

**The College of West Anglia
Minutes of
The Finance & General Purposes Committee
6 May 2020
8.30 am
Remote Meeting – Microsoft Teams**

Present	Andrew Cave	Governor (Chair)
	Ray Harding	Governor
	Alan Measures	Governor
	David Pomfret	Governor (Principal)
	Adam Thompsett	Governor
	Gary Webb	Governor
Attending	Paul Harrison	Vice Principal Corporate Services
	Neil Harries	Head of Finance
	Ruth Harrison	Vice Principal Curriculum & Learning
	Paul O'Shea	Head of Marketing & Student Services
	Rob Petto	Head of Funding & Exams (part)
	Stephen Halls	Clerk to the Corporation

The Chair welcomed everybody to this first “remote” meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee and explained that he would invite governors in turn to ask questions on each report as the meeting moved through the agenda.

1 Apologies

There were no apologies for absence.

2 Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

Alan Measures joined the meeting at 8.34 am

3 Minutes of the previous meeting – 29 January 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2020 were agreed as being an accurate record.

4 Matters Arising

The progress against the outstanding matters from previous meetings were summarised in the report for item 4.

Governors asked for an update on progress following the recent Tribal Consulting report. The Principal reported that the findings from the Tribal report had been considered as part of the restructure proposals to be reviewed by the Employment Policy Committee in due course, noting though that the restructure exercise had been temporarily suspended for the time being due to the coronavirus pandemic. The Principal added that it may be necessary to revisit and consider again some of the original proposals in light of recent events. The Principal mentioned the Property Strategy 2020-23 to be considered later in the meeting, which indicated there was a degree of excess space across the campuses which would now be needed to manage social distancing requirements when the campuses reopened.

Governors asked if there was a summary report to accompany the Tribal Consulting report which comprised many detailed pages. The Principal advised that there was a one-page executive summary towards the front of the Tribal report and agreed that much of the report was very detailed, comprising radar charts and data tables. Governors asked if there was the potential for more to be obtained from the report and if it should be reviewed further by this committee. The Principal confirmed that the report had been analysed by area, with the findings being used as the basis for the restructure proposals to be considered by the Employment Policy Committee. The Principal would discuss with the Committee Chair and the Clerk if it was considered appropriate for the Tribal report to be reviewed further by this committee.

ACTION-PRINCIPAL/CLERK

The Vice Principal Corporate Services referred to Item 10, Property Strategy, from the meeting held 29 January 2020 regarding reasonable levels of occupancy and average space requirements and advised that these points would be discussed further in Item 9 on today's agenda.

Rob Petto joined the meeting at 8.43 am

5 Funding Position & Data Control

Governors asked about the impact of not renewing the Adult Education Budget contract with the Greater London Authority after 2020/21. The Head of Funding & Exams advised that the allocation had been sustained for both the current year and the next. The loss of this contract after 2020/21 was not considered to be significant as much of the income received was then paid to the subcontractor delivering the service, with a small margin remaining for the college.

Regarding the allocation for Apprenticeship Carry-Ins, which assumed 100% for retention and achievement, Governors asked why a more realistic amount was not calculated to allow for underperformance. The Head of Funding & Exams explained that although the actual allocation was based on 100%, the amount included within the College's forecast was reduced appropriately.

Governors asked if any over-delivery of apprenticeship was likely to be funded, bearing in mind the coronavirus pandemic which had resulted in many apprenticeships abruptly ending or being suspended. The Head of Funding & Exams advised that he would be monitoring the situation carefully and looking especially at the changes regarding Digital Accounts.

Governors were interested in how the College would manage a fall in apprenticeships and if it was considering any opportunities that this could create. The Head of Funding & Exams considered that a reduction in apprenticeships would be a challenge for the College, however, with individuals then forced to look for other training opportunities this would result in increased numbers into other study programmes. Adult Education programmes could expand in light of

possible increased unemployment levels along with requests for new training particularly in the 19+ category. The Principal added that the College had received circa 250 applications for apprenticeship training for the 2020/21 year which was very positive, although the challenge now was to find suitable employers who could offer apprenticeship positions. Apprenticeship staff were now engaged working with local employers to secure opportunities. In some areas, positions would not be available from September with starts being delayed to January 2021 having to be considered. The Principal noted an on-line transition programme being launched by the College in the following week to engage recent school leavers, prior to the commencement of their September courses.

