

PETER SYMONDS COLLEGE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS

HELD ON MONDAY 13 MAY 2024 at 3.00 PM

Present:

Amanda Storey (Chair)	David Williams
Syamantak Bhattacharya	Sara Russell (Principal)
Alan Sydney	Tina Thorne
Caroline Rand (part, to item 9)	Joanna Townsend
Lynne Evans	Michael Wesley
Dave Stickland	Lucy Walsh Waring
Norman Levy	Hugh Stafford-Smith
Zac Hussain	John White

In Attendance:

Nick Allen	(Vice Principal)
Lucy Edevane	(Deputy Principal W&P)
Stephen Cowling	(Deputy Principal S,S&S)
Irfan Khan	(Finance Director)
Vicky Owen	(Clerk)
Rachel Robson	(External Governance Reviewer, Stone King)
Dom Thompson	(Director of AHED) - for the presentation at item 3 only

Item		Action
1.	Apologies – Scott Stemp, Barry Neaves, Onkar Chiroma, Jaanvi Singh	
2.	Chair/Vice Chair appointment <i>Paper circulated: Note from Clerk on appointment of Chair & Vice Chair</i>	
2.1	The Clerk thanked members for their responses to the request for proposals and seconding for the two posts and reported that there was one nomination for each role. In accordance with section 3 of the Standing Orders, there is therefore no requirement for an election and the appointments are made for a period of three years (subject to annual review) with effect from 1 September 2024 as follows: Lynne Evans as Chair and Joanna Townsend as Vice Chair. The Board unanimously ratified the appointments.	
3.	Presentation by Dom Thompson, Director of AHED <i>Paper shared after the meeting: AHED Presentation to Board</i>	
3.1	DT talked through his presentation about the Adult & Higher Education Division which looked at key developments in this academic year and anticipated for next. He summarised progress against the recovery plan following a decrease in enrolments to some HE courses. Key planks of the	

	plan include to personalise the enrolment process, work with employers and promote progression routes for existing students.	
3.2	DT said that enrolments to leisure and languages courses have seen a very significant increase which is pleasing given the value this has to the local community. He also explained that there will be changes to the amount received for funded adult courses which will be positive for us. Finally, DT outlined the key priorities for the future.	
	Questions from the Board	
3.3	The Board thanked DT for his presentation and commended him for the positive developments to date against the plan. They asked whether the increases in applications are in line with the enrolments required to meet the target outcomes of the plan. DT said that they are above what he expected and the plan requires.	
3.4	The Board asked if the work that has been done to achieve the increased level of enrolments is sustainable year on year. DT said that he believes that it is; it took work to identify what changes might bear fruit and, generally, the time was in redesigning the Division's approach. Now that is done, it can easily be rolled out in the future.	
3.5	Noting that a key issue is converting applications to enrolments, the Board asked if there is anything else in implementing the plan that is causing DT concern. DT said the main thing in Adult Education is the changing outside environment; it is impossible to know what might happen. He also commented that retention is very important in HE courses, given that they usually last three years.	
3.6	The Board asked what DT regards as the biggest challenge for the next couple of years. DT said that demand for Counselling courses is currently very high but may wane. There is a lot of competition in the provision of these courses, but he said that AHED is accredited with the BACP (which some other providers are not) and its reputation is very strong.	
3.7	DT had mentioned that some staff are leaving and the Board asked if they should be concerned by this. DT replied that they should not; some key personnel are retiring as expected. Others who have very small contracts are moving on, but this is entirely normal in the sector.	
4.	Minutes of the meeting dated 24 February 2024 The minutes were accepted as a correct record.	
5.	Matters arising <i>Papers circulated: EO Objectives 2020-24 Final Review; EO Objectives 2020-24 Governors Summary Review</i>	
5.1	Point 10.3 Re the summary of progress against previous EO Objectives (see papers circulated), LKE provided this summary for the Board as requested in the February meeting, as well as the full review document. The Board	

