



WOKING COLLEGE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Minutes of a meeting of the Woking College Board of Trustees held on Wednesday 4th December 2024 at 6.00pm in W09 Conference Room (W Building)

Present:	Katherine Dunleavy	
	Erica Ehor	
	Charlotte Eker	
	Helen Flower	
	Brett Freeman	Principal
	Alastair MacAulay	
	Anne Middleton	Via Teams
	Nawal Raza-Malik	
	Rosh Sellahewa	
	Tim Stokes	Chair
	Rosh Sellahewa	Vice Chair
In Attendance:	Nuweed Razaq	Deputy Principal
	Barbara Maude	Clerk to the Board of Trustees

ITEM	AGENDA DESCRIPTION	ACTION
1.	<p>Apologies for Absence & Declarations of Interest</p> <p>The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. It was confirmed that the meeting was quorate. Anne Middleton joined the meeting via Teams. Apologies had been received from Ben Ramdhony who was unwell; and Tracy Hampton and Gary Botha both of whom had prior work commitments. The apologies were agreed.</p> <p>The Clerk also advised that Cullum Mitchell had tendered his resignation with immediate effect. Cullum Mitchell had been in touch with both the Chair and the Principal to advise that having taken up a Headship he had discovered that his weekly SLT meetings now clashed with Board meetings and he would be unable to attend future Trustee Board meetings. Regrettably, he had come to the conclusion that he would have to step down from the Board. It was noted that his resignation was therefore effective from today. The Chair and the Principal recorded their thanks to Cullum Mitchell who had been a valued member of the Board for many years.</p> <p>No Trustee or member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) declared any pecuniary or other direct or indirect personal interest in any item on the agenda.</p>	
2.	<p>Introduction</p> <p>The Chair outlined the strategic intent of the meeting which was primarily to review and approve the Financial Statements for the year ending 31st August 2024.</p>	-

3.	<p>Minutes of the Previous Meeting</p> <p>The Board received the minutes of the previous meeting held on 6th November 2024. The minutes were agreed and approved for signature.</p>	-																				
4.	<p>Matters arising</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="197 331 1305 573"> <thead> <tr> <th>Item</th> <th>Action</th> <th>By whom</th> <th>By when</th> <th>Status</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td></td> <td>All remaining Trustees to complete Safeguarding training 2024 and declarations on GH</td> <td>All</td> <td>ASAP</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>Trustee Self-Assessment Report & QIP</td> <td>BMA/All</td> <td>Item 9</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>Circulate to Trustees BFR's Movember link</td> <td>BMA</td> <td>ASAP</td> <td>Completed</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>In terms of matters arising, the Clerk advised that three Trustees were still to complete their annual Safeguarding training namely, Rosh Sellahewa, Anne Middleton and Tracy Hampton. They were encouraged to complete this as soon as possible. Anne Middleton advised that she had difficulties in being able to access the external training link and was therefore due to come into College to complete the training on a College laptop later in the week.</p> <p>The Trustee Self-Assessment Report and QIP for 2024/25 was on the agenda for consideration later in the meeting.</p> <p>The Principal reported that he had raised over £500 via his Movember link for Prostate Cancer and thanked Trustees for supporting his chosen charity.</p>	Item	Action	By whom	By when	Status		All remaining Trustees to complete Safeguarding training 2024 and declarations on GH	All	ASAP			Trustee Self-Assessment Report & QIP	BMA/All	Item 9			Circulate to Trustees BFR's Movember link	BMA	ASAP	Completed	
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TEACHING, LEARNING & ASSESSMENT																						
5.	<p>The Deputy Principal presented an update on enrolment data for 2024/25 and the number and reasons for student withdrawals to date.</p> <p>In terms of enrolment data then overall the number of students enrolled as at November 2024 was 1,707. This compared to 1,486 in 2023/24; 1,385 in 2022/23 and 1,446 in 2021/22. A student cohort of 1,707 was a 15% increase on the same time last year.</p> <p>In addition, a bigger second year cohort next year was likely to see the College come very close to capacity.</p> <p>The College had also seen an increase in student applications for 2025/26 with over 600 students already interviewed. Management were thinking strategically on how increased numbers could be accommodated and this formed part of the weekly executive meetings and would also be the focus for the upcoming SLT Away Day.</p> <p>Management advised that in terms of the January 2025 exams, the Conference Room would, for example, be used as a classroom as pressure was being exerted on College areas to accommodate the space requirements of the exam timetable.</p> <p>In terms of student withdrawals, only 6 students had withdrawn from College after the start of their courses this year. This compared to 18 in 2023/24 and 13 in 2022/23. Furthermore, the 6 withdrawals were all for genuine and supported reasons, with 2 students withdrawing for health reasons and 2 moving to another College/returning to their previous school.</p> <p>The Board enquired about the process should a student wish to join the College in their</p>																					

