

Governing Board

Tue 08 October 2024, 16:00 - 18:30

GWA Parson's Walk Campus, Wigan



Attendees

Present: Ann Harrison (Independent Governor and Chair), Andrea Ferguson (Independent Governor), Susan Spibey (Independent Governor), Jenny Bullen (Independent Governor), Steven Tomlinson (Independent Governor), John Clarke (Independent Governor), Caroline Elwood (Independent Governor), Sarah Smith (Independent Governor), Chris Fletcher (Independent Governor), Alison McKenzie-Folan (Independent Governor), Anna Dawe (Principal), Rebecca Turley (Staff Governor), Jennifer Connor (Staff Governor), Aston Aldred (Student Governor)

In attendance: Joanne Platt (Director of Governance), Anne-Marie Francis (Vice Principal - Curriculum), Louise Brown (Vice Principal Corporate Services), Steven Scott (Finance Director), Dave Harrison (Vice Principal – Data and Funding)

The Director of Governance confirmed that the meeting was quorate.

The Chair welcomed Sarah Smith to her first meeting of the Governing Board. The Chair also noted that this was her last meeting and also the last meeting for Susan Spibey, both of whom had come to the end of their terms of office as Governors.

Meeting minutes

1. Apologies for absence

GB-24-10-01

Apologies for absence had been received from Kath Causey, Paul Park, Hayley Mercer, Susan Snape and Alison Rushton.

2. Declarations of Interests

GB-24-10-02

Andrea Ferguson and Caroline Elwood declared an interest in Item 12 and left the meeting for that item. There were no other declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of previous meetings and matters arising

GB-24-10-03

The Board reviewed the minutes of the meeting held on 2 July 2024 and agreed they were a correct record. There were no matters arising.

Resolved: The Board approved the minutes of the meeting held on 2 July 2024 for signature by the Chair.

4. Chair's Update to the Board - verbal report

GB-24-10-04

As it had been the summer break, the Chair had no updates to report.

Platt Joanne
04/12/2024 10:15:38



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The Principal gave an update on national, regional and local issues. In terms of the national picture, following the change of Government in July 2024, it was noted that the EFSA has been disbanded and its responsibilities now fall within the Department for Education. The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) has also been disbanded and its responsibilities now fall within a new organisation (Skills England). There is also a move to remove Ofsted single word judgements for schools, replacing this with a new balanced scorecard model, although this hasn't yet been proposed in relation to FE inspections.

In terms of curriculum reform, the Government has paused proposed changes made by the former Government and is now undertaking its own review, which will run until December. It is understood that T-levels will remain and possibly some BTEC qualifications. In addition, Government is undertaking a full curriculum review of all Key Stages, including Key Stage 5 and has made changes to the Growth and Skills Levy, including the removal of funding for Level 7 and the creation of Foundation Apprenticeships.

Funding given to schools for a 5.5% pay rise for teachers has not been provided to FE, and the discussion in relation to VAT on private school fees does not include reference to VAT already paid by FE institutions. The Board discussed the steps the College was taking to ensure that it has a voice in relation to these changes, including attendance at political conferences and the lobbying of local MPs and agreed that Governors would use any opportunities they had within their own networks to lobby.

In relation to the College's strategic priorities, it was noted that there had been an improvement in achievement rates for 16-18 and 19+, an improvement in retention and that T-Level and A-Level pass rates were well ahead of national averages. Apprenticeship achievement overall was also above the national 70% target and national averages and the rate has improved for 16-18s. Right Start has been refined and has delivered greater impact and behaviour and attendance this year to date has taken a positive step forward.