<p>5.2</p> <p>5.3</p>	<p>thanked LKE for doing that additional work, expressing the view that it is extremely valuable to them to be able to have a summary as well as being able to refer to the full review. Clearly a great deal of work has gone on around EO in the last few years. Congratulations to staff. Completed.</p> <p>Point 10.5 LKE checked for appropriate and consistent use of the word 'black' in the EO document. Completed.</p> <p>Point 16.3 SMT had discussed a staff member's suggestion of a governor occasionally being available in the Staff Room but were not convinced that it was a good idea, concerned that governors might be asked about operational matters. SMT suggested an alternative which is guided learning walks which might be led by a Director of Curriculum or Head of Subject. They suggested a pilot with a volunteer subject area. Two members (JW and LWW) volunteered to be involved in that pilot and another member commented that it had worked very well at a previous college at which he was a governor. The Board accepted SMT's alternative proposal and it will go on the agenda of the C&QA Committee.</p>	<p>Clerk</p>
<p>6.</p> <p>6.1</p> <p>6.1.1</p> <p>6.1.2</p> <p>6.2</p>	<p>Principal's matters <i>Paper circulated: Principal's matters 150424; ESFA Letter FR2023; Governing Body Finance Dashboard 2022 23</i></p> <p>SR said that the paper is unchanged since the version which was discussed at P&R on 15 April. However, she updated the Board on two things which have happened very recently but too late to be incorporated:</p> <p>The Vice Chancellor of a local university has offered our students access to their skills laboratories and other facilities. It is also possible that our music students will be invited to play for a high-profile upcoming university event which SR said would be very exciting.</p> <p>On Tuesday last week (7 May) SR received a call from Ofsted, notifying of an inspection commencing 14 May. SMT were very concerned about the timing due to the large number of exams taking place, the fact that the L6 would be out of College for a day and because the U6 are in their final hours of teaching before their exams. SMT felt that an inspection in this week would be disruptive to students and also unlikely to give a true representation of the College. SMT responded to Ofsted, requesting a deferral and this was granted. The College will be inspected during the 2024-25 academic year and SMT will be keen to welcome Ofsted when the time comes.</p> <p>Question from the Board Regarding freedom of speech (section 5), the Board asked if the College has experienced any recent issues, particularly given the Israel/Palestine situation. SMT replied that the particular OfS communication relates to HE and there have been no concerns reported at AHED. In the sixth form, staff are alert to potential sensitivities. There have been no demonstrations or</p>	

6.3	<p>such like. A staff member recently held a debate on the issue which they did under SMT oversight; it went well.</p> <p>It was agreed that IK would speak to the Dashboard in his financial update in item 9 below.</p>	
7.	<p>Governors' Snapshot <i>Paper circulated: Governors Snapshot May 24</i></p> <p>7.1 NA drew the Board's attention to Panel 3 which shows the highest retention figure for L6 students for the last decade. He explained that this figure is, however, not firm for a while as the attendance counting method requires the College to go back to when a student last attended i.e. it can be a while before an absent student is counted as having left.</p> <p>7.2 He also commented that Panel 4 shows a significant improvement in attendance and that SMT hope that this will continue as the current L6 move into their second year and if the new L6 adopt the same behaviour.</p> <p>7.3 Finally, NA drew the Board's attention to item 21 on the Key Priorities RAG Rating re the EDI Action Plan which is the only one that is amber rather than green. The item had been written before the College received such a large number of applications which mean that the KP no longer applies as it did before. SMT continue to do very careful modelling of applications, conversion rates and resources.</p> <p>Questions from the Board</p> <p>7.4 The Board has previously discussed measures to improve attendance in tutorials, but asked what is behind the improvement in attendance in teaching lessons. NA said that one reason could be that the College now sends parental emails re attendance. He explained that staff have analysed the figures and find that it is the students with generally lower attendance who have most improved.</p> <p>7.4.1 The Board asked if there are comparative figures for other colleges. NA said that attendance at PSC, adjusted for prior attainment, is about 2% higher than at a typical college.</p> <p>7.5 The Board asked what feedback the College seeks from students about their opinion of tutor sessions. NA said that there is an annual survey. They do not say that anything is bad, rather that they would like more of certain topics e.g. university information and interview skills.</p> <p>7.6 A Board member said that, in the student lunch (see item 13 below) students were very positive about the tutorial programme and said that they generally value the fact that their tutor is also one of their teachers, but one commented that there is a potential conflict if they are unhappy about a teacher and that person is also their tutor. That student was not</p>	

