

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE BOARD OF ACTIVATE LEARNING
HELD AT THE READING CAMPUS ON 15 JULY 2019

PRESENT:	Tracey James (7/8) Sally Dicketts (8/8) Ben Sims (6/8) Maire Brankin (7/8) James Dipple (8/8) Malcolm Wicks (7/8) Dermot Mathias (6/8) Pauline Odulinski (6/8) Julia Von Klonowski (6/8) Andy Stone (3/3) Sue Sturgeon (2/2)	Vice Chair, Acting Chair Chief Executive Officer <i>(as indicated in the minutes)</i>
IN ATTENDANCE:	Steve Ball Lee Nicholls	Chief Finance Officer Deputy Chief Executive Officer
CLERK:	Jamie Wade	Clerk to the Corporation

PART I

The meeting started at 16:00.

<u>MINUTE NO.</u>		<u>ACTION</u>
1.	<u>Apologies for Absence</u> Apologies were received from Chris Jones (6/8), Eve James (3/8) and Nina Robinson (5/8).	
2.	<u>Declaration of Interests, Gifts and Hospitality</u> No member declared any interest, gift or hospitality.	
3.	<u>Minutes of the Meeting of 17 June 2019</u> The minutes of the meeting on 17 June 2019, having previously been circulated to the Board, were approved as an accurate record of the meetings. All members were agreed.	
4.	<u>Matters Arising from the Minutes of 01 April 2019</u> The Board noted that all matters arising from the meeting of 17 June 2019 were complete, except for the treatment of income from The Oxford Partnership (TOP), which would be addressed at the December meeting.	
	<i>AS joined the meeting at 16:05.</i>	

MINUTE
NO.

ACTION

5.

Deep Dive – Improvement Plan: 201819 Update and 201920 Plan

The Board received the Quality Improvement Plan for Further Education and Skills and the DCEO presented an overview of key points. The DCEO highlighted the respective Ofsted grades of the pre-merger entities and the Board noted that, although the newly merged Activate Learning was considered to have no grading, the organisation would continue to reference its previous report for the purpose of bids and similar matters. The DCEO also highlighted key changes to the new Education Inspection Framework.

The DCEO presented that predicted achievement levels for 2018/19, with confidence intervals, and the Board considered how the predictions were defined and the factors underlying the confidence levels. The Board noted the breakdown of retention levels, as compared with 2017/18, including a 5% drop in the Academic and Professional Studies faculty as compared with incremental gains in all other faculties. This drop was attributed to changes to the A Level framework, and the Board were assured that the statistics did not represent a high number of students becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training), but rather that the choice to drop one out of four A Levels at year 2 was recorded as a withdrawal under the new framework.

The DCEO presented indicative performance in apprenticeships, highlighting problem areas; the Board agreed that insufficient progress was being made, but were assured that measures were in place to drive ongoing improvement. The Board briefly considered whether a narrowing of focus may contribute to expedited improvement, but noted that the scope of apprenticeships offered had already been narrowed as a result of the Apprenticeship Strategy in 2018. The Board noted that there were decisions to be made by the Executive Team about the delivery of Construction and some Engineering apprenticeships, which had been devolved to Faculty. The Board queried whether lessons could be learnt from higher performance in Bracknell & Wokingham (BWC) apprenticeships, noting that stability of staffing and well established frameworks were contributing factors, but also that the delivery model had not been financially sustainable. The Board sought and received assurance about the reasons behind the transfer of apprentices from one major employer to another provider. The Board considered whether there were strong providers from whom improvement strategies could be drawn, and were assured that this was being achieved through partnerships under the Strategic College Improvement Fund.

The DCEO highlighted recommendations for improvement from the previous Ofsted reports, noting that standalone themes in the BWC and Guildford College Group (GCG) reports were largely addressed by the mergers. Common themes in all three reports (apprenticeship timely achievement and consistent student progress through stretch and challenge) were the focus of Teaching & Learning events across the Group.

The DCEO outlined the key areas of focus for the 2019/20 Improvement Plan: apprenticeship timely achievement; retention in the first 6 weeks; retention in key faculties; and implementing the Learning Philosophy. The Board considered the key strategies for achieving those aims, and noted the importance of embedding and promoting career pathways, measures for overall engagement with learning (rather than just classroom attendance), and ensuring relevant work experience. The Board briefly considered whether a tailored improvement plan would be required for BWC, but were assured that

the embedding of the faculty structure meant that a combined plan for the Oxfordshire and Berkshire Colleges would be sufficient.

The Board agreed that the right areas were being addressed and noted the outcomes in Appendix 1, against which performance would be measured on a termly basis. The Board noted that targets for timely achievement in apprenticeships were not ambitious enough to ensure being ahead of national average in three years' time, and considered the balance between ambitious and achievable targets.

The Board noted that some targets for 2019/20 appeared flat-lined from 2018/19 due to inclusion of the merged institutions. The Board approved the quality targets for 2019/20, subject to the review of apprenticeship targets to ensure achievable stretch targets. It was agreed that when the 2019/20 Improvement Plan was presented for approval, it would include a revised set of targets for 2020/21 onwards and a breakdown of actions and milestones, with simple RAG rating. **All members were agreed.**

Action: Review 2019/20 apprenticeship performance targets to ensure achievable stretch targets

DCEO

Action: Review quality targets from 2020/21 onwards to ensure alignment with strategic KPIs

DCEO

The meeting was adjourned at 17:05 and reconvened at 17:15.

6.

2019/20 Budget

Activate Learning Budget 2019/20

The Board received the 2019/20 Budget Update and the CFO provided a recap of the Activate Learning 2019/20 budget (excluding Surrey Colleges). The CFO highlighted the risks and opportunities contained in the budget and assured the Board that, where possible and desirable, opportunities and mitigations were being explored.