Governors asked about the further marketing activities to capture new students. The Head of Funding & Exams advised that where taster sessions would normally be held for prospective students, a number of on-line activities were now taking place instead. The Vice Principal Curriculum & Learning added that faculties were now producing Welcome videos available on the website and You-Tube, with teaching staff explaining their courses and giving virtual tours of the facilities.

Regarding Digital Accounts for apprenticeships, Governors asked what proportion of activity related to small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) rather than larger companies. Although the Head of Funding & Exams did not have the exact figures to hand, he reflected that the proportion of SMEs engaged with the College was not insignificant and that with both the recent circumstances and the changes regarding Digital Accounts this could result in a risk to the College, adding that the College would be supporting companies to manage the changes. The Principal confirmed that the College would work hard to ensure companies were fully supported during this time and that good relations were maintained. The Principal considered that companies in the construction sector had been the worst affected so far, but were usually the first to recover following a recession.

Governors were keen for the College to be ready to manage new learners who required training. The Principal noted that the team was well geared to support and advise where needed; this was confirmed by the Vice Principal Curriculum & Learning who noted that the apprenticeship advisers were already speaking with companies and individuals in this regard.

The Chair summarised the report noting that income was on track in the current year, but there were major uncertainties for particular income streams in 2020/21. The Chair asked about current retention levels. The Vice Principal Curriculum & Learning advised that overall retention was at 93%, and at 92% for 16-18 year olds.

The report was noted.

Rob Petto left the meeting at 9.06 am

Paul O'Shea joined the meeting at 9.06 am

6 College Website – Annual Review

Governors commented on the need for the website to be able to effectively manage on-line recruitment, especially at the current time, anticipating that the demand for this would increase.

Governors asked if it was possible to identify how much activity on the website had increased due to the coronavirus pandemic. The Head of Marketing & Student Services explained that this was not possible although the start of the current lockdown period saw a significant increase in the use of the live-chat facility for online enquiries. This had subsequently reduced to near-normal levels. The Head of Marketing & Student Services also noted that, due to a

misconfiguration of the Google Analytics reports when the new site was launched, current data inadvertently included website activity originating from within the college. This meant that some of the comparative data in Appendix 1 was not comparing like for like. For example, the indication that there had been an increase in the use of desktop devices and the Internet Explorer browser was misleading as this reflected the predominance of desktop PCs on college campuses and the ongoing use of Internet Explorer for several college systems. A like-for-like comparison would almost certainly have indicated further decreases in desktop and Internet Explorer usage. Google Analytics had now been reconfigured so the report would show correctly for next time.

The Head of Marketing & Student Services highlighted that site speed had improved dramatically on the previous year, since the launch of the new website in October 2019.

Governors asked if there were any conclusions or points to note from the information provided under the summary of the most viewed courses pages. The Head of Marketing & Student Services explained that this fluctuated year-on-year due to various factors, noting that A Levels tended to remain popular each year.

Regarding security of the website, Governors asked what was meant by “brute-force protection.” The Vice Principal Corporate Services advised that a brute force attack consisted of a large amount of repeated attempts at guessing a username and password to gain access to the system.

Governors enquired if there had been any suggested developments noted due to coronavirus which were now being considered to improve the current system, or to be considered later on. The Head of Marketing & Student Services noted the changes which had been implemented to the admissions process, with offers to learners now being made based on predicted grades and a new plan to follow up all offers with telephone calls to applicants being implemented. Most of the planned face-to-face activities (e.g. applicant experience days) were in the process of being replaced by a series of virtual events, using platforms such as Zoom and Facebook.

Governors asked if there was anything to note from the demographic data of those visiting the website and if the split between males and females reflected the proportions of actual students currently. The Head of Marketing & Student Services considered that there was nothing significant to note from this data, although further analysis by market segment, full time/part time course and age could provide some insight. At the recent on-line Facebook live event which was well attended a high proportion of attendees were female, with the majority most likely to have been mothers of prospective students, noting that not all users of the website were the actual prospective students themselves.

The report was noted.

Paul O-Shea left the meeting at 9.25 am

7 Medium-Term Financial Plan Update

This item was deemed “confidential.”

