WOKING COLLEGE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Minutes of a meeting of the Woking College Board of Trustees held on
Wednesday 20th March 2024 at 6.00pm in the Conference Room W09

Present: Gary Botha
                    Erica Ehoro
                    Brett Freeman   Principal
                    Tracy Hampton
                    Cullum Mitchell
                    Anne Middleton
                    Alastair MacAulay
                    Ben Ramdhony
                    Rosh Sellahewa
                    Tim Stokes   Chair

In Attendance: Nawal Raza   Observer
                    Nuweed Razaq   Deputy Principal
                    Laura Cook   Assistant Principal
                    Barbara Maude   Clerk to the Board of Trustees

	Agenda Description	Action
1.	**Apologies for Absence & Declarations of Interest** Apologies had been received from Ben Smith who was overseas due to work commitments. The apology was agreed. All other Trustees were present and it was confirmed that the meeting was quorate. The Chair welcomed Nawal Raza to the meeting who was attending as an observer with a view to progressing an application to join the Board of Trustees No Trustee or member of senior management declared any pecuniary or other direct or indirect personal interest in any item on the agenda.	
2.	**Introduction to the Board Meeting** The Chair outlined the strategic intent of the meeting, which was to focus on the Principal's termly report and the review of teaching and learning via the IQR and EQR's completed in Health & Social Care, Applied Science, Film Studies and Geography.	
3.	**Minutes of the Previous Meeting** The Board received the minutes of the previous meeting held on 31st January 2024. The minutes were agreed as an accurate record and approved for signature by the Chair which was now undertaken by the 'marked as signed' facility on GovernorHub.	

4.	**Matters arising** The only matter arising from the minutes of the previous meeting related to the request to all Trustees that they should submit any completed Link Trustee reports to the Deputy Principal.	ALL
	Principal's Report	
5.	The Board received the Principal's termly report and the Principal highlighted some key sections for Trustees' information. In terms of KPIs, the Principal reported that overall the KPIs were good with attendance currently at 96.3% which was broadly in line with the same time last year (96.9%); retention at 94%; applications at 1905 (1496 in 2023); interviews carried out 1227 and acceptances at 1,123 (873 in 2023). In terms of the potential increase in student numbers in September 2024, the Principal explained that management were considering plans to be able to accommodate extra students. In essence, classrooms could cope but it was the availability of social spaces that posed more of a problem and consideration was being given to ways in which the canteen could be extended. However, if those plans necessitated planning permission than that in itself involved a process that would take time. With the potential for increased student numbers in 2024/25, the average class size was likely to increase from between 16-17 to 18-20 students. Trustees challenged on whether staff had been pre-empted about the increase and the Principal advised that they had all been fully briefed. In terms of the national context, and in particular the Level 3 reform process, the Principal advised that the College were able to enrol students on all of the College's AQAs in September. Should there be a change in government, following a general election, the Labour party had advised that they would 'pause and reflect' on the defunding of AQAs. The ESFA were advising Colleges not to make any changes as in reality there could be little change over the next 2/3 years. The Principal also advised that earlier in the day the Chief Executive of OCR (Oxford, Cambridge & RSA) Awarding Body had been in College and had met various Heads of Department. In terms of funding, the College had not as yet received its funding allocation for 2024/25. It was expected by the end of the month and it was anticipated that funding would be in line with inflation. Looking at marketing, there had been numerous activities undertaken including a website overhaul, meet the student videos, the planning and design of the new prospectus, taster days and the development of a new alumni section on the website. The Principal highlighted in particular two new marketing initiatives, the first was the new 'We are Woking' video which featured student life and endorsed College values. It	

was agreed that the link to the video would be circulated to all Trustees outside of the meeting.	BMA

Secondly, the Principal highlighted that the College had recently sponsored Woking FC's home match against Kidderminster. This had been a great social event, with the College being able to offer discounted ticket prices to the match for both staff and students.

Whilst the marketing activities had been extensive it remained the view of management that the reason why acceptances were up by 35% was due to a positive College reputation.

