

# Governing Board

Tue 05 December 2023, 16:00 - 18:30

GW A, Parson's Walk, Wigan



## Attendees

**Present:** Ann Harrison (Chair) (Independent Governor), Kath Causey (Independent Governor), Andrea Ferguson (Independent Governor), Jenny Bullen (Independent Governor), Hayley Mercer (Independent Governor), Nazia Rehman (Independent Governor), Susan Snape (Independent Governor), Susan Spibey (Independent Governor), Alison McKenzie-Folan (Independent Governor), Steven Tomlinson (Independent Governor), Rebecca Turley (Staff Governor), Jennifer Connor (Staff Governor), Anna Dawe (Principal), Aston Aldred (Student Governor), Emilie Hoyland (Student Governor)

**In attendance:** Joanne Platt (Director of Governance), Louise Brown (Vice Principal, Corporate Services), Anne-Marie Francis (Vice Principal - Curriculum), Alison Rushton (Vice Principal - Employment & Skills), Steven Scott (Finance Director), Dave Harrison (Vice Principal - Data & Funding), Scott Gillon (Wylie & Bisset for Items 5, 9.1 and 9.2).

Caroline Elwood (Governor Elect) and Paul Park (Governor Elect) attended as observers.

The Director of Governance confirmed that the meeting was quorate.

The Chair welcomed Scott Gillon, Caroline Elwood and Paul Park to the meeting.

## Meeting minutes

### 1. Apologies for absence

GB-23-12-01

There were no apologies for absence.

### 2. Declarations of Interests

GB-23-12-02

Steven Tomlinson declared an interest in Item 8 and left the meeting for part of that item.

Caroline Elwood and Paul Park declared an interest in Item 8 and left the meeting for part of that item.

### 3. Minutes of previous meetings and matters arising

GB-23-12-03

The Board reviewed the minutes of Parts 1 and 2 of the meeting held on 10 October and agreed that they are an accurate record of the meeting. There were no matters arising and all actions are complete.

**Resolved:** The Board approved the minutes of Part 1 of the meeting held on 10 October for signature by the Chair.

**Resolved:** The Board approved the minutes of Part 2 of the meeting held on 10 October for signature by the Chair.



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The Board received a report of actions taken via Chair's Action and Written Resolution, since the last meeting.

**Resolved:** The Board ratified the decisions taken via Chairs Action and Written Resolution since the last meeting of the Board as follows:

**Part 1:** Final approval of the Civic University Agreement between Wigan and Leigh College, Edgehill University, Wigan Council and Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

**Part 2:** Confidential item.

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## 5. Financial Statements Auditors Report 2022-23

The Board considered the Financial Statements Auditor's Report for 2022-23, noting that the Auditor has issued an unmodified audit opinion subject to authorisation of the financial statements by the Governing Board and confirmation of no funding clawback in relation to the devolved AEB. The Auditor confirmed that there were no matters to bring to the attention of the Board.

The Regularity Audit Report states that there are no anticipated qualifications in the regularity assurance opinion for the year ended 31 July 2023 and the Financial Statements Auditor's report also states that there are no anticipated qualifications in the audit opinion on the College's accounts for the year ended 31 July 2023, and that in the auditor's opinion, the financial statements give a true and fair view of the College's financial position and the income and expenditure and have been properly prepared in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice and in accordance with the requirements of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 and directions made thereunder by the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

The Board noted that the auditors are satisfied that funds received have been applied for their intended purpose and that the College's forecasts and financial projections indicate that the College has a reasonable expectation that it has adequate resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future, and for this reason will continue to adopt the going concern basis in the preparation of its Financial Statements.

The Board also noted that the Auditors are satisfied, following review of the forecasts and financial projections, that the Board of Governor's assessment of the going concern basis of preparation is appropriate and it was also confirmed that, following an overall review of the governance arrangements and process of internal control in place at the College, the Auditor is of the opinion that the College has strong systems in place to comply with governance requirements.

The Auditor has made no recommendations in relation to the year ended 31 July 2023.

The report of the auditors also includes drafts of the letters of representation for external audit and regularity, which the Board is required to approve and which must be signed by the Chair and the Accounting Officer, alongside the financial statements.

The Board was pleased to see such a positive report once again, and thanked the Auditors and the Finance Team for all the work they had done to prepare the accounts and for the audit work, which provides independent assurance to the Governing Board.

In response to a question from a Governor, it was confirmed that whilst it is unusual to see such a clean report, the landscape is changing with more regulation and involvement of third parties, with financial statements facing ever more scrutiny. However, the Auditor stated that the College is a well run and well governed college and always does what it needs to do, and as such he has no concerns to bring to the attention of the Board.

**Resolved:** The Board noted the Financial Statements Auditors Report 2022-23.



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The Chair advised the Board that since her last update to the Board, she had attended the annual strategic conversation meeting with the FE Commissioner and the Executive Team, where curriculum reform and the DfE Transformation Project was discussed. The Chair noted that the Principal had raised issues in the meeting that had previously caused the Board concern, which provided the Board with assurance that matters are being escalated appropriately where required.

