

Minutes of the meeting of the Northampton College Corporation held at 1700 hrs 20 June 2023.

Present	Pat Brennan Barrett (Principal)	Sharon Bunker	David Bailey	Philip Hilton (Acting Chair)
	Paul Nutter	Anne-Marie Kilday	Mark Robbins	Michael Watkins
	Rod Wood			
In Attendance	Jane Deery (VP(Curr&StProg))	Ralph Devereux (Clerk)	Jan Hutt (VP(HR))	Patrick Leavey (DP)
	Phil O'Hara (VP(SS))	Mark Owen (AP(SS))(till 51/22)	Paul Wakeling (Consultant)(till 52/22)	Julian Wood (DP(FCA))
Apologies	Becky Bradshaw	Geraldine Schofield	Helen Scott	David Smith

50/22 OPENING

- The apologies were accepted. No notice had been received of any Member becoming ineligible to hold office, the meeting was quorate and there were no agenda related interests declared.
- Helen Scott had sent apologies and Philip Hilton would act as Chair. **(Action 1 RD)**. All present then introduced themselves and the Chair explained that items would be taken out of agenda order for convenience of the those presenting.

The information was received.

Actions had been identified. (See Register 61/22 below.)

51/22 SAFEGUARDING AND PREVENT

A safe and welcoming environment, where all are respected and valued, is at the heart of safeguarding and organised to actively prevents harm, harassment, bullying, abuse and neglect and when necessary, enable a safe, timely and effective response. Although the processes were controlled and guided by specialists, they remained the responsibility of everyone involved; general awareness is the most effective answer. The comprehensive Annual Report (2022.23) and associated Appendices updated, detailed and explained the cross-college engagement and consequent outcomes and achievements, including substantial "Prevent" (Extremism and Radicalisation). The arrangements for addressing the increasing levels of poor mental health, including anxiety, were particularly welcomed and these were closely considered and noted as were increased cases of substance misuse and gang/organised reports . The recently upgraded software system was effective allowing far more speedy responses, whilst certain areas had seen an increase in activity and reporting this was seen as a positive indicator of raised awareness. Increased staff training particularly cyber-related was noted and welcomed. The report was discussed at length, welcomed and approved **(Action 2 JH)**; thanks were recorded for the clarity of the narrative detail.

Sample Questions

Q	<i>Have these improvements been externally moderated?</i>
A	Yes indeed. Paul Nutter, a well-respected and experienced consultant in the field has recently completed a wide-ranging audit of the operation resulting in a positive outcome. (PN has now joined the Corporation and endorsed that comment at the meeting)
	<i>Have the listed actions from that audit now been completed?</i>
	In the main yes, although a small number mainly training related are progressing.
	<i>The highest number of internal referrals is the "Other" category, can that be more defined?</i>
	Extremely difficult or it would have been done, issues range for example from financial fraud to students' inappropriate .access to on-line content

The information was received.

Actions had been identified. (See Register 63/21 below.)

52/22 MINUTES

- a. The minutes of the meeting held on 11 May 2023 were confirmed for electronic signature, Clerk to Action. **(Action 3RD)**
- b. Matters Arising. There were no matters arising.
- c. Outstanding Actions. Actions from the previous meeting had been completed or were in progress.

See referenced minute for full action.		Status
Action 1	44/22a. Last minutes (9.3.23) confirmed for signature.	Complete
Action 2	41/22c. Members reminded to complete on-line CPD.	
Action 3	41/22d. Urgent Business (2 items agreed).	
Action 4	44/22b. TFCP approved.	
Action 5	44/22c. TMP approved.	
Action 6	47/22a. SAR provisionally approved.	
Action 7	47/22a. SAR provisionally approved.	
Action 8	47/22a. SoD approved.	
Action 9	48/22a(i). Overseas trip (PBB) noted.	
Action 10	48/22a(ii) QTLA Chair vacancy to be filled.	

- d. Urgent Business. No urgent business was requested. However, the Principal had been included in the King's Birthday Honours List and appointed as an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE). The honour is awarded for playing a major role in public service, including work which has contributed nationally. This is well a deserved recognition of the Principal's unstinting dedication to and achievement in Further Education generally and her long-lasting particular commitment to Special Educational Needs (SEN). The Corporation unanimously and unreservedly congratulates Pat on this national acknowledgement.

The information was received.

Actions had been identified. (See Register 61/22 below.)

53/22 COMMITTEE MINUTES

- a. Audit Committee (AC). The last AC meeting (08.06.23) had again been unexpectedly inquorate; the meeting had continued as advisory and the draft notes of the meeting were then considered, received and the advisory recommendation for approval of the Finance Regulation. (minute 32/23b) was noted to inform agenda Item 6. David Bailey and Geraldine Schofield had agreed to join the AC, which would be considered at Item 9, that should resolve the quoracy issue. The Committee Chair drew attention in particular, to Minute 30/22 which included detail of the External Audit fee increase; this was approved. **(Action 4)**
- b. Quality Teaching Learning and Assessment (QTLA). The last QTLA meeting had been held the previous day; the draft minutes were being processed. Anne Marie Kilday had offered to join the Committee (See last meeting Action 10) and that would also be considered at Agenda Item 9. Anne-Marie then verbally updated on the proceedings and some issues would inform the Principal's Report (55/22).