7.7	<p>clear as to how to go to their Senior Tutor although other students and staff confirmed that this is made clear on the student intranet.</p> <p>Regarding potential sixth form enrolments in September 2024 and the large number of applications received, the Board asked what is the maximum number of students that the College can take. SMT said that the projection is for an additional 80, with staffing and rooming being organised accordingly. Numbers beyond that can be accommodated but might require a reduction in the following years' intake which could result in undesirable oscillation between numbers in each year; SMT does not expect this to be an issue.</p>	
8.	<p>Report from the Search & Governance Committee <i>Papers circulated: Draft Search Minutes March 24; Code of Conduct draft 24; Procedures for co-opted members draft 24; ToR Search & Governance draft 24</i></p> <p>8.1 JT summarised the activity of the Committee and said that their key concern for the coming months is that four experienced governors will leave the Board and need to be replaced. The Committee has conducted a skills audit, identifying key skills desired in new members and is also aiming to maintain and improve diversity in the Board.</p> <p>8.2 Resolved: the Board approved the Code of Conduct (Governors) as per the draft circulated; the Terms of Reference for the S&G Committee as per the draft circulated; the Procedures for Co-opted Members as per the draft circulated; the appointment of Onkar Chiroma to the C&QA Committee on a date to be agreed; the appointment of Dave Stickland to the C&QA Committee with effect from 1 September 2024. All in favour.</p>	
9.	<p>Report from the P&R Committee <i>Papers circulated: Draft P&R minutes Apr 24; Confidential P&R mins Apr 24; Finance Report April 24; Financial Regulations Draft 24; Funding for the Prof John Garrett Award; Staff IT Conditions of Use Draft New; Student IT Conditions of Use Draft New. Paper shared after the meeting: PSC – letter to MJ from CoG</i></p> <p>LE invited IK to present the Finance Report.</p> <p>9.1 Finance</p> <p>9.1.1 Dashboard – (see item 6 above) IK explained that, as usual, the grade for 2022/23 after the first return was 'good' but has been adjusted to 'outstanding' after the final return. He expects the same to happen for the 2023/24 figures.</p> <p>The Board commented that the ESFA dashboard is complex and hard for many governors to understand. Referring to the Performance ratio/EBITA figures table, this shows 'requires improvement' for 2023/24 and asked IK if this is a concern. IK said that the high figure for 2020/21 was an anomaly</p>	