The Chair had also chaired two additional meetings of the Search and Governance Committee to interview prospective Governors, and two meetings to finalise the scope for the External Board Review (EBR) that would start after the Strategic Away Day in January 2024. It was noted that the timeline and process for the EBR would be discussed at the Away Day.

The Chair had also attended the first meeting of the Skills Review Task and Finish Group, where a senior manager from the Council had presented data on skills needs in the Borough. It was noted that the Skills Review Task and Finish Group would meet again in early January 2024 and would feed back their findings so far to Governors at the Away Day.

The outcome of the Skills Review will be a published Skills Statement by the Governing Board in the late summer of 2024, in accordance with the statutory guidance.

The Board discussed ongoing concerns about curriculum reform proposals and noted that the College had submitted a formal response to the consultation both in its own name and also as part of a wider response by the Greater Manchester Colleges' Group.

The Board noted the update.

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The Principal gave a strategic update to the Board. It was noted that the Greater Manchester Colleges Group's (GMCG) £8.4m (revenue and capital) bid to the Local Skills Improvement Fund was focused on responding to the LSIP, with five projects across the sub-region. The College was leading on projects in Engineering and Education, with other GM colleges leading on projects in Construction, Health and Digital.

If successful, the £2.5m Further Education Investment Fund – Innovate GM, will be utilised to increase and diffuse innovation knowledge with SME businesses in the Borough. Partnership working is required with GM Higher Education Institutions and across GM Colleges. Oldham College is the lead institution on this project and funding will pay for posts within Wigan and Leigh college. The outcome of this bid will be known before Christmas and if successful, the project will run from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

The governance model for the GM Trailblazer Devolution Deal for skills is still under development and the draft governance structure was shared with the Board. Panels have been established to look at themes sitting alongside employer focused panels and it was noted that the role of both providers and local authorities within the sub-region needs further clarification.

In relation to the GMCA Sustainability Project, the GMCA is completing a survey and review on post-16 capacity across the 10 GM boroughs. This has been completed for Manchester but is now being rolled out to other colleges. It was noted that the College has its own strategy to address growth and capacity. Data on past and projected student numbers and provision type across GM was shared with the Board, and an update on the College's plans to address growth was provided. It is not yet clear how a GM strategy to address growth will impact the College.

Governors discussed the impact of growth on the College and it was confirmed that the College was responding positively to ensure that it will be in a position to meet demand.

The Board discussed the latest data on early drop out, retention and attendance, and noted that the University Civic Agreement had now been signed by all parties. The Care Leavers programme was discussed and it was noted that this is being expanded across more employers. Governors noted that the success of the Care Leavers programme had recently been acknowledged as an example of partnership working and cited as best practice in a recent Peer Review at the Council. The success of the Home school Maths and English programme was being received very positively and it was noted that there had been an expansion of the AEB programme, with more employability programmes designed around sector need.

There has been a 25% increase in 16-16 Apprentices in learning, compared with the same period last year and food manufacturing and wider manufacturing bespoke programmes are under development, using the AEB flexibilities. The Board noted that the College is on track to once again exceed its AEB allocation and that discussions continue with the GMCA in relation to the allocation for Wigan Borough.

It was confirmed that the in-year growth bid will be awarded in the current academic year, based on increased student numbers. There has been significant investment in both estate and resources in response to growth in student numbers, with earlier recruitment of staffing in-line with the curriculum plan, and the Board noted that the staff pay award had been well received and compared favourably with other colleges in the region.

The Board noted that two students had got to the national finals and been awarded bronze in World Skills, which had been partly hosted in Wigan this year, and also noted the graduation ceremonies and a range of other events that had taken place including L2 and L3 Floristry Students doing outstanding displays at Arley Hall, a highly successful A Level Wellbeing day at Wigan Youth Zone, and 3-night residential team building event for hair and beauty students, with a parallel programme planned for young male students, L2 Food Preparation and Cookery at Haydock Races, a Microsoft Talk with Computer, Media & Business Students and an A level student trip to Auschwitz-Birkenau, in Poland.

The Board said well done to the Executive Team for such positive achievements and thanked the Principal for her update.



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### **Caroline Elwood and Paul Park left the meeting at 5.03pm**

The Board considered a report on Board appointments, noting the particular mix of skills the prospective new Governors would bring to the Board. On the recommendation of the Search and Governance Committee, it was agreed to appoint all four candidates and the Board also agreed the Committees each new Governor would become a member of.

### **Caroline Elwood and Paul Park re-joined the meeting at 5.05pm**

### **Steven Tomlinson left the meeting at 5.05pm**

The Board agreed to appoint Steven Tomlinson as Co-Vice Chair of the Curriculum and Student Matters Committee, noting that this was in accordance with the Board Succession Plan following the appointment of Andrea Ferguson as Chair Elect of the Governing Board.