The information was received.

Actions had been identified. (See Register 61/22 below.)

54/22 CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

The Principal and Deputy Principal (DP) jointly explained the rationale that had motivated a deep scrutiny and possible re-development of the curriculum. At Northampton, A Level provision had been ceased almost 8 years previously, then the correct approach, however the situation had now moved on and the imminent Level 2 (L2) and L3 reforms were a catalyst for a searching review, which had been completed by Paul Wakeling. Paul is an experienced FE professional

an ex-Principal of an FE College and a respected consultant and analyst. The full paper addressing the issue had been circulated well in advance of the meeting and Paul then led a comprehensive interactive consideration of the arguments, which had led to the recommendation to resume ALevel provision and to launch an L3 Academic Curriculum planning and scoping phase in the coming year with September 2024 delivery to comprise 9 subjects including combining with alternative academic qualifications (AAQ) (all listed in the accompanying document); the provision could progressively build to a full 500 learner 6th Form over 5 years. The arguments were compelling and after deliberations including robust challenges and suggestions for strengthening it was unanimously decided to accept the recommendation. **(Action 5PH)**

Q	<i>What is the basis for the proposal?</i>
A	The planned reforms include defunding of current L2/3 provision and consequently demand alternatives, thus reorganisation.
	<i>This appears to be an inherently risky proposal?</i>
	The risks have been addressed and appropriated mitigations are explained in the paper. The launch will be challenging but College resources and management are prepared.
	<i>The introduction will rely on applications for the new provision; communication and marketing will be key, should the detailed planning for that be documented?</i>
	Yes. That such detail will be included, the document is still draft. It is clear that the present students are independent and treated as individuals; that strength will continue to attract potential applicants. Active and focused recruitment will be necessary.
	<i>These processes will require positive leadership, the CMT is currently fully committed; how will this be achieved?</i>
	We will appoint a dedicated and committed specialist manager and have appropriate governance mechanisms in place to support the project,

The information was received.

Actions had been identified. (See Register 61/22 below.)

Paul Wakeling left the meeting.

55/22 PRINCIPAL'S REPORT

The Quality, Teaching Learning & Assessment (QTLA) Committee had considered some issues at their last meeting and had noted that while Sport continued to give concerns, corrective actions had been completed and were showing progress. With apprenticeships, at the start of the year the self-assessed grade had been Grade 3; progress now indicated a 60-65% year-end End Point Assessment (EPA) skills tests outcome, which also represented a good progress. The Principal's reporting process was linked to the Strategic Plan and led to a full and detailed analysis at year end; the Report was then considered, informed by a verbal update with reference to a progressive colour coded table Blue (Covid related), Red, Amber, Green (BRAG) leading to the expected outcome.

The majority of gradings were Green however exceptions included the English and Maths (EAM) Amber assessment which had motivated the comprehensive refocus to a (previously discussed) dispersed and contextualised EAM delivery process, which was now showing clear positives. The Finance Expected Outcome remained Amber although the last 2 monthly assessments had been Green and the outcome would be considerably more positive than expected; this would be considered more closely in Item 4a. There was nothing further to bring to the meeting's attention.

The information was received.

56/22 FINANCE REPORT

The Finance Report was considered and discussed, informed by the comprehensive report supplemented by a verbal commentary from the DP(FCA).

- a. Management Accounts. The management accounts up to April 2023 (R09) were then fully explained and discussed; the comprehensive document comprised a narrative informed by graphical and tabulated detail. The overall picture continues to improve and the EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization) was now 9.4% (£2944k)

resulting in an operating surplus of £835k above budget, largely as the result of a combined £670K grant for student growth, adult income and lower than budgeted pay costs. Key Performance indicators (KPI) had been tabulated and variances were explained, the continuing prudent approach to potential energy costs was noted. Income was above budget and pay cost £146k below budget. The current operating surplus at £1870k was £835k above budget and the Financial Health Grade remained “Outstanding”.

- b. Budget and Financial Plan. The draft Budget and 3-year financial plan were attached for consideration and comment. Three requests were included and would be considered in relation to the detail. The full plan had been prepared in accordance with Governance Policies and the full detail was supplemented by a clear and comprehensive briefing.
 - (i) the Budget 2023.24 comprised the Income and Expenditure (I&E) which was compared with the 2022.23 year-end, the Budget Balance Sheet and Cashflow and the Capital Budget and summary programme; and
 - (ii) the 3 Year Financial Plan comprised the Statement of Comprehensive Income (SOCl), Balance Sheet and Cashflow supplemented by essential Ratios and Sensitivities.

