022/23;
- (ii) the potential impact of a deficit re covenant waiver/financial health grade; and
- (iii) the headline information for the budget for 2023/24.

2.3 ANNUAL ACCOUNTABILITY STATEMENT

The Assistant Principal of Curriculum and Stakeholder Engagement presented the Accountability Statement and outlined the following key points:

- The accountability statement had emerged following recent government reforms to transform further education. It was a two-part document that set out the overall expectations of providers in return for DfE funding.
- The statement allowed colleges to establish focused planning related to mission and strategic aims, what and how colleges intended to deliver provision to support local, regional and national needs.
- The DfE guidance stated that the accountability statement would not be used or assessed in any way.

Governor Questions:

Who will see the accountability statement?

The statement will be publicly available and published on the College website.

What is the deadline for submission of the statement?

The deadline for submission is 31 May 2023.

Will we see a change of reporting to the Board in how the College delivers against the statement priorities?

The College contribution to the local skills need will be included as a standing agenda item by way of Board update. There will be an end of year report on how the College performed against the plan which will link into our College KPIs.

ACTION:

Local Skills Needs update to be included as a standing agenda item.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Accountability Statement be approved subject to any amendment to be made following the Greater Manchester LSIP publication.

2.4 COLLEGE KPI DASHBOARD

The Assistant Vice Chancellor (Planning & Student Experience) (UoB) presented the College KPI Dashboard, which detailed the key sustainability indicators and those indicators on areas monitored by the ESFA. The following points were highlighted:

- The addition of T Levels as a separate reporting item.
- A change was made to the dashboard following circulation of the report. The KPI related to bank covenants was now 'amber' instead of 'red'.

Governor Questions:

Was there anything more the College could do to increase recruitment?

The College had better relationships with schools and had increased engagement for the next recruitment session.

It was **RESOLVED** that the College KPI Dashboard be noted.

2.5 MATHS AND ENGLISH UPDATE

The Assistant Principal of Curriculum, Stakeholder and Student Services presented the Maths and English Update. The following key points were highlighted:

- There were over 1000 learners attending each of the examinations with 40% that required access arrangements.
- Exam boards still recognised the impact of COVID-19 on learners' progress in maths and English. It had therefore been confirmed that the arrangements put in place for maths in the 2022 examinations ie. supported materials being made available in the exam such as formulae and revised equation sheets, would remain for 2023. No adjustments were to be made for English.
- Centres had been informed that grade boundaries would return to that of pre-pandemic levels and therefore a decline in results was predicted.
- There had been a 10% increase in English and maths attendance compared to this time last year.
- Multiply funds of £89k had been utilised for targeted 1:1 and group support, maths examination packs and dongles for home internet access.

Governor Questions:

Is accountability being addressed with schools on poor English and maths attainment?

This has been raised at Bolton Council level and there is no simple answer. In the main schools have their own measures and targets to achieve, if they achieve those targets there is no incentive to assist the weaker learners that come through to the College. Failure is built into the model with a certain percentage that will fail.

Is the technical education system fit for purpose?

The reform of the functional skills hasn't been given enough time to prove or disprove whether it will work due to the impact of COVID-19.

How does the extra funding meet the challenges faced by the College?

The College isn't able to make use of the majority of funding which is used to pay for staff overtime and agency staff. We have rebranded the additional maths support roles required as 'maths mentors' that has seen an improvement in interest.

It was **RESOLVED** that the English and Maths Update be noted.

2.6 CONTRIBUTION TO SKILLS NEEDS

The Assistant Principal of Curriculum, Stakeholder and Student Services presented the College interactive skills network diagram, that was previously circulated to all Board Members for comment.

The interactive network diagram provided a visual representation of the College's engagement with employers, relationship with key stakeholders and their involvement in shaping the College curriculum offer and skills agenda priorities. The diagram would be included within the annual accountability statement.

It was **RESOLVED** that the College Contribution to Skills Needs presentation be noted.

2.7* STARRED ITEMS

(i) HR STRATEGY / PEOPLE STRATEGY 2024/26

Members had received and reviewed the HR Strategy (People Strategy).

It was **RESOLVED** that the HR Strategy (People Strategy) 2024/26 be noted.

(ii) COMMONALITY OF INTERESTS POLICY

Members had received and reviewed the Commonality of Interests Policy which required annual review.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Commonality of Interests Policy be noted.

(iii) CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY

Members had received and reviewed the Conflict of Interest Policy which required annual review.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Conflict of Interest Policy be approved.

(iv) PUBLIC INTEREST DISCLOSURE POLICY

Members had received and reviewed the Public Interest Disclosure Policy which required review.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Public Interest Disclosure Policy be approved.

3. SECTION C - UNIVERSITY GROUP MATTERS

3.1(i)* GROUP RISK REGISTER

Members had received and reviewed the Group Risk Register.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Group Risk Register be noted.

3.2(ii) GROUP ACADEMIC GOVERNANCE REPORT 2023

Members had received and reviewed the Group Academic Governance report.

The report was provided in the context of the academic governance arrangements at Group level.

The aim of the academic audit was to assess the extent to which updates on progress within the relevant Improvement Plans or equivalent could be relied upon. The aim was not to assess the adequacy of the content of the plans, the manner in which progress was reported, or whether or not adequate progress was being made, but rather whether the statements regarding progress were robust.

The Deputy Principal confirmed that all evidence requested was sent to the Assistant Vice Chancellor OfS (UoB). The report for the College indicated one area that required further evidence to support one of the claims made in the Improvement Plan.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Group Academic Governance Report be noted.

4. SECTION D - ANY OTHER BUSINESS

4.1 MEETING EVALUATION

Board Members confirmed that the meeting was informative, supportive and provided adequate challenge when needed. Board Members were confident that critical issues were sufficiently reported on.

(All Members and Officers save for Independent Members left the meeting at 6.32pm)

5. SECTION E – FUTURE MEETINGS

The dates and times of future meetings were noted as follows:

Board Meeting - Tuesday 27 June 2023 at 5.00pm

Committees -

Resources – Tuesday 6 June 2023 at 5.00pm

Audit – Wednesday 14 June 2023 at 5.00pm

Standards & Performance – Tuesday 20 June 2023 at 2.00pm

Search & Governance – Tuesday 20 June 2023 at 5.00pm

The Chair thanked Members for their attendance and the meeting closed at 6.37pm

Chair's Signature:

Date: 27 June 2023