	<p>due to Covid and that current figure for 2023/24 is normal for this point in the year because it does not reflect in year funding. As before, it will increase to above 4% when the ESFA adjusts it. Commenting on the c4% figure, the Board discussed the notion of ‘profitability’ for an organisation such as a college. They expressed the view that the organisation should be spending its income on its current students commensurate with accumulating an adequate level of reserves. The Board considered that therefore, for this type of college, a profit level of 8%, for instance, would in their opinion be too high.</p>	
9.1.2	<p>2023/24 Forecast Outturn Position – IK said that the figures reflect seven months’ actual and five months’ forecast. He drew their attention to Table 2 which shows the increased funding received since the budget was set.</p>	
9.1.3	<p>IK said that the position in Boarding is good, with a lower number of leavers than in previous years. The cash position is strong and in fact he will be bringing an investment proposal to the next P&R Committee.</p>	
9.1.4	<p>Budget for 2024/25 – IK said that funding for the next year has been confirmed and the budget will go to the next P&R Committee.</p>	
9.2	<p>Estates</p>	
9.2.1	<p>IK said that the decanting of Wyke Lodge is complete. Portacabins have been erected for teaching and offices, and the Caretaker and his wife are in rented accommodation adjacent to the site. Pre-commencement conditions are complete and a bat licence has been obtained, but asbestos has been found in the old building, so a notification has been made to the HSE.</p>	
9.2.2	<p>The Board asked if the work to remove the asbestos will add significantly to the project costs and IK said that a figure is pending but it is not expected to be significant.</p>	
9.2.3	<p>IK drew the Board’s attention to Table 8 which concerns fit out costs which could not be included in the main bid.</p>	
9.3	<p>Letter to the ESFA re funding for Wyke Lodge</p>	
9.3.1	<p>SR said that the ESFA has just contacted the College (and others like it) saying that claims must be received by 31 March 2025 to be paid. This is the original deadline, but anecdotal evidence is that colleges have been allowed flexibility in previous rounds. It seems that the deadline for this final round of the funding cycle is ‘harder’ than before. The ESFA has requested a letter from the College, signed by the Chair of Governors, saying that we are aware of the deadline and have reserves available to cover the costs should we be unable to submit the claims in time.</p>	
9.3.2	<p>IK said that the contractors remain confident that they can finish on time and that SMT have confidence in them from experience with the Carville build. Nonetheless, there is an element of risk that the College may have to use some reserves if there is an unexpected delay although IK regards it as low risk. The Chair said that she and SMT have discussed possible ways to</p>	

	<p>reduce the risk e.g. whether one can submit claims in advance of paying for work or pay early, but this is not possible. It is also not possible to manage the payment so as to use the grant funding first and the College's contribution last – money to pay every invoice must come from the grant and contribution pro rata to the overall commitment.</p>	
9.3.3	<p>IK said that the big invoices will come in quickly and he expects them by February; the later payments tend to be smaller. SMT and advisers will be monitoring the project even more closely than normal to guard against any avoidable delays. (CR left the meeting.)</p>	
9.3.4	<p>The Board asked if it is possible to take out insurance to cover this or find another arrangement such as holding the money separately, but IK said he thought not although he will check on insurance. A bond is awaited from the contractor although that only covers the risk of them becoming insolvent. He confirmed that the contract with Ascia has been agreed so the wording cannot be changed.</p>	IK
9.3.5	<p>The Board also considered whether it is a requirement to send the letter and whether the assurance can be qualified e.g. subject to the time taken to remove the asbestos. SMT and the Chair said that the assurance required is quite specific and the wording of the College's letter is as careful as they believe it can be.</p>	
9.3.6	<p>Some Board members expressed concern that the letter is required even though the project is well under way, while others said that it is simply requiring confirmation that the College will abide by rules to which it has already agreed. Some felt that the ESFA letter to colleges promotes what should in any event occur i.e. close Board scrutiny of the use of grants.</p>	
9.4	<p>CIF and Salix funding IK was pleased to confirm that funding has been secured for both projects. The former will enable the replacement of the current fire alarm system which is safe but fragmented, with a centralised modern one. The latter (Salix) grant has rather complicated conditions attached and will require careful management to ensure that all the money can be used.</p>	
9.5	<p>Finance Regulations IK mentioned that the College regulations have been updated, mainly to reflect the publication of the College Financial Handbook.</p>	
9.6	<p>Resolved: the Board approved: that the Chair sign the letter to the ESFA re the Wyke Lodge project as discussed above; the budget costs for the Wyke redevelopment additional items as set out in Table 8 of up to £591,450 (excl VAT), while noting that part of these costs may be covered by unused contingency on the main project up to £150k subject to some of the potential risks not arising e.g. asbestos removal; the Financial Regulations 2024 as per the draft circulated; the College administering the Prof John Garrett Award with immediate effect as set out in the</p>	

