

# WOKING COLLEGE BOARD OF TRUSTEES Minutes of a meeting of the Board of Trustees held on Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2024 6.00pm in Conference Room W09

Present: Erica Ehoro

Brett Freeman Principal

Tracy Hampton Alastair MacAulay Anne Middleton Cullum Mitchell Ben Ramdhony Rosh Sellahewa

Ben Smith Via Teams until 6.10pm

Tim Stokes Chair

In Attendance: Nuweed Razaq Deputy Principal

Laura Cook Assistant Principal

Zamir Tehal Member Charlotte Eker Observer Nawal Raza-Malik Observer

Barbara Maude Clerk to the Board of Trustees

| Item | Agenda Description  |  |  |
|------|---|--|--|
|      | STANDING ITEMS  |  |  |
| 1.   | Apologies for Absence & Declarations of Interest  Apologies had been received from Gary Botha due to a clash with his own school's  Governing Body meeting. The apology was agreed. No Trustee or member of the senior management team declared any pecuniary or other direct or indirect personal interest in any item on the agenda.  |  |  |
| 2.   | Introduction to the Board Meeting & Welcome to New Trustee Applicants  The Chair outlined the strategic intent of the meeting and welcomed Charlotte Eker and Nawal Raza-Malik, both of whom were attending as observers with a view to be appointed to the Board of Trustees with effect from September 2024. The Chair also welcomed to the meeting Zamir Tehal, who was attending in his role as a Member, as he had unfortunately not been able to make the last Members AGM. |  |  |
| 3.   | Minutes of the Previous Meeting The Board received the minutes of the previous meeting held on 8 <sup>th</sup> May 2024. The minutes were agreed as an accurate record and approved for signature by the Chair, via the marked as signed facility on GovernorHub.   |  |  |

#### 4. Matters arising

The Board reviewed the following matters arising:

|    | Matters arising 08.05.24     | By whom   | By when     | Status          |
|----|------------------------------|-----------|-------------|-----------------|
| 1. | Approval of costings for the | TST & RSE | If required | Ongoing         |
|    | canteen redevelopment        |           |             |                 |
| 2. | Trustees to complete NGA     | All       | ASAP        | Ongoing         |
|    | Skills Audit                 |           |             |                 |
| 3. | Link Trustee Scheme & SLT's  | SLT/BMA   | ASAP        | Agenda Item 9.1 |
|    | areas of responsibility      |           |             |                 |
| 4. | Calendar notification of     | ВМА       | ASAP        | Completed       |
|    | 2024/25 meetings             |           |             |                 |

It was noted that in terms of item 1, the costings for the canteen development had still not been received so this was still ongoing. In respect of item 2, the timeline for completion of the NGA Annual Skills Audit had now closed and the results of the audit had formed part of the matters considered by the Succession Planning Working Party at the meeting held prior to the Board meeting. Item 3 formed part of the present agenda and item 4 had been completed.

## PRINCIPAL'S REPORT

5. The Board received the Principal's Termly Report which was the final report of this current academic year.

The Principal reported that in terms of KPIs, both applications and acceptances were up on the previous two years standing at 2,139 and 1,435 respectively. Attendance at the recent Open Evening had also been extremely positive with the highest number of attendees the College had ever recorded. The Principal reported that he had received lots of positive comments from students and parents alike and a number of applications had already been received after the event for 2025/26.

In terms of student numbers, management estimated that the College might enrol approximately 1,100 students and retain 700  $2^{nd}$  year students for 2024/25. Rolling forward this could mean that in 2025/26 the College could potentially have a similar number of new students and 900  $2^{nd}$  year students.

Members queried why the College lost approximately 200 students after Year 12 and management advised that many of those completed a qualification at the end of Year 12 and did not continue further, and others may have dropped out as approximately 10% of the cohort decided that a course was not suitable for them.

Whilst an additional 300 students would bring in a significant amount of additional funding (lagged funding if in year growth funding was not granted) it also meant in terms of capacity that total numbers would either have to be limited or the College may need to consider the use of portacabins to help capacity issues in the short to medium term. The Board considered that it was key to look at strategic options as soon as possible so that options were agreed for September 2025 if the use of portacabins or modular builds was now being actively considered.