In respect of site issues, the main works planned to take place over the summer were in respect of the fire compartmentation CIF bid project. This had transpired to be a bigger project than at first envisaged and would necessitate taking down many of the ceilings that had been taken down last summer. It was unfortunate, but management could not undertake a programme of sequential works as funding did not follow the same pattern.

The College were currently waiting on the outcome of the CIF bid submitted during this academic year in respect of a bid to replace the first-floor roof of W building.

It was noted that 354 UCAS applications had been submitted by the deadline of 31st January 2024 which was comparable to the number submitted last year even though the current Year 13 were a smaller cohort.

The third inset day of the year had centred on the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion and continued the whole College Teaching & Learning focus for this year which was 'Making Every Lesson' count.

In addition and as part of sharing best practice, a staff member had attended a training session and had then disseminated information to all staff on 'conversational marking' which was framed at getting students to ask better questions about their work. An example was given that students would be asked to write an essay, then they would be asked to reflect on their work and then ask questions of the teacher. This was aimed at improving their skills such as viewing their work through a different lens or perspective. Marking would only given on questions that the student had asked.

In terms of staffing, the sector was at peak interview season as the 31st May cut-off date for resignations approached. The Principal gave an overview of vacancies that the College were currently looking to fill. In particular, the College were currently short of both Criminology and Sociology teachers so members of SLT, notably Helena Clarke and Laura Cook were now each teaching 13.5 hours per week to cover the vacancies. The Principal was also teaching 9 hours a week as it was impossible for the College to recruit A level teachers at this stage of the academic year.

Compared to most schools and Colleges, the Principal advised that College was in a good position in terms of general staffing levels especially as there was a sector wide shortage of teachers (approximately 43%) creating a sparsity of applicants.

	Whilst the Principal's report contained a very helpful summary of the achievements, activities and enrolment of Year 12 students, Trustees asked for more information about how the College set strategies and targets for the Excellence Programme and how the College monitored progress and measured outcomes. Management advised that the Excellence Programme was part of the College's SAR process so it was robustly monitored in terms of ALPs data and if there was any decline then there would be appropriate management challenge and any areas of development that were identified would form part of the Excellence Programme's QIP.	
	It was also confirmed that all students were invited to apply to join the Excellence Programme and were encouraged to do so if they wanted to extend their learning and their understanding and experience of the world around them. Management emphasised that participation in the Excellence Programme was not based on GCSE results.	
	All students were also able to undertake an EPQ (Extended Project Qualification), which was a Level 3 course that was taken alongside A levels. This tended to be undertaken by a self-selected group of students but it was open to all although if students were struggling with their 3 main subjects then an EPQ may not be the best option for them.	
	The Deputy Principal advised that a member of staff had made a subject access request. The IT Director was working with the Deputy Principal to support him in complying with the request which spanned a period of time from August 2022 to date. Considerable time was being spent in complying with the request and redacting irrelevant information. It was agreed that Rosh Sellahewa and the Deputy Principal would speak outside of the meeting to discuss whether AI software could be used to help in this process.	RSE/ NRA
	The Chair of the Board, on behalf of all Trustees, extended his thanks to the members of SLT who were taking on additional teaching responsibilities to help cover the current teacher vacancies. He also encouraged any Trustee who might be available to participate in the College's own Dragon's Den (the Clerk would circulate the date and time to all Trustees for their information) and praised the recent 'A Little Night Music' production which had been excellent.	
	Teaching, Learning & Assessment	
6.	The Assistant Principal presented the IQR and EQR reports. These reports formed part of the College's quality assurance process and were designed to identify areas of good practice, areas for development and suggested strategies. Targets would then be added to the department's QIP and impact measured through the department's SARs. **IQR – Health & Social Care (Level 3)** The Assistant Principal advised that Health & Social Care had been chosen because results had dipped and the department had suffered some disruption over the last two years due to staff turnover and long-term sickness. There was now a new Head of Department and a new course leader. Whilst it was clear that students enjoyed their lessons and had built strong relationships with their teachers it was considered that	