For Place and Productivity, there have been significant increases in engagement with technical education, study programmes and Apprenticeships, T-level enrolments are up and understanding and confidence is growing. However the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training are increasing in the Borough and Level 4 engagement is decreasing, although it was noted that IoT target numbers have been met. In terms of capacity, unlike some colleges, the College has not declared itself as full and students have been accommodated. It was noted that the new premises (The Skills Academy) is already full. and Governors discussed the options being considered to accommodate further growth, including staffing. Adult enrolments have increased and the College expects to fully utilise the Adult Education Budget plus the additional 10%. Apprenticeship starts are up and the Leigh Adult Learning Centre Centre of Excellent in Health and Social Care has started, improving utilisation at Leigh Campus. Governors were pleased to hear that the College had not turned any students away and were managing to attract additional staff. Governors also discussed the sources of the data that is being used to predict future growth.

Governors discussed enrolment numbers and predictions at census and how this might lead to an in-year growth bid. Whilst HE enrolment is down this year, this should be viewed within the context of the growth in Level 4-6 Apprenticeships. The 2024-25 budget has been reviewed in response to student number growth, although a potential in-year growth allocation has not been assumed. Planned capital works include the Power House at Pagefield, the College's contribution to the DfE for the Transformation Fund Project and completion of the summer capital works. It was noted that the reporting surplus must be strong to maintain cash and levels in reserve, which enables the College to make the necessary capital investments.

The Board also saw some photographs of the improvement works carried out over the summer and noted that World Skills UK is being hosted in GM and Wigan, that members of the Executive Team are leading a Best Practice Panel at the upcoming AoC Conference and that entries for Beacon Awards have been made.

It was agreed to invite Governors to visit the Skills Academy at a future date, possibly via a Link Visit.

The Board noted the update.



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The Board considered the end of year reports on performance against the previous strategic plan, noting that the final outcome will be presented to the committees in the Autumn cycle of meetings.

In terms of Quality, it was noted that there had been improved achievement rates across all areas of activity. Although 16-18 retention improved, the pass rate did not, which is largely due to a decline in the overall pass rate for GCSE Maths and English. Governors discussed this, noting that the national approach to marking would always result in approximately the same number of students achieving grade 4 or above each year. Although the College's learners had outperformed the national average, internal achievement targets for Maths and English had not been met.

The digitalisation of learning and assessment has progressed significantly, attendance rates, behaviour and classroom standards remain a focus and two specialist posts have been created to support disengaged learners, leaving teachers to focus on other students in lessons. Also, work-readiness and progression advice and guidance is a priority area for further development and there will be further investment in Fab Futures.

In terms of Place and Productivity, place based curriculum solutions have been developed and are having a positive impact. These include the highly successful targeted programme for Elected Home Educated students, the expansion of adult learning and full utilisation of the Adult Education Budget (AEB). There was also an increase in targeted workforce skills solutions, for example in Residential Children's Services, Food Manufacturing and the delivery of the Local Skills Improvement Programme. Engagement with technical education was high and is increasing but the numbers of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) is showing signs of increasing in the Borough and will be a focus for the current year. Collaborative and stakeholder working continues to further improve and is very strong.

In terms of Investment for the Future, College finances remain strong and this has enabled the College to invest significantly in upgrades and renewal to the College estate. It also enabled further investment in the workforce and a remuneration and reward package that enabled the College to grow and retain its workforce. It was noted that the Transformation Programme is progressing, the College responded quickly to student growth numbers and has been able to accommodate significant growth.

The Board also reviewed the start of year targets, noting that dashboards that will be reported to committees and Board throughout 2024-25 have been updated to reflect the new 3 year Strategic Plan.

In terms of Quality, it was noted that there will be a specific focus on attendance and behaviour with revised strategies to address these challenges, and in particular a refreshed approach to address this in relation to GCSE Maths and English students. There will also be a focus on advice and guidance and work-readiness including an initial full delivery of the Apprenticeship Workforce Development Programme.

In terms of Place and Productivity, in partnership with stakeholders the College will focus on the development of the Care Academy at Leigh Adult Learning Centre, will prepare for the implications from the new Growth and Skills Levy, and will strategically respond to the capacity challenges and significant student number increases.