second year and the Deputy Principal advised that normally a student would have to restart a course from the first year but it did very much depend upon the individual circumstances. It might be possible to join in the second year but it would depend, for example, upon the course and the exam board. Whilst it did occasionally happen, the circumstances were quite rare.

The Board also enquired whether the College had seen an increase in the number of applications received from students who had previously been educated at private schools. Management advised that they had not currently seen any increase and neither had fellow S7 colleagues although the 20% VAT increase on private school fees may not have fully impacted as yet.

The Deputy Principal presented the complaints log and it was noted that for this academic year to date there had been 6 formal complaints.

The first complaint related to a parent wanting her daughter to be moved to a different Business class with a specific teacher. Initially, this could not be accommodated but due to the action taken in relation, in part, to Complaint Number 4 (which related to a Business teacher) a teacher left and a consequence was that one of the classes needed to collapse which allowed the complainant in Number 1 to be allocated the teacher she had requested.

Management explained that a Business teacher who was still on their probationary period and was subject to Capability processes had their contract terminated and this had effectively concluded complaint number 1 and 4.

Complaint number 2 related to a student who claimed she was being punished by association. The student had brought an intruder on site who in turn had asked other students if they were interested in purchasing drugs. CCTV had captured the student and the associate walking into the College grounds and approaching students. An appeal against the decision had been rejected by the Principal and the complaint closed.

Management did advise that following this particular complaint they intended to review the process to see if an appeal should ultimately be made to a panel.

In terms of complaint number 4 this related to a situation over a student achieving low scores in Maths and their teacher suggesting he considered alternative courses. Poor communication between the parent and the HoD had exacerbated the situation which had been resolved by a facilitated meeting between the parent, the HoD and Terry Wilks, Director of Learning and Teaching Innovation, to clarify the situation and provide further reassurance. No further action was taken.

Complaint 5 related to a Health & Safety issue with a student suffering an accident with a spray gun but the investigation had established that the student herself caused the accident by pushing an object into the nozzle which had resulted in the spray going straight into her eyes. The parent had been informed and the matter closed.

The final complaint was in respect of an exclusion due to poor attendance which was currently being investigated by the Principal and was therefore ongoing. Of the six complaints, 5 had been closed.

The Board commended management on the very small number of complaints received. Given the fact that the College had over 1,700 students this was considered to be an incredibly small number of complaints.