	there needed to be greater challenge, and some of the recommendations included more structured homework, a variety of revision methods, the development of a bank of learner scripts and learner friendly mark schemes. **IQR – Applied Science (Level 3)** In terms of Applied Science, this department had been chosen as results were good and the College wanted to look at practices that the department employed that could be shared College wide. An area for improvement flowing from the IQR included the creation of a student friendly grade tracker which would give students greater ownership over tracking their projected grade outcomes. Also, although this was an experienced and stable teaching department, more effective communication was encouraged between the seven teachers delivering the curriculum and the opportunity to bring learners into the lesson dialogue was also encouraged. **EQR – Film Studies** The focus for the Film Studies EQR was on how the department could further support students to achieve high grades, how well students are prepared for the exam and how this could be improved; and strategies to enhance achievement in the NEA (Non-Exam Assessment). The EQR revealed an over-reliance on oracy resulting in learners not being practised at writing essay worth responses. Students were not using the correct terminology and key terms which was precluding them from accessing the higher grades. It also appeared that the team were marking too generously, a situation also repeated in terms of the NEA where comments and grades awarded did not accurately reflect the work itself. Management advised that these were all issues that could be addressed straight away. **EQR – Geography (oral update only)** The Assistant Principal advised that the EQR in Geography had just been undertaken and as such a written report was currently not available. The College had planned to undertake an EQR on IT but due to the appointment of a new HoD in IT it had been decided to defer the IT EQR until 2024/25. The report would be available shortly but currently only oral feedback had been provided. Geography was taught by a sole teacher, and the EQR had referenced 'exemplary teaching'. As a sole geographer there was no possibility at present to share ideas with colleagues although next year the College would be looking to recruit an additional teacher to cover the number of students who would be taking Geography (approximately 80 in total). The EQR had made a number of recommendations and once available the report could be shared with Trustees at the next Board meeting.	LCO
	Finance & Audit Committee	
7.	The Chair of the Finance & Audit Committee gave an oral summary of those matters considered by the Committee at the meeting held on 6th March 2024.	

The Chair advised that the committee held a closed session with the internal auditors prior to the start of the formal meeting. This was now standard procedure for the Committee providing them with the opportunity to discuss matters directly with the internal auditors without management present.

The internal auditors had attended the meeting remotely to present the Internal Audit Plan for 2023/24 and to discuss the timeline for the internal audits taking place before the year end which were HR, Payroll and compliance against the 'musts' within the Academy Trust Handbook 2023.

The Committee had also considered the SRMA feedback that suitable KPIs should be included within the Management Accounts to ensure effective and robust financial monitoring. Having considered this recommendation, and taking into account that the DfE portal did not hold data relating to 16-19 academies (which made benchmarking difficult); also, that the ATH stated that no KPIs had to be included within Management Accounts; and finally, that no other S7 Finance Directors included any KPIs other than operating surplus and income ratio, the Committee agreed that no further KPIs should be included. Instead, the Committee would focus on more robustly challenging the present KPIs/ratios set out in the Management Accounts.

The one area that the Committee had asked for greater information about was staff utilisation and it had been agreed that the Deputy Principal would attend the November meeting of the Committee to present on the processes used to ensure the College fully utilised staff.

The Committee had reviewed the December 2023 and January 2024 Management Accounts with the January 2024 accounts showing an operating deficit of £58k which was £77k ahead of budget for the year to date. The yearend forecast had been updated and now the year end deficit was forecast to have reduced from £262k to £181k.

The Committee had examined the budget assumptions for 2024/25. The Principal advised that in headline terms, staff pay was only being funded by 1.89% as the DfE had advised that the sector had 'headroom in existing budgets. Hence, finances would be tight but at least utility costs were at least expected to stabilise.

In terms of the School Resource Management Self-Assessment Tool, it was noted that this had been shared with the Chair of the Board prior to its submission to the DfE on 15th March 2024. Due to the timing of the Finance and Audit Committee meeting and the Board meeting it had not been possible to present the completed SRMST to the Board for prior approval but it was being presented now, retrospectively, and with the Chair's approval.