### **Steven Tomlinson re-joined the meeting at 5.07pm**

**Resolved:** That the Board appoints Caroline Elwood as an Independent Governor for a four-year term of office to 5 December 2027, subject to a satisfactory 12-month period of probation.

**Resolved:** That the Board appoints Paul Park as an Independent Governor for a four-year term of office to 5 December 2027, subject to a satisfactory 12-month period of probation.

**Resolved:** That the Board appoints John Clarke as an Independent Governor for a four-year term of office to 5 December 2027, subject to a satisfactory 12-month period of probation.

**Resolved:** That the Board appoints Chris Fletcher as an Independent Governor for a four-year term of office to 5 December 2027, subject to a satisfactory 12-month period of probation.

**Resolved:** That the Board appoints Caroline Elwood to the Audit Committee.

**Resolved:** That the Board appoints Paul Park and John Clarke to the Resources Committee.

**Resolved:** That the Board appoints Chris Fletcher to the Curriculum and Student Matters Committee

**Resolved:** That the Board appoints Steven Tomlinson as Co-Vice Chair of the Curriculum and Student Matters Committee.

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## 9. Annual Report and Accounts



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The Board reviewed the draft Financial Statements for the year ending 31 July 2023, noting that this had also been considered by the Resources Committee at its meeting on 7 November and by the Audit Committee at its meeting on 8 November, with feedback from the Resources Committee being accepted by the Audit Committee and subsequently being incorporated into the report now before the Board.

The financial statements show a surplus of £1.148 and a total comprehensive income of £1.345M after pension adjustments. The overall balance sheet position at the year-end shows net assets of £43.598M following this £1.345M gain. There was an increase in fixed asset carrying values of £2.459M to £58.286M with in year additions of £4.116M in the year, which were offset by a depreciation charge of £1.657M. The pension scheme obligation has not changed. The year-end actuarial valuation showed a pension asset of £20.068M, however this has been restricted to £nil as the College is of the opinion that no asset legally exists and therefore no pension asset has been recognised in the balance sheet as at 31 July 2023. The overall cash position has improved by £2M due to improved cash flows from operating activities less depreciation and working capital movements.

The Board noted that following approval, the Financial Statements will be submitted to the ESFA by the deadline of 31 December 2023 and will then be published on the College website by the deadline of 31 January 2024.

Governors commended the report, and in particular the introduction, which is clear and easy to follow and provides a wealth of information on the College. They also commented that the report shows that the College's finances are in good hands.

**Resolved:** The Board approved the Annual Report and Accounts (including the Annual Remuneration Report) 2022-23 for signature by the Chair and Accounting Officer and agreed that the letters of representation should be signed by the Chair and the Accounting Officer.

## 9.2. Regulatory Audit Questionnaire 2022-23

The Board reviewed the Regulatory Audit Questionnaire, which is a key piece of evidence used by the Financial Statements Auditors in undertaking its audit work. It was noted that the form had been updated this year, with additional questions added to reflect College re-classification.

It was noted that the Questionnaire had also been reviewed by the Audit Committee at its meeting on 8 November and that the Auditors were satisfied that the responses and evidence provided by the College were an accurate reflection of the College's position.

**Resolved:** The Board approved the Regulatory Audit Questionnaire 2022-23

**Scott Gillon left the meeting.**



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The Board considered the Audit Committee's Annual Report, which is a statutory requirement and which outlines the Committee's key activities in 2022-23, providing assurance in relation to the monitoring of risk and systems of control at the College. It was noted that the Audit Committee's Annual Report is also shared with the Education & Skills Funding Agency as part of its monitoring arrangements.

The report concludes that the Governing Board has an adequate and effective assurance framework and that it has fulfilled its statutory and regulatory responsibilities. Governance, risk management and control processes support the effective and efficient use of resources, the solvency of the College and the safeguarding of assets and on this basis, it was noted that the Audit Committee had concluded that the framework is adequate to permit the Chair of the Governing Board and Accounting Officer to sign the Statement of Corporate Governance and Internal Control, the Statement of Regularity, Propriety and Compliance and the Statement of Responsibility of the Members of the Corporation within the Financial Statements as required.

The Board also noted that the Audit Committee was satisfied that the College's Executive Team has provided appropriate reports to all committees and the Governing Board, including sufficient detail to enable effective governance. The Committee was also satisfied that effective arrangements are in place for the management and quality assurance of data and that the Executive Team has provided accurate and high-quality data to enable the Governing Board and its committees to effectively challenge performance. In addition, the Committee had received a summary of assurance mechanisms available to provide assurance to the Governing Board in relation to its key data controls and it was noted that this report was also before the Board today at Item 12.3 below.