As to the process for applications for 2024/25, the Board queried what was the College's approach in light of capacity and the Principal advised that as from Easter onwards the College had told every student at interview that they may not get their first subject choice.

However, as the Principal advised the Board, the number one priority from the perspective of the senior management team was to maintain the College's sense of community.

Members highlighted that there were a number of both teaching and support staff leaving this year and queried whether an increase in student numbers could exacerbate further staff movement. Management advised that staffing was stable despite an element of 'churn' this year. The College was fully staffed for 2024/25 having successfully recruited to all vacant positions and this was particularly pleasing as the recruitment fields of new staff were small and it was difficult across the sector to recruit good quality teachers. Particular mention was made of the Modern Foreign Languages department, which had seen a number of staff leave but the College was very pleased with the new teachers it had been able to recruit.

In terms of support staff, the Principal highlighted that the College had new members join both the Finance and Registry Teams and the new members of staff all had a strong educational ethos behind them and had settled in well.

Members also discussed the position of L2 students. As discussed previously, the L2 cohort tended to be students who applied late so the College, as it remained intent on maintaining its comprehensive nature, may consider reserving a number of L2 places to ensure there was capacity to meet what was a usual late demand for L2 places.

The Principal highlighted the recent Careers Fayre in which the College had hosted approximately 50 Universities and over 40 different employers. 75 different talks had taken place throughout the day and students had attended three different talks of their choice hosted by external speakers.

The Principal advised that the current extensive Enrichment Programme that the College offered may have to change next year due to increase pressure on staff if the number of students increased in line with expectations. However, the College would do all it could to maintain as much of the current range of enrichment activities as possible. Members commended the Principal on the extensive range of the College's enrichment programme and asked whether the College adequately celebrated the programme and whether it did enough to promote it to parents. The Principal advised that details were included in newsletters and videos but he would reflect on how the College could further promote the enrichment programme to reach more parents.

The Chair of the Board highlighted that following an introduction he had made to Natta Civil Engineering they had brought in a speaker to the College and this had resulted in one of the students getting a degree apprenticeship with Natta.

The Board thanked the Principal for his termly report. **TEACHING, LEARNING & ASSESSMENT** Laura Cook, Assistant Principal Curriculum & Quality introduced the Curriculum 6. Intent position statement together with details of curriculum changes for 2024/25. In terms of the Curriculum Intent Statement for 2024/25 no changes were proposed to the statement although it was noted that they may be changes once the College's Strategic Plan had been reviewed. At present the strategic and cultural intent remained the same as for 2023/24. In terms of curriculum changes for 2024/25 new courses had been introduced, namely A Level Music Technology and BTEC Computer Science. The College was finding that some universities preferred students to have an A level in Music Technology rather than a BTEC. In respect of the BTEC in Computer Science this was more accessible than the A level course as students could access it with a Grade 4 in Maths so it presented greater options. A choice of A level History curriculum had also been introduced (with two courses now available). Exam board changes were noted, in particular A level English Literature, which was being changed as management considered that the College's students would better engage with the different exam board. There was also to be greater promotion of Core Maths through the enrolment process to increase student numbers. Whilst this had always been an option, the College would look to promote this more widely. It was desirable for students to take Core Maths alongside existing studies to demonstrate mathematical capabilities. For those students taking a science subject for example, and not A level Maths as well, the College would signpost Core Maths as an option to consider. 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 19<sup>th</sup> June 2024. The Chair reported that in accordance with their usual practice, the Committee had held a closed session with the internal auditors prior to the start of the meeting and without management present. He was pleased to assure the Board that no issues or areas of concern had been raised. The internal auditors had presented remotely the Academy Trust Handbook Compliance Audit Report together with an update on audits planned for the balance of 2023/24. In terms of the ATH audit, the executive summary set out all of the musts and indicated whether the College was fully compliant or not. The internal auditors had confirmed that where 'Not Applicable' had been entered this indicated that the particular situation or requirement had not arisen at the College.