The Board **resolved:**
i. To receive the minutes of the Finance and Audit Committee held on 6th March 2024;
ii. To approve the January 2024 Management Accounts; and
iii. To approve the School Resource Management Self-Assessment Tool (SRMST)

	Policy Approvals	
8.	**Policy Review Schedule** The Scheme of Delegation remained unchanged for 2024 and the Financial Regulations had no major changes proposed and only some minor updates in accordance with the ATH 2023. Both documents had been reviewed by the Finance & Audit Committee and were recommended for Board approval. In terms of policies requiring Board approval, after review the Board **resolved:** **To approve:** **1. Staff Development Policy (which included the Mentoring Procedure);** **2. Scheme of Delegation; and** **3. Financial Regulations which included within the various appendices the Charging & Remissions Policy; Trustees' Allowances Policy; Reserves Policy; and Acceptance of Gifts & Hospitality Policy.** The Principal advised that the review of the Health & Safety Policy was underway but with the Board's agreement this item would be deferred until the next meeting as the policy required a more thorough overhaul than had been originally anticipated.	FMU
	Governance	
9.	The Board conducted a review of the Trustee Code of Conduct which had been originally introduced in March 2023 and was recommended to be reviewed on an annual basis. The Code was based on the NGA model Code of Conduct template and was anchored in the Seven Nolan principles of public life and the Framework for Ethical leadership in Education. Having reviewed the Code of Conduct, the Board reflected that over the course of the last year no changes needed to be made to the Code. The Board **resolved:** **To approve the Trustee Code of Conduct 2024** Trustees were reminded that they were required to undertake an annual skills audit. The last skills audit had been completed using Microsoft Forms and had been 'light touch' following the External Review of Governance that had been undertaken. However, the Clerk advised that she would liaise with the Chair outside of the meeting to identify the most appropriate format for this year's skills audit and then notify Trustees outside of the meeting. An up to date skills audit would help inform the Succession Planning Working Group when considering the appointment of any new Trustees.	ALL
10.	**Any Other Business** Trustees were advised that there had been two recent developments to bring to their attention.	

	The first was the Economic Crime & Corporate Transparency Act 2023 which had come into effect on 4th March 2024 although the timeframe for the introduction of the provisions was not yet certain. The Act was introducing measures to improve corporate transparency to prevent economic crime. It would require ID verification for both directors and PSCs (persons with significant control) of companies.

There would be two routes available either direct verification via Companies House or through an Authorised Corporate Service Provider (or agent). All Trustees (as Directors of Woking College, the company) would be required to upload a primary identity document (such as a driving licence or passport) and then Trustees would need to take a photograph of their face and through likeness matching technology their identity would be verified. Whilst the timeframe for bringing in the provisions was not yet certain there would be a transition period to allow existing Trustees to verify their identity. Failure to comply within the transition period would result in Trustees no longer being able to act as a director and/or face penalties. Identity verification was expected to be a on-off requirement.

The second development was the introduction of the new DfE Academy Trust Guidance which had come into effect on 7th March 2024. This was non-statutory guidance which provided information from a range of sources on the Trustee Board's roles and legal responsibilities. The guide encompassed a change in format and a more streamlined approach. There was now less prescriptive guidance and more signposting to third parties and other sources of information. The new guide replaced the Governance Handbook 2019, the Governance Competency Framework, the Clerking Competency Framework and the previous statutory list of policies and procedures. The guidance set out 'musts' which were a legal or regulatory requirement or duty which must be complied with and 'shoulds' which were minimum good practice requirements. It also included a more concise list of statutory policies that Trusts should have.

Although the guidance stated that there were no changes to governance expectations there had been more detail and clarity provided on certain responsibilities for trustees. Therefore, it was suggested that the Clerk, in consultation with the Chair and the Principal, would bring back to the next meeting a summary of any proposed changes following a review of the new guidance. | BMA |
| 11. | **Date & Time of Next Meeting**
It was noted that the Succession Planning Working Group would be meeting on Wednesday 8th May 2024 at 5.00pm followed by the Board of Trustees meeting held on the same day starting at 6.00pm. | |