The Audit Committee was also satisfied that both the Internal Auditors (TIAA) and the Financial Statements Auditors (Wylie & Bisset) have shown to be effective in their respective roles during 2022-23 and that the Committee itself has operated in an effective manner, has the requisite skills amongst its membership and has met the requirements of its Terms of Reference and the College's Instrument and Articles of Government. The Committee has also satisfied the procedural requirements set out in the Post-16 Audit Code of Practice and the Financial Memorandum.

**Resolved:** The Board approved the Audit Committee Annual Report 2022-23



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The Board considered the Annual Report of the College's Internal Auditors, which outlined the internal audit work carried out for the year ending 31 July 2023. The report provides an opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the College's framework of governance, risk management and systems of internal control, achieved through a risk based plan of work, agreed with management and approved by the Audit Committee.

The Internal Auditor reported that the design and effectiveness of controls had been found to provide 'substantial' overall assurance for six of the seven reported audits (excluding advisory audits) and had reported to the Committee that the Follow-Up Audit (the seventh audit) concluded that all of the recommendations identified in the previous year's audit cycle had been addressed and fully implemented.

The Internal Audit Annual Report for 2022-23 states that, for the areas reviewed during the year, the College has reasonable and effective risk management, control and governance processes in place. There were no areas reviewed by internal audit where it was assessed that the effectiveness of some of the internal control arrangements provided 'limited' or 'no assurance', and there were no limitations or restrictions placed on the internal audit service which impaired either the independence or objectivity of the service provided.

The Board noted that all six audits undertaken during the year had resulted in substantial assurance ratings, and the auditor had commented that she had never seen this before.

The Board was pleased to see such a positive report and noted that the Audit Committee do challenge the Auditors when they present their reports. It was agreed that it is useful to have an internal audit service, which provides an additional level of assurance for the Board.

The Board noted the Internal Audit Annual Report 2022-23

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## 10. Autumn Term Updates



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The Lead Governor for Careers and Destinations provided an update to the Board, following her meeting with the College's Career's Lead. She advised the Board that a Compass audit had been completed, resulting in 100% compliance against all 8 Gatsby Benchmarks being maintained for a further year.

The Curriculum and Student Matters Committee had approved the Careers Strategy for 2023-26 and a National Apprenticeship Review which started in June 2023 is now nearing completion.

A new Careers Passport to support all 16-18 year old's in full time courses and adults on full time courses has been developed and was shared with the Board. Monthly Careers meetings are also held with the College's Executive Team to monitor progress and a new Access and Participation Plan is under development.

The College's Careers Teams (including SEND Team Management) attended a Post-16 Greater Manchester Careers Conference at Hopwood Hall College in November 2023, feedback from which was very positive and which was described as a great networking event for career leads. The objectives of the event were to align understanding of the local and national careers and skills landscape to inform strategic planning and thus to achieve better outcomes for each and every young person, to develop the community and amplify the collective voice of the Post-16 sector in Greater Manchester, to identify the variety of barriers that affect young people facing disadvantage (including SEND) and explore activities and support structures to overcome them, and to build sustainable quality improvement and assurance for young people at all points and at all levels.

A Careers Adviser Event for local high school careers teachers was held in October 2023, a Careers Fairs was held at Parsons Walk Centre and Leigh College in November 2023, with the Leigh event welcoming 26 guest employers and more than 100 students attending the event. The Wigan Careers Fair welcomed 30 employers at the marketplace hosted in the Youth Zone and more than 300 students attended. The employers ranged across sectors, including banking and finance, the NHS, local government, early years, armed forces, the travel industry and the technical sector.

Employer talks have been held in the Wigan campus from a range of employers including Microsoft, the Wildlife Trust, the Manchester Airport Group, Vodafone, the British Navy and Elver Accounting. These talks engaged a high number of students and feedback from both employers and students was very positive.

A Destinations data campaign commenced in November 2023 to capture unknown destinations for 788 16-18 year old's and 717 adults.

Industry Insight Days have been held for Travel and Tourism students and there are plans to roll this out for all L3 students.

Level 3 Year 1 engineering students attended a higher education master class day at Edge Hill University in November, to encourage students to submit university applications alongside their search for work, so they have a choice on completion of their studies at the College.

It was noted that T-Level Industry Placements are a priority and are still posing a challenge, particularly in Civil Engineering and Digital specialisms.

A Borough wide Higher Education Fair is in the planning phase. This is a collaboration with Wigan Council and all local sixth forms / sixth form colleges and the Board noted that there will be an update on this at the next meeting.

Governors acknowledged the help of the Council in securing work placements and also noted that Leigh Works was working collaboratively to address the placements challenge in digital specialisms.

The Board thanked the Lead Governor for Careers and Destinations for her helpful update.

The Board noted the update



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## 10.2. Safeguarding

GB-23-12-14

The Lead Governor for Safeguarding advised the Board that it can take assurance from the Annual Safeguarding Report to be considered under Item 11.3 below, as early intervention and the range of interventions in place at the College is second to none. She noted policy updates that are taking place in relation to the DfE's Keeping Children Safe in Education and advised the Board that staffing in the Safeguarding Team had been increased to meet increased demand as a result of rising numbers of students at the College.