Following the review, the auditors had provided a strong level of assurance surrounding the College's compliance with the Schedule of Requirements within the ATH and contract management requirements. In addition, the review had not raised any recommendations for improvement and had highlighted 3 areas of good practice.

The auditors had also benchmarked the average number of recommendations in similar audits and as was noted, the College had a lower number of recommendations (0) compared to those academy trusts it had been benchmarked against.

The Chair confirmed that he had queried whether the College had a comparable number of N/As compared to other benchmarked Colleges. In response, the auditors had advised that the N/As were not a concern and more of a concern would have been if the audit had found areas of partial compliance.

In terms of the April 2024 Management Accounts, the Chair reported that the original budget surplus had been (£262k) but due to some changes in funding and some savings in non-pay and pay expenditure this now meant that the College was in a better position than expected and the updated budget surplus was currently (£144k).

It had been noted by the Committee that a lot of the credit in achieving a better position than originally forecast was due to the work of the Deputy Principal in achieving an efficient timetable.

Some notable variances included the pay expenditure line which was due in part to the staff pay award coming in at 6.5% (backdated to September 2023) whereas 4% had originally been budgeted and the supply cover budget which had increased as to one teacher had been on long term sick leave.

The Committee had also discussed both RAAC and asbestos survey costs. The Finance & Estates Director had confirmed to the Committee that the RAAC survey had been undertaken and the results showed there was no RAAC within the College and a new asbestos survey had been undertaken as part of the CIF Fire suppression work. Asbestos had been identified as being present in the fire breaks and would need to be removed if it was disturbed by the fire suppression works. The extraction of asbestos would be an additional cost that the College would have to bear.

In terms of the budget for 2024/25, the Chair reported that the 2024/25 budget outlined an operating deficit of (£245,146).

For 2024/25, the College would be funded for 1,539 students with student numbers for 2025/26 and 2026/27 remaining static at 1,800. A pay increase was likely in 2024/25 of between possibly 2-4% and the College were budgeting for 3%.

The Committee had been advised that the budget had been prepared using the 16-19 and 19+ funding allocations received from the ESFA. Where income and

expenditure were known then assumptions had been made upon the basis of the available data and in collaboration with the other S7 Finance Directors.

As the Chair reported, a deficit budget was not where the College wanted to be and whilst the College could arguably change its assumptions to 'create' a balanced budget that would not be viable or realistic position. This was a conservative budget which included no speculation in terms of growth funding. Therefore, it did allow some headroom if the financials improved and any variances were likely to be positive rather than negative.

The College as a Single Academy Trust and operating under the terms of the Academy Trust Handbook was not allowed to set a deficit budget, but as the Principal confirmed the ESFA had been advised, last year, that the likelihood was that the College would be setting a two-year deficit budget and their key recommendation for remediation had been to increase the average class size which would happen as student numbers increased.

In terms of the canteen renovation project, the Chair reported that the current proposal was to increase the available space within the canteen and change the layout to improve the flow of the existing canteen. This would increase capacity but also improve the experience for both staff and students. Unfortunately, to date, the College had not received the architect's plans and without those it was impossible to arrange for costings to be undertaken.

The Chair reported that the Committee had discussed whether strategically the College should be investing in smaller scale projects which would only provide resources and space for years rather than decades. Whilst the College were only putting in 30% towards the overall costs, the Committee had considered whether the numerous 30%'s could arguably be utilised in a better way. Again, this linked back to the strategic discussions mentioned earlier in the Board meeting that both the Board and senior management needed to undertake.

If the canteen costings came in over the summer, it was noted that the Board had already delegated authority to the Chair of the Board and the Chair of the Finance and Audit Committee to review them and to approve final sign off if required.

The Committee reviewed the External Auditors Audit Plan for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> August 2024 and their letter of engagement. Both had been approved by the Committee and were therefore recommended for ratification by the Board.

In terms of the Risk Management Assurance Framework and the Risk Register the Chair highlighted the key changes. Previously, Risk 1 which was failing to recruit and retain appropriate numbers of new and returning students had always been the main significant risk faced by the College and although that risk remained, the landscape had changed. As a result, this risk had been reduced and had now become Risk 7 and downgraded to 'low'.