	<p>The Principal presented the CPD update which summarised the CPD undertaken by College staff since the start of term. The Board enquired about the Woking Education Research Group (WERG) which was a group of 8 staff conducting action research (for example enhancing a sense of belonging in the classroom/essay writing – from the brain to the mouth to the hand to the page) and their findings would be shared with the wider staff in March 2025. An additional 5 members of staff would join the WERG after Christmas.</p> <p>The Board resolved to receive the following reports:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enrolment Data & reasons for student withdrawals 2024/25 2. Complaints Log - Executive Summary Report 3. Continuing Professional Development Update 	
PRINCIPAL'S REPORT		
6.	<p>The Board received the Principal's termly report and the Principal gave an oral summary of the key highlights. It was noted that the report now included an update on IT network developments which would be included in all future reports.</p> <p>In terms of the College's KPI position, then overall attendance stood at 97.1% (96.6/97.9).</p> <p>16-19 students on roll as already noted stood at 1707 (1473/1371). Retention was at 99.6%; applications of 1,645 at the time the report was prepared had now increased to 1,680 and interviews completed when the report was written were 460 but currently had surpassed 600.</p> <p>The Board noted both the attendance figure (97.1%) and the retention figure (99.6%) which were both extremely positive. The Principal confirmed that attendance and retention were monitored on a daily basis. Although there were invariably a few bumps after assessment days, management were pleased (but not complacent) about the data.</p> <p>In terms of retention, the Board discussed the recent 4 admin days together with the 2 reading days that students had been given and whether this had impacted retention. The Principal advised that the decision had not been taken lightly. The 6 days amounted to 4 days for teachers to mark the assessments that had been completed and then 2 days to prepare for the academic tutoring days. The Principal advised that the College had not seen a drop out after this period. The decision had been taken to seek to achieve a balance between the needs of staff and the needs of students. Teachers needed additional time to mark student's assessments and students had all been set an appropriate amount of work to complete within those days. It was also confirmed that on the two additional reading days, all staff were on site.</p> <p>The Principal advised that he had sent a short video message to parents advising them of the reasons why students were not going to be in College for those days. It was suggested that next year, it might be advisable to emphasise that the 4 admin days related to the impact of assessments and the time that was needed for teachers to be able to mark those assessments. This element may not have been entirely clear to all in the video message. The Principal also said that for next year, the College would make sure that the LRC was open as a quiet study space for those students who were unable to work at home.</p> <p>In terms of applications for 2025/26, the Principal advised that the College would ensure that there was a consistent message being relayed to applicants attending for interview from January 2025. The message would be that the College could not guarantee that they would</p>	

get their first choice of course. They would ensure that applicants knew they could be put on a waiting list.

The Principal highlighted that the SFCA had just published AI in Education which was the result of collaborative work with experts across the country and provided information and guidance on topics such as saving on workload demands and keeping up to date with the rapidly evolving technology. The College had appointed Vladimir Bolla-Bolla, Head of IT and Computing to oversee the roll-out of AI across the College. The report also contained a section on the IT and Digital Strategy Team and the progress the team had been making over the last 12 months towards refreshing aging desktop and laptop inventory and getting core systems compliant with government Cybersecurity requirements.

On a funding and financial update, it had been confirmed that colleges and schools would be compensated for the increase in employer national insurance contributions. However, the extent and nature of this compensation would not be known until 2025.

It was noted that the government had increased the cap on university tuition fees to £9,535 which would take effect for 2025 university entrants.

In terms of the Gatsby benchmarks, new guidance had been issued in respect of good careers guidance and the College would be reviewing their approach in light of those changes. The Principal encouraged Trustees to look through the careers guidance that was issued weekly and was now in the form of an interactive Padlet Board. The link had been circulated on GovernorHub and those Trustees who had already seen it, confirmed that it was highly informative and professional. The Principal also advised the Board that it had been agreed to have an apprenticeship section on the Excellence Programme from January 2025.

The Principal explained that there had been no strike action at the College. The NEU had balloted members for strike action for sixth form colleges which were not covered by the government's additional pay funding (unlike the College which was a 16-19 Academy). Any pay rise for College staff would be delayed until the NJC had agreed a settlement across the sector. The Principal advised that he had kept all staff informed and the College would put through the December pay roll earlier this year on the 19th December to help staff.

The Principal advised that whilst it had been noted in his report that there had been no health and safety accidents or site issues the Complaints log had referenced a spray gun incident and a student bringing another person on site. Unfortunately, those two incidents had not been cross referenced so reporting procedures would be reviewed. Unfortunately, it highlighted that the College did need more site and health and safety staff as the team were under staffed but the College was finding that site team members were difficult to recruit.