The Board thanked the Lead Governor for Safeguarding for her update.

The Board noted the update

## 10.3. SEND

GB-23-12-15

The Board noted that the newly appointed Lead Governor for SEND was meeting with key managers for an update on 11 December and that she will provide an update to the Board at the next meeting.

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## 11. Curriculum and Student Matters Committee Reports



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The Board reviewed the College Self-Assessment Report (SAR) for 2022-23, which had been developed from the bottom up with all departments actively engaged in identifying strengths and areas for improvement or development. The SAR has been split into the four provision types of Education Programmes for Young People (EYP), High Needs Learners, Apprenticeships and Adults.

Following governor scrutiny and approval of the provision type SARs, a top level Executive Summary SAR had been developed, which Governors found helpful. This process is new for 2022-23 and represents a much more detailed approach to reviewing the college performance by provision type and learner need aligned to meeting skills needs and committing to a cycle of continuous improvement.

The priority actions identified through the reflection and self-assessment process are captured in the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) for 2023-24 and indicate the areas for improvement and further development throughout the year. Associated actions are included to provide assurance that these improvements and developments will be made.

It was noted that there is a need to improve achievement gaps in a small number of areas and that the Teaching and Learning Academy has an agenda to reinvigorate classroom and workshop learning, which work is underway. Retention also requires improvement for adult learners and internal progression of returning students has declined.

It was noted that the SAR had been discussed with the Chair of the Board and the Chair of the Curriculum and Student Matters Committee and by the Curriculum and Student Matters Committee at its meeting on 14 November.

There had been a robust discussion which deliberated on whether the College was being too hard on itself in its SAR. In conclusion, it had been agreed that the grades were realistic and could be well evidenced, and the SAR was a useful tool to drive continuous improvement across the College.

The Chair of the Curriculum and Student Matters Committee assured the Board that grades that appear to have been static over a number of years, are in reality moving from a low to a high grade two as improvements are made and direction of travel arrows had been added to the report to aid visibility of this.

The Board agreed that the judgements given are fair and well reasoned with some really good case studies. Whilst the evidence shows that most grades were often at the top end of a two, it was agreed that keeping the grades at this level was the right approach. There were pockets of grade ones and also some grade threes, and the Board noted that areas graded at three would be subject to scrutiny from the Committee via curriculum presentations or Link Visits in 2023-24.

It was also noted that the self-assessed grade for skills was 'strong' which will permeate through all areas and the overall Grade is a solid two with pockets of 'Outstanding'. Out of 23 judgements, 17 were graded either one or two.

The Board noted that the report was very clear and easy to read and they thanked management and staff for their excellent work in pulling the SAR and QIP together.

In response to a question from a Governor, it was noted that a Grade 1 would only be given for Leadership and Management, when Quality was all graded as 1.

**Resolved:** The Board approved the SAR 2022-23 and Quality Improvement Plan 2023-24



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The Board considered the HE annual monitoring report, noting that the experience of students on higher education courses at the College is assessed critically via External Examiner reports, survey results (e.g. National Student Survey), feedback from Student Committees and course retention rates. When reviewed as a whole, the quality and standards of the College's higher education provision can be considered to be of good quality and reliable. Taking the broad range of stakeholder feedback into account the College can be confident that its higher education provision meets awarding body academic standards and the Office for Students (OfS) conditions of registration.

The implementation of the College's Higher Education Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework and professional development events such as weekly continuous professional development meetings and the Research and Scholarship Symposium, provide the College with a HE-bespoke and reliable quality assurance mechanisms. Student outcomes are evaluated via continuation rates, attainment / high grade performance, Assessment Board outcomes, retention rates and pass rates, led by a dedicated higher education management team. Whilst there were pockets of under-performance in 2022-2023 relating to retention and pass rates, the overall performance of the College's higher education provision is good.

Based upon the 2022-2023 quantitative and qualitative data presented in the report, alongside the range of actions set out to make necessary improvements, the College can have confidence in the performance of its higher education provision in 2022-2023. The OfS Risk Ratings present a self-assessment, approved at Executive level, of the College's position against each of the OfS Conditions of Registration, providing reassurance with respect to the College's external requirements.

Governors asked if the Institute of Technology (IoT) was having an impact and it was confirmed that the College had met its IoT recruitment targets and that many companies from within and outside of Greater Manchester were coming to the IoT for their training.

**Resolved:** The Board approved the HE Annual Monitoring Report and SAR 2022-23

### 11.3. Annual Safeguarding Report 2022-23

GB-23-12-18

The Board considered the Annual Safeguarding Report for 2022-23, which focused on all aspects of Safeguarding across the College and provides an outline of the various areas of focus undertaken by the Safeguarding Team in the year. The report showed the current safeguarding position and 5-year trends, changes to 'Keeping Children Safe In Education', the Prevent Duty and upcoming projects for 2023-24.