The 2023.24 budget forecasts an EBITDA of £2.1m (6.6%) and an operating 3.5% surplus of £1.1m. The operating surplus implies £489k headroom over the 2% target but the EBITDA was lower than the target of 8%. All budgetary detail was fully examined by item in the comprehensive report supplemented by graphical and comparative data. The detail was underpinned by the modest income growth proportionately outweighing the rising pay costs, all detailed in the accompanying narrative and noted. The numbers included provision for a 4% pay rise. The forecast would retain the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) Financial Health of “Outstanding” Risks were clearly identified in the narrative and financial objectives had been tabulated. The Budget and Financial Plan and the Commentary were approved for submission to the ESFA. **(Action 6JW)**

The strong budget and cash position prompted close consideration of the prudent and proper use of the surplus and it was agreed that suitably qualified professional advice on placing of <£3m of cash reserves not required for working capital, in a mix of higher interest-bearing accounts should be obtained. The developed proposal would be brought back to the Corporation for approval. **(Action 7JW)** Additionally, there was ample headroom to develop plans for a further programme of capital investment of <£1m in 2023/24, that proposal was considered and discussed, for example some equipment at the Booth Lane site was reaching the end of its expected life and would require replacement; the proposal was approved. **(Action 8JW)**

Q	<i>The staff cost: income ratio is approaching 70%, can you explain please?</i>
A	The current ratio guideline (65%) was set some 18 years ago, does not reflect the present day pressures on staff cost-of-living and cannot be sustained in the short term. However, applications are currently above expectations, and any increase in income from the modest growth included in budget projections will reduce the ratio.

The information was received.

Actions had been identified. (See Register 61/22 below.)

61/22 FINANCIAL REGULATIONS (FR)

The FR were updated annually and, after scrutiny by the AC, reported to and recommended for approval (if that was agreed) by the Corporation, however the last AC meeting had been inquorate and their recommendation could only be advisory; the Corporation took note of the advisory recommendation and considered the detail accordingly. There were a significant number of changes, and the complete amended version had been attached for reference. The most significant changes, related to Department for Education (DfE) consent requirements and related to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) reclassification and associated changes; particular references were clearly listed in the covering paper, and each was noted. Additionally, there were other amendments including for example, changes of responsibilities

and updated procurement processes. Members had received the papers in advance of the meeting and were content, The FR were approved wie. **(Action 9JW)**

The information was received.

Actions had been identified. (See Register 61/22 below.)

58/22 LEARNER DATA MONITORING

The Learner Data Monitoring information comprised 4 comprehensive data tables considering Retention and Attendance rates and BRAG rated comparison tables. Data was collected 5 times throughout the year and had been tabulated by school and by level and the information had been clearly explained in the accompanying notes. Comparisons with past performance had been realistically based on data from 2021/22 and were generally positive. For example, current overall retention stood at 95.7% broadly similar to the previous year (94.2%) the overall figure had reduced since the last report reflecting post-Easter withdrawals mainly in the 16-18 cohort. Attendance had improved on the previous year with English and Maths particularly heartening, up by c5% each. The excellent additional arrangements for the GCSE (1,400 entries for maths and 1,050 for English) had been beneficial with c95% for both. It was difficult to compare with the previous year's results and the most important limitations had been fully detailed in the narrative. This was a clear and informative Report and thanks were recorded.

The information was received and noted.

59/22 GOVERNANCE

There were 5 Governance items for consideration;

- a. Attendance. Attendance at Corporation events throughout the year had been individually tabulated and was noted.
- b. Ends of Terms. Sharon Bunker and Geraldine Schofield would complete their terms of office at the end of July, SB was stepping down as the elected staff member and an election for her successor would take place early next term. The Corporation recorded thanks to SB for her service and excellent attendance throughout her term. GS had confirmed that she wished to continue and she was unanimously re-appointed for a further term. **(Action 10RD)**
- c. QTLA Chair. Anne-Marie Kilday was confirmed as QTLA Chair (52/22b refers). **(Action 11RD)**
- d. AC Membership. David Bailey (DB) and GS had agreed to join the AC and that was confirmed (52/22a refers). **(Action 12RD)**
- e. Business Plan. The draft Corporation Business Plan 2023/24 was approved. **(Action 13RD)**

The information was received and noted.

Actions had been identified (Register at 61/22 below)

60/22 URGENT BUSINESS AND NEXT MEETING

- a. Urgent Business. No Urgent Business had been agreed.
- b. The next Corporation meeting would be at 1700 on 5 October 2023.

The information was received.

61/22 ACTION REGISTER

See referenced minute for full action.		Resp	By
Action 1	50/22. PH to Chair meeting.	Clerk	wie
Action 2	51/22. Safeguarding & Prevent annual report approved.	VPHR	
Action 3	52/22. Last minutes (11.05.23) confirmed,	Clerk	
Action 4	53/22. External Audit fee approved	DPFCA	05.10.23

Action 5	54/22. L3 curriculum introduction approved.	Chair	wie
Action 6	56/22b. Budget & Plan approved for submission	DPFCA	
Action 7	56/22. Investment plan to be brought to Corporation.		
Action 8	56/22. Capital plan approved,	DPFCA	wie
Action 9	57/22. Amended FR approved.		
Action 10	59/22b. GS re-appointed.	Clerk	
Action 11	59/22c. AMK appointed to AC (Chair).		
Action 12	59/22d. DB & GS to join AC.		
Action 13	59/22e. Business Plan approved.		