In terms of Investment for the Future, the focus will be on the Transformation Programme and the development of the Power House at Pagefield, to balance income growth with sustainable expansion in response to capacity pressures and to prepare for new workforce legislation and maintain staff engagement strategies in response to increased pressure around the sustainability of the FE workforce.

Resolved: The Board noted the update and agreed the targets for 2024-25.



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7. Management Accounts: July / Year-End

GB-24-10-07

The Board reviewed the Management Accounts to the end of July 2024.

The accounts show a year-to-date operating surplus (before FRS102 adjustments) of £1.84M against a budgeted surplus of £792k which is a positive variance of £1.022M.

Cash balances at the end of the period were £14.112M (143 days). This is higher than the originally budgeted £11.186M (102 days) and remains within the 40 day threshold adopted by the College and reported in the annual financial statements.

ESFA key performance indicators showed the College's financial health will a minimum grade of good and all bank covenants remain compliant with the terms of the facility agreement.

The Board noted the year-end financial position of the College.

7.1. Re-based Budget 2024-25

GB-24-10-08

The Board reviewed the proposed re-based budget for 2024-25, noting that the original budget approved by the Board in July 2024 had forecasted an operating surplus of £855k and a reporting surplus after FRS102 adjustments of £1.106M. Following a review of the original assumptions which had been based on the actual spend for 2023-24, and consideration of the current FE environment together with some clarification on previous expectations, the budget has been updated and the re-forecast predicts the College's position will improve to show an operating surplus of £902k and a reporting surplus of £1.154M. This will result in a minimum ESFA financial health grading of 'good' whilst also allowing the College to operate within the terms of its banking covenants.

The Board noted that the re-forecast budget did not assume additional income that may arise as a result of an in-year 16-18 growth bid although the DfE has indicated that if one is made available, that the College would be eligible for this. If this materialises, it will be included in the mid-year budget review in March 2025.

Expenditure has also been revisited in line with the increases in learner numbers and the Board noted that the College is being prudent by including these costs, but not the income, which is not yet assured, in the re-based budget.

Resolved: The Board approved the revised budget for 2024-25.

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The Board considered proposed changes to the College's Instrument and Articles of Government and Standing Orders, which do not currently provide for any maximum number of terms of office for Governors, contrary to good practice set out in the Association of College's (AoC) Code of Good Governance and the Department for Education's (DfE) Governance Guide for FE Colleges.

It was noted that the Board had previously agreed that maximum terms of office would only be introduced when the makeup of the Board in terms of length of tenure of governors was such that introducing a maximum term would not de-stabilise the Board, and the Board Succession Plan approved in 2021-22 has been working towards this change. At the start of the 2024-25 academic year, it was noted that there are only four Governors who have served for more than two terms of office. Two (including the Chair) are stepping down in October, and one independent governor will step down when her third term of office comes to an end in July 2025. The fourth is a staff governor, whose third term of office will come to an end in October 2027.

On the recommendation of the Search and Governance Committee, the Board agreed that now was the appropriate time to introduce a maximum number of terms of office into the College's Instrument and Articles of Government and Standing Orders.

The Board also noted and approved proposed updates to the Scheme of Delegation to reflect current policy areas, the changes which will also be reflected in each committee's terms of reference (which are being considered by each committee in the autumn cycle of meetings and which will be submitted to the Governing Board in December 2024 for approval).

Resolved: The Board approved changes to the Instruments and Articles of Government, Standing Orders and Scheme of Delegation.

9. Review of Confidential Minutes

GB-24-10-10

The Board noted that the Search and Governance Committee had undertaken a review of approved confidential minutes of meetings held between September 2023 and July 2024 and agreed which minutes should now be released for publication upon request.

Resolved: The Board agreed which minutes previously deemed confidential, can be released for publication.