	commitment to process document circulated; the Staff and Student IT Conditions of use as per the copies circulated. All in favour	
10.	Report from the Audit Committee <i>Papers circulated: Draft Audit minutes March 24; CCTV College Code of Practice draft Feb 24; Confidentiality Policy draft 24; Freedom of Information Policy draft 2024</i>	
10.1	MW said that the Committee received the internal auditor's reports on EHCP Compliance and Health & Safety, both of which received the highest grade of 'substantial assurance' with two or three minor recommendations.	
10.2	The Committee also looked at the tracker of progress against previous recommendations, all of which were up to date.	
10.3	The Committee discussed a number of points under its self-assessment, concluding that it is meeting its terms of reference.	
10.4	Resolved: the Board approved the amendments to the CCTV Code of Practice, Freedom of Information Policy and Confidentiality Policy. All in favour.	
11.	Report from the Curriculum & Quality Committee <i>Papers circulated: C&QA minutes draft March 24; Confidential minute CUQA 110324; ToR Curriculum & QA draft 24</i>	
11.1	In the absence of BN, JW summarised the key issues from the meeting of C&QA: the mid-year review of the Operational Plan which covered some issues which are in the Snapshot (item 7 above); the mid-year review of the College SAR which included a conversation about the changes in boarding management and of a new Personnel/Payroll system; league tables; AHED update which has been updated by DT's presentation in item 3 above.	
11.2	JW said that the Committee looked at the outcome of the student survey in which there were a couple of drops in satisfaction since last year, although one (re progress review) was clearly down to the changed timing of Progress Review Day.	
11.3	Question from the Board Following the presentation to Board re AHED and C&QA's opportunity to question the Director, the Board asked whether the Committee felt that the Board can be reassured re the AHED plan. SR said that the direction of travel is good although further confidence must wait until developments in September. JW said that C&QA felt that the plan is multi-faceted which is reassuring, although it remains overall an area of risk.	
11.4	Resolved: the Board approved the amendments to the Terms of Reference for the Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee. All in favour	

12.	Report from Boarding Link Governors <i>Paper circulated: Link Governors for Boarding Report</i>	
12.1	JW said that he and TT met with the Head of Boarding, House Parents and boarders. The boarders were very positive about their experience, with the main concerns relating to food. They said that communication between the two houses has improved and that they feel that they have good opportunities for feedback about any issues they may have.	
12.2	SC updated the Board on the position relating to boarding management. CP, the outgoing Head, has now left her post and an appointment has been made for a new Head who joins in September 2024. He has good experience in boarding. Meanwhile, TP (who left the College recently after several years as a Director of Curriculum) is covering on a part time basis. This, combined with SC taking a greater involvement and the assistance of other boarding staff, means that the area is well managed in the interim.	
	Questions from the Board	
12.3	The Board expressed concern if Wi-Fi is not working adequately. JW said that work has been done several times to improve the Wi-Fi and SMT said that students have been asked to tell staff exactly when there are issues – there have been no reports.	
12.4	The Board asked when the next inspection of boarding will take place. SMT said that it is likely to be in the academic year 2025/26 which is good timing as the new Head of Boarding will have time to settle in.	
12.5	The Board asked about the number of students coming from the Falkland Islands (FI). SMT replied that the College is still receiving FI sixth formers although the link to this area is perhaps less than it was as FI residents used to be med-evacuated to Southampton and now go elsewhere. The College greatly values the link with the Islands, but is not financially dependent on their students attending.	
12.6	The Board thanked the LGs for their work and report.	
13.	Students' verbal report/report of lunch	
13.1	There was a very good turnout of students from the new SU intake and also of governors. The students were very positive about their College experience to date, citing the stimulating environment and the range of different people and cultures.	
13.2	Regarding their first day, one said that they spent the whole of it in their tutor group which was not helpful as subsequently only a small percentage of time is spent with this group, with most being in classes. SMT said that the first day is a mix of tutorial and teaching groups.	