It was noted that the number of high risk safeguarding cases requiring a multi agency intervention continues to decrease over the 5-year period, which is reflected in the numbers of young people on Child Protection Plans requiring statutory intervention. The higher numbers of Child in Need plans, which require voluntary participation from families suggests the earlier intervention is effective in addressing and reducing risk. These numbers fluctuate across the year. PREVENT referrals have been very low over the last 5 years.

The College offers four main strands of ongoing wellbeing support for learners. This includes the Head of Studies teams and drop in support on all sites, wellbeing support which is focused initially on those learners with an Education Health & Care Plan (EHCP), the counselling service provided by Wigan Family Welfare, and the College Pastoral and Community Chaplain. The main engagement in wellbeing support lies with the 16-18 cohorts although support is also accessed by adults via the Adult Learning Mentor who sits within the Head of Studies Team.

The trend remains that overall, more females than males engage with the services on offer and therefore a greater emphasis has been placed on engaging external guest speakers such as Luke Ambler and SocioLogical who work to address the barriers to males accessing support, and the College delivers workshops specifically targeting male groups.

It was noted that there has been a 40% increase in Children Looked After (CLA) who have enrolled at the College, and the number has more than doubled in the last 5-years. This cohort of learners comprise those who have always lived in Wigan Borough and those who have moved to Wigan placements from other



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Boroughs. In the current academic year, a higher number in the cohort are from outside the Wigan Borough which can bring challenges in retention if placements break down. Many of these young people join the College with complex safeguarding concerns which presents further challenges to wellbeing and achievement.

As part of the CLA cohort, this year has seen a significant increase of unaccompanied asylum seekers who have applications in process for residency. The process is lengthy and complex and these young people face many challenges, not least the challenge of communication and adapting to a different culture, so affinity groups and support is promoted. There are concerns around retention and achievement as they can be moved to other areas with very little notice and the curriculum has been designed around this as far as possible to ensure that they achieve whilst at the College.

During the last academic year, there were instances of none disclosure by young people of their involvement in investigations relating to criminal activity. Failure to provide this information presents a safeguarding concern and lack of wellbeing support being offered. Adapting to a college culture of respect and safety in line with transparency and swift intervention ensures the most positive outcome. Staff are vigilant and responsive to information received which enables risks to be assessed and Education Safety Plans to be put in place with partner agencies.

A small number of students have lost parents to suicide or support students with low mental health. The Head of Studies team provide daily support and offer a drop in service for these learners. The College also promotes and works with external partners such as Child Bereavement UK.

Guest Speakers covering key topics such as PREVENT, Domestic Violence, Tolerance, Knife Crime and On-line Safety play a key role in the education and support of learners.

Many young people suffer from low self-esteem and rely heavily on communication via social media and online relationships rather than physical communication, which can lead to unhealthy relationships. The promotion and campaigns around resilience, good mental and physical health and healthy relationships therefore remain a priority for the academic year 2023-24. Building on the success of sessions introduced in the last academic year, the College will continue to work closely with the Young People's Domestic Abuse Adviser (YDVA), to facilitate discussion around what comprises a healthy relationship and the implications of not addressing unhealthy relationships. The YDVA works closely throughout the year with the Safeguarding team to offer drop in sessions for students at various key points of the year to ensure the subject remains a high priority.

Online Safety remains a high priority and the College's partnership with National Online Safety and National Colleges continues to be develop with a visit from National On-line Safety offering a week of training and workshops in early 2024.

Understanding and recognising the effects of historical trauma is of paramount importance when safeguarding individuals, and training is therefore being delivered throughout the year to all staff. Training has commenced in collaboration with Wigan Council for support staff and will continue to roll out and be embedded to ensure that the importance of a trauma informed approach when working with young people is recognised.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead is working closely with external partners in social care to deliver training around professional curiosity which is key to supporting and safeguarding the young people within the College. The approved professional curiosity training will be delivered to staff throughout the year to remind and encourage staff who work with students to remain vigilant and aware of possible concerns.

The Board noted that the report had been scrutinised by the Curriculum and Student Matters Committee at its meeting on 14 November and was recommended for approval by the Board.

**Resolved:** The Board approved the Annual Safeguarding Report 2022-23

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## 12. Audit Committee Reports



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The Board reviewed the Risk Register, which had been updated to reflect the current year's strategic outlook, noting that this had been scrutinised by the Audit Committee at its meeting on 8 November 2023 and used by the Committee to inform recommendations in relation to the Internal Audit Plan for the remainder of the year.

It was noted that since the last report, a new risk has been added and positioned at number 1. This relates to College resilience, business continuity and the College's ability to meet Borough need which could be negatively affected by rapid growth in activity across most / all funding streams.