FINANCE & AUDIT COMMITTEE

<p>7.</p>	<p>The Board reviewed the minutes of the Finance and Audit Committee meeting which had been held on Wednesday 20th November 2024. The Acting Chair of the Committee for the Board meeting (Gary Botha) was not present, so in his absence the Chair of the Committee (who had not been at the meeting) highlighted some of the key points from the meeting that were set out in the minutes. He was assisted in this regard by the Chair of the Board who had been at the meeting.</p> <p>It was noted that the Committee had held a closed session with both the financial statements auditors and the internal auditors without management present. The Committee had been advised that in terms of internal audit, the Audit Manager reported that all the scheduled audits had been completed, the reports were straightforward and had been finalised and the annual Internal Audit Plan for 2024/25 was ready for the Committee to approve. In terms of the financial statements audit, again, this had been completed without incident, the process had run well with no issues and it was reported that the College was in good shape with nothing of concern to highlight.</p> <p>In terms of a headline summary, Paul Creasey, Lead Audit Partner of the Financial Statements Auditors, had advised the Committee that the report contained an unqualified audit opinion and an unqualified regularity opinion. Generally, the College was in a good financial shape and no modifications were proposed to their audit opinion. There were no matters to report regarding the adoption of the going concern basis.</p> <p>Overall, the financial statements auditor had advised that the impact of growth had brought challenges with the possibility of an operating deficit in 2025/26; reserves were in place but lower than in previous years and if next year proved financial challenging, the option may be for the College to rein back on any capital projects.</p> <p>There were no adjustments to note and it was suggested that senior management could be pleased with such a 'clean' audit.</p> <p>Overall, the Internal Audit Manager advised that the low number of recommendations was a credit to College management. In addition, when benchmarked against other similar audits, the College were consistently coming out with a lower number of recommendations. All of the reports showed a very strong level of assurance.</p> <p>The Committee had also discussed the fact that reserves had dipped below the agreed threshold of £500k. The Finance & Estates Director advised that she had been fully aware that this would happen and it was due to timing. The dip was momentary but if it were to happen again, she asked the Committee what protocol should be followed to notify them about this in advance. The Committee had agreed that email notification to the Committee members would be sufficient with a brief explanation as to the reasons why reserves had dipped below threshold.</p> <p>In terms of CIF bids and capital projects, management were concentrating their efforts on submitting a CIF bid for the main block roof as this was the number one priority. At present, approximate costings were not known, but it was likely to be in the region of £1m and the College would have to pay a contribution towards those works if successful. The reserves would ordinarily have been used to pay the contribution but this was not possible so the Finance and Estates Director was exploring other options such as a CIF loan.</p> <p>The Committee had also reviewed both the Risk Management Annual Report for 2023/24 and the Risk Register for 2024/25 noting the mid-year progress update and the RAG rating assigned to each risk. The Committee had been pleased to note that no risk had been RAG</p>	
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	<p>rated red – all of the risks were either amber or green. Those that had been RAG rated Amber were due to the timings of actions during the course of the College year.</p> <p>After review, the Board resolved:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To note the Minutes of the Finance & Audit Committee meeting held on 20th November 2024; 2. To receive the October 2024 Management Accounts; 3. To approve the Financial Statements for the year ending 31st August 2024; 4. To approve Azet’s Audit Findings Report and the Letter of Representation; and 5. To note the Risk Management & Board Assurance Annual Report & Risk Register 2024/25 	
GOVERNANCE		
8.	<p>Trustee Self-Assessment Report</p> <p>Prior to the meeting, Trustees had been asked to complete the NGA Skills Audit and then to review the statements in the Board Evaluation exercise (which focussed on Trust Board effectiveness) and to reflect upon the areas of improvement that the Board would like to focus on for 2024/25. The identified areas would then be incorporated into the Trustee Self-Assessment Report 2023/24 and be the focus for Board improvement within the Quality Improvement Plan 2024/25.</p> <p>After consideration, the Board agreed that training would be its main focus for the year ahead. This recognised that a number of new Trustees had joined the Board and whilst bringing with them a breadth of professional skills, not all had served as governors or Trustees previously. The first focus would therefore be on ensuring that Trustees had an appropriate induction programme available to provide them with the necessary support. The second focus would be on training that had been identified through the recent skills audit and highlighted as areas suitable for whole Board training. The third element was on ensuring College specific training was available to any Trustee who required greater understanding or depth of knowledge that arose from their involvement with the College, for example, through the Link Trustee Scheme or arising out of attendance at SAR meetings.</p> <p>Training needs were therefore identified as induction, whole board and College specific. The Clerk would identify the costs of subscribing to GovernorHub Knowledge/The Key and/or the NGA or similar so that online bespoke training resources could be easily accessed by Trustees.</p> <p>Governor Day – Wednesday 29th January 2025</p> <p>The Board discussed the format and content of the planned Governor Day on 29th January 2025. The Principal re-circulated the schedule of SLT responsibilities which now included a section to identify the Trustee Link. All Trustees, who had not yet expressed a wish to link with an SLT member were asked to identify their top 3 choices and share those with the Clerk who would then allocate links on a first come first served basis.</p> <p>It was also considered helpful if the Link Trustee protocol could be shared again with Board members.</p> <p>As to the day itself, the format proposed was that there should ideally be a pre visit conversation between the SLT member and their Trustee link (s) and then there would be an opportunity to do a link visit on the 29th January, a tour of the College and staff and student forums.</p> <p>In respect of Erica Ehoru, the Principal advised that she had been successfully appointed as a</p>	<p>ALL</p> <p>BMA</p>