13.3	The Clerk thanked the governors who gave up their time to attend. (Post meeting note: a governor attendee has discussed a different format to consider for future lunches. SMT will consider and this could be discussed at a future Board.) Clerk to monitor.	Clerk
14. 14.1 14.2 14.3 14.4 14.5	<p>Annual Accountability Agreement <i>Paper circulated: Accountability Agreement 2024-25 v200424. Paper shared after the meeting: Accountability Agreement 2024-25 v090524</i></p> <p>NA reminded the Board that they saw this draft at the Strategy/Training Day. He thanked the Governors who had made suggestions for amendments and said that he has made minor changes to typos etc and added some more information about university progression.</p> <p>NA said that the College is required to produce the AA to show its contribution to meeting local and national skills needs. There is a prescribed format and PSC’s interpretation has previously been used nationally as a model.</p> <p>NA said that the AA must be submitted by June and that, in future years, he proposes to bring it to C&QA in the spring.</p> <p>The Board asks what the ESFA does with the AA and NA replied that it is used during the annual ‘strategic conversation’ between them and the College.</p> <p>Resolved: the Board approved the Accountability Agreement 2024/25 as per the copy circulated before the meeting subject to the amendments above. All in favour.</p>	
15. 15.1	<p>Risk Management <i>Papers shared: Agenda of the RMG 15 May 24; Draft Minutes of RMG March 2024; Strategic RR March 24; Prevent RR May 24; IT RR March 24</i></p> <p>NA said that the meeting scheduled for 2 May had to be postponed to later this week, so the last meeting was in March. The format of the IT RR has been harmonised to match that of others. Regarding Prevent, the College continues to liaise with the Police for information about areas of risk.</p>	
16. 16.1	<p>Health & Safety (standing item)</p> <p>IK said that there have been no RIDDOR reportable incidents and nothing else to report.</p>	
17. 17.1	<p>External Governance Review (standing item)</p> <p>The Clerk explained that the Reviewer will write a draft report which will initially be shared with the Clerk, Principal and Chair as a minimum to be</p>	

17.2	<p>checked for points of accuracy. After that, it will come to all Board members and there is the opportunity for the Reviewer to join (remotely) a meeting of either Search or the full Board to take questions. Search had discussed this, considering that an appearance before their Committee might allow for more effective questioning (being a small group) but the report will be owned by the full Board, so they may wish to be involved. Members felt that all Board members should have the opportunity to participate and there was a conversation about the best way to achieve this, given the time constraints and the issues inherent in remote meetings.</p> <p>It was decided that there be a special meeting at 3 pm on Monday 17 June online (before the scheduled meeting of the Audit Committee) to which all Board members will be invited. The Clerk to arrange.</p>	Clerk
18.	<p>Strategy Day follow up</p> <p>18.1 The Clerk said that this is on the agenda so that any items for action arising from the Day are followed up. There were no items of content to progress, beyond those which are already in hand. The Board commented that they enjoyed seeing Heads of Subject and hearing their presentations. They also agreed that it was positive to be able to spend time together as a group outside normal meetings.</p> <p>18.2 Although the venue is conveniently located, there were some limitations and so the Clerk will research alternatives for next year.</p>	
19.	<p>Any other business – The Chair thanked Zac Hussein and Jaanvi Singh (in her absence) for their service as Student Governors. She also thanked Tina Thorne for her long service as a governor, including being Link Governor for two areas. They will be greatly missed and left with the good wishes of all the Board. (Staff and Student governors left.)</p>	
20.	<p>Property Held in the absence of Student and Staff Governors. This is recorded in a separate confidential minute.</p>	
21.	<p>Private business - none</p>	
22.	<p>Date of next meeting – Monday 8 July 2024 at 3 pm There being no other business the meeting ended at 6.06 pm</p> <p>..... Date..... Amanda Storey Chair of Governors</p>	