In addition to the one new risk, risk scores have increased on 12 risks (Risks two, three, four, five, seven, eight, 10, 11, 12, 14, 16 and 17), risk scores on four have remained the same (Risks six, nine, 13 and 15) and no risk scores have been reduced.

Risk will continue to be assessed throughout the year and is managed proactively in the College. However, the Board recognised that the College is not always able to 100% determine the level of risk it faces as risks may relate to external forces, for example, government policy decisions, global conflict or pandemics.

The Board noted that the Audit Committee had asked the Internal Auditors to review the College's plans to address growth and capacity (Risk 1), and that this work would take place in March 2024.

Governors commended the risk register, noting that it had given the Audit Committee a lens to look through when discussing the Internal Audit Plan with the Internal Auditors.

Governors discussed potential risks arising from proposed curriculum reforms, noting that this would be managed under Risk 3.

The Board noted the report.

**Nazia Rehman left the meeting at 5.47pm.**

## 12.2. Internal Audit Plan 2023-24

The Board reviewed the Internal Audit Plan for 2023-24, noting that the Board had approved the audit activity for the autumn term at its last meeting, and had asked the Audit Committee to review the remainder of the Plan again when it considered the latest Risk Register at its meeting on 8 November.

The Board noted that the Audit Committee had asked the Auditors to push back the review of Apprentices to 2024-25, when the outcome of the external review of Apprenticeship finance would be concluded and known. It also asked the Auditors to undertake the review of sub-contracting on alternate years, as there is no longer a requirement for this to be done annually, and as this had just been done in 2022-23, it had been proposed that this should next be done in 2024-25.

In place of this, the Audit Committee had asked the Auditors to undertake a review of the College's plans in relation to capacity planning and the new risk added to the Risk Register in relation to this, to provide assurance that the activities being undertaken were adequate and proportionate to address the risk.

The Internal Audit Plan before the Board included these changes and the Board noted that the review in relation to capacity planning would be done at the end of March 2024, to enable the outcome to be reported to the Audit Committee at its last meeting in May 2024.

**Resolved:** The Board approved the Internal Audit Plan 2023-24



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The Board considered a report on Data Assurance, noting the College's commitment to maintaining high standards in its management of data, and that it works in accordance with best practice across the sector to provide appropriate assurance on data quality. The report set out the various key data systems within the College and the mechanisms by which assurance is gained, including through routine reporting to committees, Governing Board and internal and external audit reports.

The Board noted that the Data Assurance Report had been reviewed by the Audit Committee at its meeting on 8 November and was now recommended for approval.

**Resolved:** The Board approved the Data Assurance Report

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## **13. Resources Committee Reports**

### **13.1. Health and Safety Annual Report 2022-23 and Policy 2023-24**

**GB-23-12-22**

The Board considered the Health and Safety Policy for 2023-24, which has been reviewed by the Head of Estates, with assistance from CNS, the College's Health & Safety Consultants. It was noted that there have been no legislative changes requiring significant amendment to the Health and Safety Policy this year.

The report included the Health and Safety Annual Report, and Governors noted that there had been 164 accidents, incidents or near misses reported in 2022-23, only 31 of which were as a direct result of college activities.

Of the 31 reported accidents, the majority were slips, trip and falls (10) and contact with machinery (10). The remainder of the reported accidents were low numbers in relation to cuts / laceration, lifting, struck by object and other similar incidents.

The Board noted that all accidents, incidents and near misses are reviewed to identify campus specific trends and implement improvement actions. Slip, trips and falls, and the use of machinery have been a focus this academic year, with an emphasis on training and better identification / reporting of near misses. To aide this, Risk Assessment training has been delivered again to key staff, including curriculum technicians, where the accident information has been specifically used to identify hazards and better controls.

Over the year, there were 60 first aid callouts for non-college related activities, illness or underlying health issues. Recognising the underlying health issues and understanding what first aid action may be needed is covered within a personal risk assessment. This is a growth area, and as such, additional training will be delivered to staff to improve confidence in compiling a comprehensive risk assessment utilising medical advice.

37 near misses were reported over the year, which is an encouraging upward trend from previous years and helps to identify potential hazards. No RIDDOR notifications have been recorded over the 2022-23 academic year.

**Resolved:** The Board approved the Health and Safety Annual Report 2022-23

**Resolved:** The Board approved the Health and Safety Policy 2023-24

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## **14. Search and Governance Committee Reports**



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The Board considered a report on the Governor Code of Conduct, noting that the Eversheds Sutherland Code of Conduct for Corporation Members used by the College as its standard Governor Code of Conduct has been updated to reflect re-classification of colleges and the requirement for annual Accountability Statements and External Governance Reviews.

The Board agreed that the College should adopt the revised Code, noting that all members appointed after its adoption will be required to sign this version of the Code of Conduct, and the Board decision will reflect that the new Code be applied to all existing members, without the need for each member to sign the revised version.

**Resolved:** The Board approved adoption of the revised Eversheds Sutherland Code of Conduct for Corporation Members (18th Edition) for all new and existing members.

