

**Minutes of the VIRTUAL meeting held at 5.15pm on 04 November 2020**

**Present:** S Clarke, (Chair) N Savvas, Principal and CEO  
D Wildridge, (Vice Chair) (part) C Higgins  
E D'Souza

**In Attendance:** S Jones, Vice Principal Finance and Resources  
L Moody, Vice Principal Employer Engagement  
P Ewan, Head of Finance  
J Raffel, Group Director Finance  
C Meredith, Executive Dean for HE,  
A Wright, Head of Admissions and Student Futures  
T Elkin, Clerk

**Apologies:** There were no apologies

No member declared an interest in relation to items on the agenda

**1 Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair**

SC and DW were appointed as Chair and Vice Chair by the Corporation in July 2020.

**2 Apologies for absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

**3 Minutes of the meeting held on 24 June 2020**

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 June were **agreed** as a correct record.

**4 Matters Arising from meeting on 24 June 2020**

ED'Souza clarified the former minute regarding the approval of the spend in response to getting rent from the DfE for Abbeygate. SJones confirmed that the money is not actually received yet, as a consequence of the DfE and Corporation legal teams and the number of queries that have been raised. It was agreed to do what is necessary to determine whether it has to go to the next meeting of the Corporation.

Note: DWildridge joined the meeting at 5.24pm

**5 Committee Terms of Reference**

The committee agreed to adopt the terms of reference subject to amending the section "Powers" the wording of which will be suggested outside the meeting to reflect the decision-making powers which the Committee has. It was agreed to remove item 9.

**6 Year End Outturn 2019/20**

SClarke noted the "healthy surplus" at the end of last year and questioned "Why has it moved so positively when at the last meeting a deficit was forecast? It's a superb result but concerned that in June meeting it was decided not to make a pay award to staff, it's a situation which we wanted to avoid. However, this has now been paid this which is a positive. The concern is that this pay award may not have been made and then the budget would have been left with a massive surplus".

SJones noted that in recent years, staff have been prudent, based on where they cannot be 100% sure of expenditure streams to provide a safe position. This year was affected by the pandemic disruption. Towards the end of the year it was busy around the production of papers etc. whilst there is a variation, the difference between forecast and actual were too much.

**Action**

SJones

This can be addressed by spending more time talking to key budget holders and this needs to be done and with JRaffel and PEwan, look at increasing visibility of outturn and will consider further. The finance team were genuinely concerned that the college was only going to make a small surplus at the time when the pay award was discussed – this is an on-going challenge. SClarke thanked SJones for acknowledging this.

CHiggins advised that spending behaviours also have to be managed. ED'Souza noted that the committee is challenged with the better visibility as to where finances will be at the end of the year. ED'Souza asked, could we have a range of end of year figures to provide greater clarity? SJones noted that he was very careful not to predict a figure and then declare figures well away from this. Happy to provide a range of upside figures and downside figures for the committee. ED'Souza agreed with this approach.

NSavvas noted that income has been affected because colleagues have out performed the management of the budget. Would like us to keep as prudent with accurate predictions. CHiggins agreed that prudent budgeting is right, but governors need more visibility and advanced notice of underspend, to enable the committee to agree to spend on repairs etc.

SJones advised maintaining a current prudent approach but expand and be more comprehensive on the revised figure situation.

The draft audited accounts will be presented at the next committee meeting.

S Jones

## 7 **Finance Report - September 2020**

SClarke asked to review the modified budget column – it was agreed to do the same as the SAT Accounts. The committee felt its responsibility was to monitor against the original budget and this was **agreed**.

The committee reviewed the small costs that have been subsumed into other cost lines in the budget.

The reduction in HE incomes was noted. SJones added that this is counteracted by the money from the DfE for their acknowledgement of their failure to give notice in due time.

CHiggins asked, do we think the HE forecast is now correct? SJones confirmed, yes, dependent upon attrition and retention, "We are now in a better situation". CMeredith confirmed that these figures are correct but there are likely to be variants. There are better than expected performance through clearing. "The college should now have confidence that we can leverage opportunities".

CHiggins asked are the numbers in the budget as realistic as we can get for the year? CMeredith confirmed, "Yes".

ED'Souza noted that there seems a positive approach to the apprentice line. SJones provided background to this figure. Since papers were produced, another lockdown has been announced and LMoody added that colleagues still feel "Very bullish". Have pipelined new intakes for January, more than ever had before, some areas are showing highest numbers of recruitment. Some companies are clearly spending their apprenticeship levy.

## 8 **Key Performance Indicators**

These we accepted by the committee.

## 9 **Cost of WSC Services to SAT (including overheads) Annual Report**

JRaffel provided a summary of the charge. Have potentially under-charged however, therefore 10% of the cost will not be recovered. CHiggins asked, will this be reviewed by the RPT committee? SJones provided a summary of the agreement of the contract. No inclusion of 'direct overheads' in the original SLA and provided examples. If approached, the Trust may feel that it's a bit late to raise this and will affect their 2020/2021 budget.