Surrey Colleges Budget 2019/20

The Board received the Surrey Colleges 2019/20 Budget and the CFO highlighted the £600k budget deficit which, as compared with a £2.3m deficit in 2018/19, represented significant gains arising from merger efficiencies and the restructure of Group Services in Surrey. It was noted that the budget was slightly ahead of the forecast submitted to the Transaction Unit (TU) and that, despite the budget deficit, the Surrey Colleges were expected to be cash generative in 2019/20.

The CFO advised that an update on the planning variations which would enable sale of the Farnham Tennis Courts was expected that week; if the planning were granted the sale could proceed, and this could expedite the availability of funds for investment in the Surrey Colleges. The Board considered staffing levels in the Surrey Colleges, as compared with Activate Learning and market norms, and noted that there was a further saving of up to £1.5m to be made from restructuring curriculum staff in Autumn 2019.

Activate Learning Group Budget 2019/20

The CFO presented the combined Group budget for 2019/20, highlighting the budget deficit, positive cash position (arising primarily from income from TOP)

**MINUTE
NO.**

ACTION

and 'good' ESFA financial health. The Board considered the reporting requirements for the TU, and were assured that the TU was primarily concerned with cash position and received quarterly updates.

The CFO briefly outlined the opportunities for investment, which amounted to an estimated £600k in total. The Board considered whether the investment was sufficient, and were advised that, given the timescales available and current workloads, the cost of investment was yet to be fully scoped, but the Executive Team would not recommend a greater deficit than was proposed. In light of the ESFA budget submission deadline, the Board approved the Group Budget 2019/20 and the proposed investment subject to the provision and future approval of full business cases with return on investment targets. **All members were agreed.**

Action: Provide business plans, including return on investment targets, for proposed 2019/20 investments

CFO

7. Finance and Performance

The Board received the Finance Update – May 2019, which was taken as read. The Board sought and received assurance that the 2018/19 Full Year forecast remained as presented at the June meeting.

8. CEO Report

The Board received the CEO Report, which was taken as read. The CEO highlighted news from the Heston Blumenthal launch and Radio 4 interview.

9. Learning Re-Imagined KPIs (Away Day Follow Up)

The Board received and considered the updated Learning Re-Imagined Targets for 2022, particularly considering whether the First Choice for Business measures would be effective; it was noted that there were no established measures for this aspect of the strategy and therefore the effectiveness of the measures would be monitored. The Board recommended that alumni tracking compared destinations against aspiration for a more robust measurement. The Board approved the updated Learning Re-imagined Key Performance Indicators. **All members were agreed.**

10. Minutes of Committees

Audit & Risk Committee

The Board received the draft minutes of the meeting of the Audit & Risk Committee on 26 June 2019, noting some minor updates to the draft received.

The Board received and approved the Internal Audit Plan 2019/20, which was recommended by the Committee. **All members were agreed.**

The Board received and approved the External Audit Plan 2018/19, which was recommended by the Committee. **All members were agreed.**

The Board received and approved the Bracknell & Wokingham College Final Financial Statements, which was recommended by the Committee. **All members were agreed.**

MINUTE
NO.

ACTION

Search & Governance

The Chair of the Search & Governance Committee provided a verbal update from the meeting of the Committee on 15 July 2019. The Board noted that a new link governor structure had been approved and were asked to review the role descriptions, when circulated, and submit expressions of interest for those roles that would be of interest; it was noted that some roles were already being fulfilled by existing link governors.

Action: Circulate the link governor role descriptions to Governors and invite expressions of interest

Clerk

The Board received and approved the Committee's recommendation for the renewal of Chris Jones' term of office as member and Chair of the Corporation. **All members were agreed.**

The Chair of the Committee advised the Board that the Committee had discussed the FE Commissioner's recommendation that FE Corporations establish a Finance Committee and issue monthly management accounts to Governors. The Committee expressed confidence in the information received from the Executive Team, whereby causes for concern were routinely flagged for the Board's attention. In light of this and the success of the Carver model, which ensured that all Governors had visibility of and responsibility for the financial stability of the organisation, the Committee recommended and the Board agreed that the current structure be retained. **All members were agreed.**

11. Corporation Schedule of Business 2019/20

The Board received and approved the 2019/20 Schedule of Business. The Board requested that agenda item titles be reviewed to reflect a focus on quality. **All members were agreed.**

Action: Review the Board agenda item titles to reflect a focus on quality

Clerk

12. Policies

The Board received and approved the Policy Approval Schedule, which was recommended by the Committee, and noted work underway to improve the policy environment of Activate Learning. **All members were agreed**

The Board received and approved Anti- Corruption & Bribery Policy and Financial Regulations. **All members were agreed.**

13. Use of Corporation Seal

There were no uses of the Corporation Seal to report.

14. Health and Safety Report

The Board received and noted the Health & Safety update.

15. Any Other Business

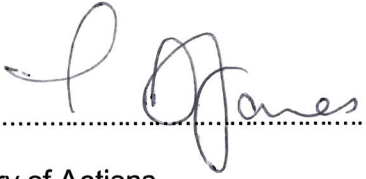
No other business was raised.

16. Dates

The Board noted the dates of the upcoming meetings.

The meeting closed at 18:30.

Chair



Date 30/9/19.....

Summary of Actions

Action	Responsible
Review 2019/20 apprenticeship performance targets to ensure achievable stretch targets	DCEO
Review quality targets from 2020/21 onwards to ensure alignment with strategic KPIs	DCEO
Provide business plans, including return on investment targets, for proposed 2019/20 investments	CFO
Circulate the link governor role descriptions to Governors and invite expressions of interest	Clerk
Review the Corporation agenda item titles to reflect a focus on quality	Clerk