The previous Risk 2 which was reducing overall income and increasing costs had been elevated as the main risk and had been placed as Risk 1.

Risk 2 had been added, which was a new risk, which related to the over-recruitment of students and the negative impact that this could have upon the College. This was in respect of the impact of a negative student experience, either by being turned away as the College was full or that the College's enrichment programme and the overall learner experience was impacted by high student numbers.

The previous Risk 7, which had related to the failure to prepare for the over-recruitment of new students had been removed as this was encapsulated within the new Risk 2.

After detailed review, the Board were unanimous in their commendation of the Deputy Principal (not only for his efforts in undertaking the timetabling of all subjects as mentioned earlier) but also in the quality and robustness of the Risk Register and the College's overarching approach to the Risk Management Framework.

The Board were also advised that in accordance with the practice in previous years, it was proposed that the Chair of the Finance and Audit Committee should be delegated authority on behalf of the Board of Trustees to sign off the Budget Forecast Return which was required to be submitted by 29<sup>th</sup> August 2024. The BFR required Board approval but as the Board were not due to meet again until September, authority would be delegated to the Chair of the Finance & Audit Committee to sign this off on behalf of the Board over the summer break.

Finally, the Principal reiterated his thanks to the Board for their pragmatic and supportive approach to the College's 2024/25 proposed budget. Setting a deficit budget was not ideal but the Board's endorsement of the College's approach was valued. The Principal acknowledged that this not an approach that many of his contemporaries were experiencing.

#### The Board resolved:

- i. To receive the minutes of the Finance & Audit Committee meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> June 2024;
- ii. To approve April 2024 Management Accounts;
- iii. To approve the Budget for 2024/25 & Two-Year Financial Forecast;
- iv. To approve the External Audit Plan for year ending 31.08.24 & the External Auditor's Letter of Engagement;
- v. To approve the Risk Register 2024/25;
- vi. To delegate authority to the Chair of the Finance and Audit Committee to sign off, on behalf of the Board of Trustees, the Budget Forecast Return by 29<sup>th</sup> August 2024.

## **SAFEGUARDING & PREVENT**

**8.** The Board received both the Annual Safeguarding Report for 2023/24 which in the absence of Helena Clarke, Assistant Principal Support for Learning & Wellbeing was presented by the Deputy Principal.

In terms of training, the Board noted the training undertaken by staff during 2023/24 had been completed online as the FE South-East Prevent Co-ordinator's role had changed and this meant they were no longer available to deliver face to face training. The DSL would this year deliver face to face training for staff in 2024/25. In addition, it was also noted that the bi-annual Surrey Safeguarding Audit had been completed which had confirmed that the College was meeting best practice standards as highlighted by Surrey County Council.

In terms of key Child Protection information, there were 4 students who were looked after and the College had made 10 referrals to Children's services across the 2023/24 academic year.

The College currently had 7 trained members of the safeguarding team, and with additional staff completing separate DSL training and the inclusion of 3 new Heads of Year starting in September the College would have a total of 12 DSL trained staff by the end of the academic year.

In addition, the College would have 17 trained Mental Health First Aid England champions in the team for 2024/25. As part of the Student Wellbeing Action Plan 2022/25 the student Wellbeing Co-ordinator would begin extensive training in the autumn term to qualify as a MHFA trainer.

In July 2023, the pastoral team along with the MHFA champions completed additional Suicide Prevention training with the charity Papyrus, who also delivered a student Suicide Awareness session and the College had shared a webinar link via the parent newsletter for parents and carers to access a bespoke training session.

In terms of progress made against targets, the Progress Mentor programme had continued its success with 84% of the 57 students referred to a Progress Mentor completing 1 or more of their courses or continuing on to the next year of their courses. This was up from 74% for the previous year. This programme had been introduced to provide additional support to students with low attendance linked to mental health concerns.