10. Board Succession Plan 2024-26

GB-24-10-11

The Board considered the Board Succession Plan which had been developed following a discussion on the outcome of Governor 1-1 meetings with the Chair of the Governing Board that had taken place in May and June 2024, informed by the Board Skills Audit.

It was noted that 16 Governors had completed the Board Skills Audit and 15 had met with the Chair to discuss their responses and their aspirations within the College. Aspirations to additional leadership roles in the College identified in those discussions had been addressed when additional appointments had been approved by the Governing Board in July 2024.

The Board Succession Plan had now been updated to reflect the current position and the Board agreed to approve this.

Resolved: The Board approved the Board Succession Plan for 2024-26.

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The Board considered the proposed Board Development Plan for 2024-25, which was informed by the 2024 Skills Audit Questionnaires and 1-1 meetings with the Chair. It was noted that the analysis shows there to be a good balance of skills, experience and competencies, with a high level of expertise under each category within the Board membership and no areas scoring very low, indicating a wide spread of skills across the Board as a whole.

The Board Development Plan has been developed to address the areas where Governors identified a need for further development and the Board agreed to approve this.

Resolved: The Board approved the Board Development Plan for 2024-25.

12. Board appointments

Andrea Ferguson and Caroline Elwood left the meeting at 5.30pm

At its meeting on 10 October 2023, the Board had appointed Andrea Ferguson as Chair Elect of the Governing Board, pending the current Chair standing down as a Governor. The Chair is standing down at the end of today's meeting and accordingly the Board agreed to formally approve Andrea Ferguson's appointment as Chair with effect from 9 October 2024 until the end of her term of office as a Governor (February 2026).

The Board also confirmed the appointment of Freya Robinson as a Student Governor with effect from 9 October 2024 to 31 July 2026.

The Board also approved a sabbatical of up to six-months for Hayley Mercer and agreed to appoint Caroline Elwood as Lead Governor for SEND during Hayley Mercer's sabbatical.

Resolved: The Board approved the appointment of Andrea Ferguson as Chair of the Governing Board with effect from 9 October 2024 until the remainder of her term of office as a Governor (February 2026)

Resolved: The Board approved the appointment of Freya Robinson as a Student Governor and a member of the Curriculum and Student Matters Committee, with effect from 9 October 2024 until 31 July 2026.

Resolved: The Board approved a sabbatical for Hayley Mercer for a period of up to six-months from today's date.

Resolved: The Board approved the appointment of Caroline Elwood as Lead Governor for SEND pending Hayley Mercer's sabbatical.

Andrea Ferguson and Caroline Elwood re-joined the meeting at 5.35pm

13. Review of Senior Post Holders and Governance Structures

The Board considered a report on the periodic review of Senior Post Holder and committee structures, noting that it is good practice set out in the Association of College's Code of Good Governance for College Governing Boards to periodically review these to ensure they remain fit for purpose to deliver the College strategy

It was noted that this review had been deferred last year in light of the impending review of the College's Strategic Plan and the External Board Review which took place in the Spring term of 2024.

Having considered options, the Board agreed that no changes were needed, noting that the recent External Board Review had not resulted in any suggested changes and had confirmed that governance arrangements are strong and working well at the College.

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Resolved: The Board agreed to make no changes to Senior Post Holders or Board structures.

14. Annual Report on Data Protection and Freedom of Information

GB-24-10-15

The Board reviewed the Annual Report on Data Protection and Freedom of Information, noting that during the year staff continued to work in a flexible working from home pattern and that the College had reviewed its processes in the light of this and enhanced its cyber security procedures.

It was noted that the College has received 26 Freedom of Information requests and 398 Subject Access requests in the 2023-24 academic year, a total increase of 55 from the previous year. All requests had been responded to within the statutory period. There were seven reported data breaches in 2023-24, of which two were reported to the Information Commissioners Office, resulting on no formal action being required, although the College had provided additional staff training in response to this.