CHiggins expressed concern that we need to be financially correct? ED'Souza clarified that if the Corporation has not fully recovered its costs from SAT, this was raised in the Hayes Macintyre report, we need to be clear that SAT is beneficial as this is a powerful story. SClarke noted that if WSC is providing services to other organisations, we could be deemed to be undercharging for services.

SClarke noted, if we are not charging according to our financial regulations, we have a duty to record this. SJones to check further.

S Jones

The committee noted that there was cross-subsidised costs but they are outweighed by the benefits of co-operative working. Can always re-visit this if required, following SJones further investigation.

## 10 **Enrolments 2020/2021**

### **i. FE**

AWright summarised the enrolments which are 3,132 today, still picking up new students. Strong conversion rate of 85%. There were concerns re: transport for level 1 students and Covid-19 restrictions, but the travel has not created a barrier.

NSavvas noted that in every college there is a theory that level 1 & 2 students do not travel. This is why AWright has done this piece of work. "Looking at the data it has given us significant surprises which were not expected. Not expecting to see the distance that some students are travelling. It's likely due to the quality of provision". LMoody added examples of distances that students are travelling as they are not happy with their provision locally. Committee members welcomed this.

SClarke asked, are they using public transport? Yes, and we have surveyed their anxieties about coming into the college and especially use of public transport, but this has not proved to be an issue.

Next academic year, recruitment has just started positively, now have 409 applications. 261 at this point last year. Will probably level out as there will not be a huge peak of application following the open event, in the current circumstances.

ED'Souza asked, is this pointing to the fact that we now have a campus with a different education campus – does Abbeygate help to drive these numbers? Majority of applications are for Level 3 provision.

CHiggins questioned, are these applications for WSC but they could potentially go to Abbeygate – is there synergy as more pole are coming onto the campus? AWright feels that there are two very different provisions, there has been a focus on the right course for the right student.

CHiggins, do students want to do more practical courses rather than academic? NSavvas explained that Abbeygate was planned to "scoop up" what was happening in sixth forms in schools. The strategic plan was that they would be complementary between Abbeygate and WSC and to One. Students are therefore accessing outstanding provisions. AWright has carried out research, are attracting more Sixth Form students have about 50% of the sixth form students in the region.

### **ii. HE**

Meredith outlined HE. Recruitment was challenging last year, whilst Covid-19 had an impact, have recruited late in the past. The goal is to maximise three-year enrolments to generate steady income streams. The current challenge is to work out more detail around the demographic of students we have. Sector as a whole has had increases in recruitment nationally and regionally. Need to investigate the students we did get to identify where we have to do more work in the future. Now need to get more detailed year on year figures. Feel we need a bigger attack on data to build better comparisons and data capture. Enormously grateful to have AWright's support and attention to detail, will have a much better idea of our targets in the recruitment pool.

Have set out targets: 275 FTE. As we move to UEA, the budget modelling has been carried out with SJones, to get a better sense of strategic risk. Doing more activities with schools to create a more professional recruitment picture. Approx. 60 people attended the virtual open day which was a good figure and live UCAS applications are in, never received these before January before. 1k independent visitors have reviewed course content, there is a huge acceleration of the exposure of the offer. Should go into next academic year in a much stronger position.

AWright added, UCAS applications nationwide are 12% up, hope that this impacts on WSC numbers.

**11** Subcontracted Provision 2020/21

**i. Subcontracting and Supply Chain Fees Policy 2020/2021**

The Committee **approved** the revised policy. The policy has been added to the website with a 'caveat: subject to approval'. LMoody explained that it's a condition of sub-contracting.

The Committee **approved** all sub-contractors on the list provided. LMoody explained that there is more joint-working, enables the college to offer apprenticeship standards that could not do otherwise. All sub-contractors have been through the due diligence process.

**12** Any Other Business

SJones having checked the point from the start of the meeting, confirmed that the lease with the Trust for Abbeygate – was completed.

SClarke noted the college has been allocated funding to carry out condition works and at the Property committee meeting, decision making was delegated to ED'Souza and SClarke as some decisions were not in compliance with financial regulations. DWildridge added her approval. The Clerk confirmed that CHiggins had already responded.

The committee **approved** the agreement.

ED'Souza and SClarke agreed to follow up with members of the Property committee.

SClarke and ED'Souza agreed to contact RStevenson re: the latest report as hoping to complete major works by the end of March 2021 and would need to get authority from the DfE to extend the deadline date. "We want to make sure that are spending the money appropriately".

There are certain issue that the committee has the power to authorise but have noted a few instances where instances are requiring approval, but do not come through due process and staff members are not aware that they need specific approvals – do not want to hold things up but when staff members should be aware and build timing for approvals into the planning process. Therefore, the committee is expected to agree to things that we don't have sufficient information about – could the Executive Team pass this message down to staff? If they need exceptional approval, they need to be able to provide information quickly. NSavvas agreed that this would be actioned.

ED'Souza summarised, we all want the same things, but as governors we have a duty to ensure that public money is spent properly.

SClarke thanked everyone for their hard work and contributions.

Date of next Meeting:

- Wednesday 2 December 2020 at 5.05pm

The meeting closed at 6.49pm

E D'Souza  
S Clarke

E D'Souza  
S Clarke