	<p>Progress Mentor with effect from 6th January 2025. Erica Ehoró was currently elected as one of the two parent Trustees but from the start of next term she would technically become a College employee.</p> <p>The Board were advised that the Academy Trust Handbook stated that employees should not serve as Trustees (other than the Principal) but it was a 'should' not rather than a 'must' not. The Articles of Association stated that Trustees could be employed by the College but their employment was subject to certain conditions such as their appointment process had to be fair and that they should excuse themselves from discussions on salaries, contracts, performance etc.</p> <p>Therefore, a Trustee being an employee was possible although it was not the DfE's preferred advice.</p> <p>The Board having considered all the circumstances and whilst noting the DfE's advice, considered that it was appropriate for Erica Ehoró to remain as a Trustee. She had not as yet taken up her post as a Progress Mentor and it was only appropriate that she had the opportunity to settle into her new role as a College employee. It was agreed that she should continue in office until the end of the current academic year at which time the situation could be reviewed to assess whether continuing in post was something that both she and the Board considered appropriate.</p>	
<p>10.</p>	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>As it was recommended that a termly Safeguarding Report from the designated Safeguarding Link should be made to the Board, Anne Middleton, gave an oral summary of her recent visit in November to the College. Overall, she advised that there was nothing to flag up to the Board as a concern. Systems and processes were working well and the Safeguarding Team remained very busy. There was ongoing collaborative work with Papyrus UK, a suicide prevention charity, in terms of awareness and training for staff and also research into wellbeing being conducted by Cambridge and Sheffield Universities and the setting up of a Menopause Support Group for staff.</p> <p>One item that was discussed was whether students could access inappropriate material via Smart TVs. Management advised that the College's monitoring and filtering system (Smoothwall) would flag this up but to absolutely certain, management would raise this query with the Director of IT & Digital Strategy.</p> <p>Finally, the Board extended their thanks to Alastair MacAulay who was stepping down from the Board at the end of the calendar year, having completed his term of office. The Chair extended his thanks to Alastair, for his support and commitment to the College over the last four years. Alastair's wise counsel and astute analysis would be greatly missed.</p>	<p>BFR</p>
<p>11.</p>	<p>Date & Time of Next Meetings</p> <p>It was agreed that the next meeting of the Board would take place on Wednesday 29th January 2025. The meeting would form part of the planned Trustee Day to be held on the same day.</p> <p>The Chair closed the meeting at 7.34pm.</p>	