8 Management Accounts – March 2020

Governors asked for further information regarding the explanation of contribution analysis in the report where a number of variances had been noted. The Head of Finance explained that work was currently being undertaken to refine the matching and reporting of income and associated costs, particularly where there were current “oddities” such as the Additional Learner Support income which was currently held centrally rather than allocated across departments. The Principal noted that this highlighted the desire to reduce reliance on sub-contract partnerships and that by switching to college core delivery this would improve contribution overall.

Governors asked for an update on when the new style management accounts format would be published. The Head of Finance explained that work was still progressing; it was anticipated that the new format would be ready for the April 2020 accounts. The Vice Principal Corporate Services added that he would welcome feedback by committee members on the new format.

Governors asked about the furloughing of college staff. The Principal advised that this was currently being actioned with a minimal number of staff affected. In the recent AoC’s survey, 20% of colleges had reported zero furloughed staff and a further 20% had reported between 0-20 staff; CWA would fall within this second group. One or two colleges had furloughed 100+ staff which was likely to gain the attention and challenge from HMRC as these colleges would also be receiving grant funding to offset staff costs and therefore would not be expected to be claiming additional support for high numbers of staff.

Governors enquired about the lost income through commercial and retail sales. The Principal reported that much of this income related to commercial training, the recovery of which post-coronavirus was uncertain. The Vice Principal Corporate Services added that the Head of Department for Commercial Training was maintaining communications with clients to aid a fast recovery once the campuses re-opened. The Head of Finance also mentioned retail sales across all campuses, the Hair & Beauty Salon and the nursery.

The Chair asked for further information regarding the uncertainty of having to pay for exam fees. The Principal advised that this matter was being addressed by the AoC with colleges being advised to hold back on paying for exam fees in full at the current time until this matter was resolved. There was an expectation of savings being realised.

The report was noted.

9 Property Strategy 2020/23

This item was deemed “confidential.”

10 Fees Policy 2020/21

There were no questions or concerns raised for this report.

It was agreed by the Committee to approve the Fees Policy 2020/21

(The next two items on the agenda were taken in reverse order)

11 Committee Performance, Terms of Reference and Future Business Agenda Plan

The committee reviewed the committee review proforma as prepared by the Clerk and concluded that it provided a fair and accurate summary of the committee's performance during the past year. Governors asked the report to mention the committee's request for a new presentation style of management accounts to aid review. The Clerk would include this.

ACTION-CLERK

The Terms of Reference were considered with no changes proposed.

No changes to the proposed future business agenda plan were required.

The report was noted.

12 Governance & Financial Management Regulations 2020

The Clerk advised that a review had been undertaken by the Vice Principal Corporate Services, the Head of Finance and the Clerk. Only minor changes had been made to the regulations during the review, these being indicated as tracked changes in the report. The Clerk also reported 3 further changes that had recently been requested to the terms of reference for the Chair's Meeting Group.

Governors asked about the recent proposed changes to the terms of office for governors. The Clerk advised that these particular terms were included within the Instrument & Articles of Government, rather than the Governance & Financial Management Regulations.

Governors asked about the Chair's Meeting Group. The Clerk advised that this group was created in 2019 for information sharing purposes for the respective committee chairs and that this group did not hold any delegated powers.

It was agreed by the Committee to recommend the Governance & Financial Management Regulations 2020 to the Board for approval.

13 Any Other Business

Governors were pleased to note the small impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the finances of the college in the current year, accepting that the position would be more difficult and challenging in 2020/21. Governors noted their thanks to staff for coping during the current crisis.

The Chair gave his thanks to governors and staff for attending and taking part in the meeting.

The Principal thanked the Chair and governors for their ongoing support during the current situation.

14 Chair's items for briefing to Corporation

- The committee reviewed and discussed in detail the funding report and the latest medium-term financial plan, noting that the committee would continue to monitor closely the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on the finances;
- The effectiveness of the website was reviewed;
- The property strategy for 2020-23 and the Governance & Financial Management Regulations 2020 were both reviewed and would be recommended to the Board for approval.

15 Date and time of next meeting

Wednesday, 17 June 2020, 8.30 am.

The meeting closed at 10.40 am