Across College, wellbeing and mental health support continued to grow with increases in support groups and cross college wellbeing events. The College also had 2 trained ELSA staff (Emotional Literacy Support Assistants) who started in January 2024 and had successfully supported 7 students with 1-2- specialist support throughout this academic year.

The College was also proud to have taken part in the Brainwaves Research Programme which was a 10-year national research programme into the Mental Health and Wellbeing of Young People and Adolescents. This had enabled College students to be part of this important project working with Oxford University and providing them with the opportunity to 'pay it forward' to help improve the mental health of future generations.

In terms of the College working with external agencies, the Board asked about their work with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). It was confirmed that a CAMHS referral continued to be difficult and that the College had been fortunate to maintain a full level of staffing of volunteer counsellors across the year, led by the College's lead counsellor.

Looking ahead, the College would be working in partnership with the Mental Health Support Team (MHST) on cross college wellbeing strategies. They would be working within College one day a week to carry out directed, targeted work with students who the College had referred for their support.

The Board queried the data in terms of suspensions and exclusions in 2023/24 noting that the number of suspensions had increased to 37 from 35 in 2022/23. The figures for all categories were very similar to the previous year which was positive in light of the increased numbers in the year group.

The College continued to operate a zero-tolerance approach to violence and physical assault with students suspended for an offence of this nature being permanently excluded.

The number of online (as opposed to in person) incidents of offensive behaviour had increased and this was something that was immediately flagged up by the College's IT systems and was treated very seriously. In addition, the pastoral team were planning a drop-down morning for an extended tutorial session on offensive, discriminatory or derogatory language.

The Board enquired about the process for permanent exclusions and how this was managed. It was confirmed that an appeal to the Board would only occur if it was alleged that the Principal had not conducted an appeal made to him appropriately.

In general terms, the Year 12 cohort, appeared to have lower maturity levels than in previous years, and the College continued to see the implications of COVID on their levels of both maturity and resilience. Many of the skills that cohorts prior to COVID displayed were simply not present in the cohorts coming through College since COVID and the College were having to help build, evolve and develop key skills. However, as management advised, as in all previous years, the summer between Year 12 and 13 was often a great leveller for students and their maturity naturally evolved.

Anne Middleton, lead Safeguarding Trustee commented that from her NHS experience she was aware that there was a sexual assault charity that provided external support for any student that had suffered sexual assault and she would, outside of the meeting, raise this with the College's DSL.

This lead on to consideration of the Lead Safeguarding Trustees' annual written report. Anne Middleton had conducted termly Safeguarding visits to the College throughout 2023/24 and provided an annual written report to the Board at this meeting.

Key points of note included termly reviews of the single central record which provided a good assurance of process; discussion regarding any learning from a student suicide in the autumn term and it was noted that the child death review process had provided no recommendations for the College. In addition, a new initiative had included Kindness Awards presented at the Awards Evening; the fact that external psychology support would be available from September 2024; and the staff wellbeing survey having identified work load as a key factor for stress and potential burnout had resulted in some new strategies being put into place to attempt to reduce work volume.

The Board asked the Deputy Principal to relay their thanks to the Assistant Principal Support for Learning & Wellbeing for the comprehensive nature of the Safeguarding report and also thanked the designated Safeguarding Lead Trustee for her annual report.

The Board reviewed the Prevent Strategy and the Student Code of Conduct.

The Prevent Strategy had only minor refinements and no substantive changes were proposed.

In terms of training, it was confirmed that all staff completed online Prevent Training. Face to face training via the South East FE Co-ordinator, as mentioned previously was no longer available so it would be necessary to repeat the online Prevent training in 2024/25 although the DSL would include a Prevent update as part of the INSET programme.

In respect of the Student Code of Conduct, it was noted that under DfE guidance it was recommended (but not statutory) that academies considered having a Behaviour Principles written statement. As the Student Code of Conduct set out the College's expectations with regard to behaviour it was felt that the Student Code of Conduct fully encapsulated the behaviour principles of the College. The Student Code of Conduct had been drawn up in consultation with the Student Union and agreed with them. Every student was required to sign and return a copy of the Code of Conduct and as could be seen from the suspension data, 23 students this year had been suspended for poor behaviour in breach of the Student Code of Conduct. It was noted that this year the Codie of Conduct had been revised to set out clearly the appropriate use of AI.

