

BOSTON COLLEGE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CORPORATION HELD ON 11 DECEMBER 2024

1. PRESENT

David Earnshaw (Chair), Daran Bland, Gavin Booth (to item 5a), Jacob Cawthorne (from item 2), David Fannin, Claire Foster, Mike Gildersleeves, Nick Hodgkiss, Heather Lee, David Parnell, Nick Worth and Fiona Wrisberg.

Also in attendance: Janet Hemmant (Clerk to the Corporation), Jen Durrant (Executive Director: People - to item 5b), Debbie Holland (Chief Operating Officer), Tom Hughes (Assistant Principal: Quality Performance and Standards), Abid Hussain (Assistant Principal: Student Experience) and Matt Smith (Deputy Principal). Peter Davis (Digital Education Manager) attended for item 3 only.

Apologies for absence were received from Jurate Matulioniene, Katy Priestley and Sandra Williamson.

Meeting attendance: 71%

2. MEMBERSHIP

Members were advised of the nominations of Jacob Cawthorne and Jessica Mellon as student governors. It was agreed that they should be appointed to serve until the end of the 2025-26 academic year.

Jacob Cawthorne joined the meeting at this point.

3. PRESENTATION: USE OF AI TO SUPPORT TEACHER WORKLOAD

Peter Davis, Digital Education Manager, gave a presentation on the use of Artificial Intelligence.

Peter explained where the college is in the implementation of AI and how it can be used to support teachers' work. It was noted that legislation was not keeping up with the development of AI. Gavin Booth asked what the next steps for the college would be and members were advised that a digital survey would be followed up and ways of working with students were being examined. Daran Bland asked about strategies being put in place to ensure that students are still putting effort into their learning and mechanisms for monitoring this were explained. Nick Hodgkiss commented that AI can be used for research but teacher input is needed to ensure that what is being sourced is valid. Jacob Cawthorne advised that he had used Copilot to support research and Peter Davis commented that AI can be used to support critical thinking.

4. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

a) Corporation - 16 October 2024

The Minutes of the meeting held on 16 October 2024 were reviewed and approved as a correct record.

b) Standards Committee - 20 November 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2024 were reviewed.

Daran Bland gave an overview of the committee's discussions at this meeting. External data is planned to become part of the KPI reporting and ESOL developments were reviewed.

c) Audit Committee - 21 November 2024

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2024 were reviewed.

Daran Bland advised that the committee had looked at audit feedback, the control environment, staffing issues and the risk register. The committee has been satisfied with the external audit findings and the accounts.

d) Search and Governance Committee - 25 November 2024

The Minutes of the meeting held on 25 November 2024 were reviewed.

Heather Lee asked members to be prompt in responding to requests for information. Wherever possible, future requests will indicate a required reply date. Claire Foster told members that a LinkedIn post for the recruitment of new governors was being shared.

e) Finance and Resources Committee - 25 November 2024

The Minutes of the meeting held on 25 November 2024 were reviewed.

David Parnell told members that the committee had a lengthy and thorough review of the accounts and also discussed the Estates Strategy.

5. REPORTS

a) Self-Assessment Report

Members received a report and draft self-assessment for 2023-24 from the Principal.

Members were advised that Matt Smith and Tom Hughes had done significant work on the self-assessment. David Earnshaw asked what had changed since the last assessment. Claire Foster advised that High Needs had not been identified as Requires Improvement previously and this is now a focus of attention. Heather Lee asked about the definition of SEND. Claire commented that these learners were either officially or self identified as SEND. Analysis of data on these learners has not been strong enough and the college is working with a consultant to improve this.

Gavin Booth asked what external inputs had fed into the assessment. Matt advised that the judgement is made against an established framework with national data tables being used for comparisons. The college is keen to look at some elements of peer review. Abid Hussain said that the college had done some peer review work on SEND with the Weston-super-Mare and Norwich colleges. Daran Bland suggested that external peer review will help the college identify how to measure progress in SEND. Matt commented that steps are being taken to eliminate attendance gaps to enhance performance.

David Earnshaw asked where the college is in respect of a move to Outstanding. Matt is working on the quality improvement plan which will be a working document showing progress. Heather suggested that governors could spend time at the CPD event looking at how the college could move towards Outstanding.

David Earnshaw commented on an area having no external work experience. Matt advised that reporting in 2024-25 will identify the percentages of external and internal work experience. Tom commented that there had been some excellent work carried out but work experience is not classed as external if college staff are involved. Matt identified some logistical challenges including construction where employers do not admit young learners to their sites. Claire commented that the aim is to get students employment ready.

David Earnshaw asked what had changed since the Ofsted visit. Claire advised of a different approach to attendance and ownership of English and maths. Tom commented that the curriculum planning process has been transformed and includes direct feedback from employers to ensure that the offer is robust. There has been a complete redesign of High Needs provision making it more focused and ambitious. Success coaches have also been introduced to tackle attendance issues.

David Parnell asked how higher performing areas would maintain standards when the focus was on moving others forward. Matt advised that the QIP will track impact and progress for all areas. Tom noted that reviews of professional services areas had also been introduced.

Nick Worth commented that there is a clear commitment to improvement and Daran concurred that the assessments were thorough and well-articulated. Fiona Wrisberg noted that this was the first year with Senior Learning Leads having broader responsibility and Claire commented that there was a clear commitment within this group to improvement.

Members noted that the QIP would be available at the next meeting and agreed to approve the self-assessment including the proposed grades. ●

Gavin Booth left the meeting at this point.

b) Human Resources Annual Report 2023-24

Members received a report from the Executive Director: People.