Governors asked about the high numbers of Subject Access Requests and it was confirmed that many of these relate to requests from former students for previous exam results.

Resolved: The Board noted the Annual Report on Data Protection and Freedom of Information for 2023-24.

15. Sub-Contracting: Recruitment and Spend

GB-24-10-16

In line with current ESFA guidance on governance of sub-contracting, the Board considered a report on the breadth and performance of sub-contracting in the 2023-24 academic year.

It was noted that in 2023-24, the Governing Board had approved the sub-contracting of £1,007,939 worth of funding to two main providers delivering the whole programme and a number of other providers delivering smaller elements of apprenticeship programmes. Overall the College spent £821,858 against this planned sub-contracting spend, due to sub-contractors not meeting their recruitment targets.

For the 2024-25 academic year the Governing Board had approved plans to sub-contract £827,819 worth of funding to two main providers, delivering the whole programme and a couple of Higher Education Institutions delivering smaller elements of apprenticeship programmes.

The Board noted that early 16-18 recruitment indications, show that there will be some under delivery on this budget target and that both providers have yet to recruit fully to their adult programmes.

The Board noted the report.



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16. Capital Projects Update: presentation

GB-24-10-17

The Board received an update on Capital Projects, noting that the contract between DfE and Willmott Dixon had been executed on 3 July, that the School for the Arts had been partially demolished, although demolition works had been delayed following discovery of additional asbestos. The decant strategy was now being formulated, sooner than expected, further design work is set to commence and the lease termination for mobile masts is ongoing.

In terms of the Skills Academy at Prescott Street, it was noted that this had been delivered on time for the start of the academic year, providing new workshops and teaching spaces, refectory provision, a Business Hub accommodating HR, Finance, data and funding, exams and MIS and 50 additional car parking spaces.

In terms of the Automotive Technology workshops, this had also been delivered on time for the start of the new academic year and included Automotive Technology and an electric car lab facility, defined teaching spaces and an outdoor electric charging area.

The Animal Management T-Level facilities at Leigh College had also been delivered on time for the start of the new academic year, the investment being funded by T-Level Capital, and has provided new practical spaces and outdoor enclosures.

The Power House project at Pagefield Campus incorporates a new extension and the reconfiguration of reception / Head of Studies / Student Services space. The Stage 2 design is now complete and the College is now preparing the planning application. Stages 3-4 are expected to be completed by January 2025, with contractor procurement starting in January 2025. The reception area is expected to be finished for September 2025 to receive new students, with the extension being finished by the end of October 2025.

In terms of the small capital works programme, the 2nd floor refurbishment of Leigh Adult Learning Centre and the refectory and Learning Resource Centre upgrades at Leigh College are now complete and Governors saw photographs of the new facilities.

The Board discussed the plans to further review capacity to ensure the College can accommodate future growth and commended the Executive Team for their work in relation to capital investment in the College.

The Board asked for an indicative figure of how much had been invested over the past 5-years to be provided at a future meeting.

The Board noted the update.

17. Part B: The following items had been discussed by Committees and / or were for the Board's information only.

17.1. Search and Governance Committee Chair's Report

GB-24-10-18

The Board noted the report.

17.2. Use of the Corporation Seal

GB-24-10-19

The Board noted the report.

18. Chairs Action

GB-24-10-20

The Board noted the report and endorsed the decision made via Chairs Action on 26 September 2024.

19. Any other business

GB-24-10-21

There were no items of other business.

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20. Date and time of next meeting: 3 December 2024 at 4pm followed by Governors' Christmas Meal at 6.30pm

GB-24-10-22

The meeting ended at 6pm.

21. Actions

GB-24-10-05: Arrange a Governor visit to the Skills Academy

Action by: Director of Governance

GB-24-10-17: Provide an indicative cost of the total investment in the College estate over the past 5-years to Governors at a future meeting.

Action by: Finance Director

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