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## 15. Capital Projects Update

The Board received an update in relation to Capital Projects, noting that the College continues to work alongside the DfE and Willmott Dixon on a range of project-related matters. Since the last Governing Board meeting, significant progress has been made in relation to the furniture and equipment layout plans for all types of teaching and non-teaching resources. Discussions are ongoing about the amount of legacy furniture and equipment which will transfer to the new building once complete. Although the DfE continues to assess Willmott Dixon's Royal Institution of British Architects (RIBA) Stage 3 submission, it is understood that the Stage 4 submission will be made prior to Christmas.

Following the public consultation event in September, the detailed planning application for the main elements of the project (the new building and the demolition of the main building) was submitted at the beginning of October. Willmott Dixon continues to liaise with the Local Planning Authority (LPA) and it is now expected that the application will be determined during the first week of January. At the time of preparing the report, only one comment had been received from a local resident (not formally objecting to the proposal). The demolition of the School for the Arts Building was the subject of a separate planning application, which was approved by the LPA on 8 November.

Although discussions have taken place with the DfE's Programme Delivery Lead, FE Capital Transformation Fund, the College is still awaiting a formal response to the letter issued in July in which clarification was sought on the College's contribution, payment terms and contractual arrangements. The College will continue to chase for a formal response to the letter.

The enabling works have now commenced on-site. Split into three elements as noted below, the College has signed the Licence to Occupy for phases 1A and 1B of the Early Works Package. A separate licence will be put in place covering phase 1C once more details are known.

The Board noted the phasing of the works and key project milestones which are set out in the Pre-Construction Services Agreement between the DfE and Willmott Dixon. This demonstrates that progress is being made on project mobilisation with the level of activity on-site expected to intensify over the coming weeks.

Governors noted that the visuals shared with the Board at the last meeting were causing a degree of excitement amongst stakeholders and the Board noted how the project would totally transform the town centre when completed.

In response to a question from a Governor, it was confirmed that the College has the capacity to accommodate the increased number of students in the current academic year and that plans to secure additional accommodation for next year are well advanced. Accordingly, there are no concerns to share with Governors at this stage.

The Board noted the update



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## 16. Strategic Workshop (Strategic Plan and Governor Skills Review)

GB-23-12-25

The Board discussed the agenda for the Strategic Away Day being held in January 2024, noting that the focus would be on the Duty to Review placed on governing boards in relation to meeting skills need and the integral part of the accountability statement process that the duty fulfils, the External Board Review and the development of the new 3-year Strategic Plan for 2024-2027

It was noted that several of these items are interlinked and require input from, for example, the Skills Review Task & Finish Group as well as collective work on the formation of the strategic plan.

It was agreed that the Away Day is also an opportunity to reflect on the work done to date, sense check the strategic direction being taken and progress further work over the spring term prior to final publication of the annual accountability action plan and the new strategic plan.

**Resolved:** The Board agreed the content of the Strategic Workshop to be held on 19 January 2024

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## 17. KPI Dashboards

The Board noted that the KPI dashboards had all been scrutinised in detail in the Committees. However, in view of their importance in monitoring progress in achieving the strategic objectives, the dashboards were also submitted to the Board for further discussion where required.

### 17.1. Finance KPI Dashboard

GB-23-12-26

The Board noted the report.

### 17.2. HR KPI Dashboard

GB-23-12-27

The Board noted the report.

### 17.3. Estates and Sustainability KPI Dashboard

GB-23-12-28

The Board noted the report.

### 17.4. Curriculum KPI Dashboard: Study Programmes

GB-23-12-29

The Board noted the report.

### 17.5. Curriculum KPI Dashboard: Adults

GB-23-12-30

The Board noted the report.

### 17.6. Curriculum KPI Dashboard: Apprentices

GB-23-12-31



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The Board noted the report.

## **17.7. Curriculum KPI Dashboard: HE**

**GB-23-12-32**

The Board noted the report.

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## **18. Part B: The following items had been the subject of discussion or approval by Committees or were attached for the Board's information only.**

### **18.1. Link Visits Reports**

**GB-23-12-33**

To note the report

The Board noted the report.

### **18.2. Committee Chairs' Reports**

#### **18.2.1. Audit Committee Chair's Report**

**GB-23-12-34**

The Board noted the report.

#### **18.2.2. Curriculum and Student Matters Committee Chair's Report**

**GB-23-12-35**

The Board noted the report.

#### **18.2.3. Resources Committee Chair's Report**

**GB-23-12-36**

The Board noted the report.

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## **19. Any other business**

**GB-23-12-37**

There were no items of other business.

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## **20. Date and time of next meeting: 19 March 2024 at 4.30pm**

**GB-23-12-38**

The earlier start time for a Board Development session was noted.

The Chair wished everyone a Happy Christmas.

**The meeting ended at 6.05pm.**

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## **21. APPENDICES**

The Appendices were noted.



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