Members reviewed the detail of the report and were advised by Jen Durrant that high rates of staff turnover was a common issue for colleges and the college had seen an increase in staff leaving within the first year of employment. Claire Foster said that the college was looking at onboarding arrangements and Daran Bland commented on the arrangements for supporting new staff which the Standards committee had looked at.

In response to a query from David Earnshaw, it was confirmed that implementation of the iTrent software was going well. There had been some hidden costs but the college was now able to access a support network which was helpful. Feedback from staff has been good and Nick Hodgkiss commented on the improvements the software had introduced for managers. It was noted that there was some inconsistency in the data analysis arising from the integration of legacy data with information from the new system which will not be seen in future.

c) Principal's

Members received a report from the Principal on sector and college issues.

Claire Foster noted that there were number of government initiatives impacting on the college. Nick Worth suggested that once appointed the mayor will hold an influential position. Mike Gildersleeves raised the possibility of opportunities linking the skills agenda and DWP funding.

Information on the balanced scorecard was reviewed and it was noted that this was a work in progress. The information presented is also being discussed in committees.

d) Finance

Members received a report from the Chief Operating Officer which included annual accounts for 2023-24 with supporting documents, information on the financial position at 31 October 2024 and the risk management report for 2023-24.

Debbie Holland advised members that the accounts had been considered by Finance and Resources and Audit committees and all outstanding matters had now been resolved. There were no post-balance sheet events.

Having reviewed the information presented, members confirmed compliance with the requirements for signing off the accounts, agreed to approve the annual accounts and authorised signature of the management representations. Members confirmed their acceptance of the Audit committee's annual report which included the internal audit annual report, the internal audit plan and the external audit findings.

In looking at the management accounts, Mike Gildersleeves asked how National Insurance cost increases were being treated. Debbie advised that it was currently assumed that the costs would be fully covered by additional public sector funding. It was noted that staff pay will be reviewed again in the next quarter. ●

Members noted that the top risk on the risk register was a cyber attack and that training on this was imminent. Inflation is a decreasing risk and funding certainty an increasing risk. Claire Foster commented that there was concern about insufficient funds potentially being available particularly with the ESFA no longer responsible for adult funding once this moved to local authority control following devolution.

e) Governance

Members received a report from the Clerk to the Corporation.

A legacy provision in the Instrument of Government for nominees of the CE of Skills Funding to have places on the Board was noted to be superfluous and it was agreed that the Instrument should be amended to remove this.

Members considered a recommendation from the Search and Governance committee that an application from Shruti Trivedi to become a governor should be approved. It was agreed that she should be appointed for a four-year term commencing at the Corporation meeting in March 2025.

The annual report of the Search and Governance committee was accepted and a discussion took place about perceptions of board diversity. It was noted that skills in finance, accounting and audit were currently being sought and it was suggested that skills in cybersecurity might be accessed through an appointment with experience in the RAF. The draft governance self-assessment for 2023-24 was reviewed and approved.

Committee vacancies were considered and it was agreed that Mike Gildersleeves should be appointed to the Finance and Resources and Search and Governance committees and that Jacob Cawthorne should be appointed to the Standards committee.

f) Safeguarding and Wellbeing

Members received a report from the Assistant Principal: Student Experience.

Abid Hussain advised members that data was still being produced from a combination of manual and digital systems and work was continuing to improve the quality of reporting. MyConcern is proving to be very effective on the ground but overall performance reporting still needs some work. The level of concerns raised is similar to last year. David Earnshaw asked what the learners felt about the system and Jacob Cawthorne reported that there had been some reservations but the overall impact was to make students feel safer.

Daran Bland suggested that there was an opportunity to identify data which would be useful for governors and Heather Lee suggested that national comparators would be helpful. Fiona Wrisberg suggested that there was an opportunity to create data comparison snapshots. Mike Gildersleeves asked whether issues identified mirrored the council's experience. Claire Foster advised that regional concerns are being looked at with the Crime Commissioner. External feedback to the college has included comments on how safe it feels on the campuses.

g) SEND

Members received a report from the SEND Managers which was presented by the Assistant Principal: Student Experience.

Abid Hussain told governors that there would be a further report later in the year. Nick Worth asked about the implications or risks of the challenges in recruiting Learning Support Assistants. Claire Foster advised that the college has to provide support to learners and was finding ways to tackle the issue. The sector skills work academy approach had proved useful and the college was looking at further ways of accessing the market for these staff.

h) Learner Views

Members received a report from the Assistant Principal, Quality, Performance and Standards.

Members noted the feedback from learners. Tom Hughes advised that the college was looking at timetabling to improve learner satisfaction. David Earnshaw commented that it was good to see the response rates increasing.

i) HE Annual Monitoring Report 2023-24

Members received a report from the HE Quality Manager which was presented by the Assistant Principal, Quality, Performance and Standards.

Members noted that it is felt that a move to a two-year curriculum plan for higher education will be positive. Matt Smith identified a need to understand the motivation of learners to take higher education courses at Boston College.

j) OfS Reportable Events

Matt Smith confirmed that there was nothing to report.

6. **ACTION LOG**

Members reviewed progress made against items in the action log. It was noted that due diligence work on Haven Wharf was continuing.

7. **CAREERS**

David Parnell gave some feedback on his work linking with Careers where he had seen a visit to the college by Action Jackson which had been extremely well received and worthwhile.

8. **NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Corporation and the CPD event will take place on 12 March 2025.