#### The Board resolved to approve:

Prevent Strategy

The Board also received and endorsed:

- DSL's Annual Safeguarding Report
- Annual Lead Safeguarding Trustee's Annual report
- Student Code of Conduct (as the College's Behaviour Principles written statement)

**GOVERNANCE** 

9. As agreed previously, the Board had considered aligning the Link Trustee Scheme for 2024/25 under the areas of responsibility for the Principal, Deputy Principal, Assistant Principal Curriculum & Quality, Assistant Principal Support for Learning and Wellbeing and the Finance & Estates Director.

Trustees were asked to choose which of the respective SLT's portfolio they were interested in as under these five tiers both curriculum departments or a cross college areas were covered. This would provide Trustees with just one point of contact. Trustees would be appointed, preferably in pairs, and this approach would be trialled for 2024/25 to assess whether it provided a more meaningful insight and experience for Trustees.

In terms of the election of the Chair and Vice Chair for 2024/25, the Clerk advised that Tim Stokes had confirmed that he was prepared to stand as Chair for 2024/25. His appointment was proposed by Alastair MacAulay, seconded by Anne Middleton and supported unanimously by the Board.

In respect of the post of Vice Chair, Rosh Sellahewa had also confirmed that he was prepared to stand as Vice Chair for 2024/25 and his appointment was proposed by Tracy Hampton; seconded by Tim Stokes and again unanimously supported.

In terms of the suggested Committee membership for 2024/25, Tracy Hampton confirmed at the meeting that she was happy to join the Finance and Audit Committee with effect from  $1^{st}$  September 2024.

Trustees were asked to review the Committee list for 2024/25 outside of the meeting and to confirm to the Clerk if any other Trustee wished to join either the Finance & Audit Committee or the Succession Planning Working Party.

In respect of the Succession Planning Working Party, it was confirmed that the Working Party had met just prior to the Board meeting. It was reported that they had interviewed Nawal Raza, who was a statistician currently working for the DfE and was attending today's meeting as an observer. In addition, the Principal and Chair of the Board had previously interviewed Charlotte Eker, who was also attending as an observer. Charlotte was a former student and having worked in the finance sector, was now working as a trainee solicitor. The Board were delighted to support their applications and it was confirmed that with the members agreement, a formal members resolution would be passed and they would be appointed with effect from 1st September and join the Board at the Annual Conference on 11th September 2024.

All Trustees were reminded to ensure that their declaration in respect of any gifts and hospitality received during the 2023/24 academic year should be completed via the GovernorHub and this extended to completing a NIL return.

The Board resolved:

- To approve the election of Tim Stokes as Chair and Rosh Sellahewa as Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees of Woking College for the academic year 2024/25, commencing on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2024 until 31<sup>st</sup> August 2025;
- To approve the Committee Membership for 2024/25 with the addition of Tracy Hampton as a member of the Finance & Audit Committee.

#### 10. Any other Business

It was noted that the summary of the recent Student Focus Group had been included for information. This set out the discussions that had taken place between the Chair of the Board, Tim Stokes and Tracy Hampton and the Student Union on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2024.

The Chair highlighted that the subject of the canteen had been raised again and the SU feedback had been relayed to the Finance and Estates Director who would be meeting with the SU to discuss, in light of the current canteen renovation project, to see if some of their suggestions could be incorporated.

The Clerk advised that there had also been very positive feedback in the Staff Forum regarding the staff wellbeing survey results that had been circulated by Helena Clarke, Assistant Principal Support for Learning & Wellbeing entitled 'You said; We did.' It was agreed that this would be helpful for Trustees to see so this would be circulated outside of the meeting.

# 11. Date & Time of Next Meetings

It was agreed that the next meeting of the Board of Trustees would take place on Wednesday  $11^{\rm th}$  September 2024 at 4.15pm, which was the Annual Trustees Conference with Heads of Department, which would be followed by a Board meeting.