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Meeting date: **19 April 2021**

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Venue: **Microsoft Teams**

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**PRESENT:**

Sue Sturgeon (4/4)	Chair of the Corporation
Dermot Mathias (4/4)	Vice Chair of the Corporation
Sally Dicketts (4/4)	Chief Executive Officer
Pauline Odulinski (4/4)	
Malcolm Wicks (4/4)	
Julia von Klonowski (4/4)	
Andy Stone (4/4)	
Emma Shipp (4/4)	
David Goosey (3/4)	
Ben Sims (4/4)	
Angela Adimora (3/3)	<i>As indicated in the minutes</i>
Kathy Slack (3/3)	
Jamie Edge (3/3)	<i>As indicated in the minutes</i>
Megan Henderson (3/3)	<i>As indicated in the minutes</i>

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

Steve Ball	Chief Finance Officer
Lee Nicholls	Deputy Chief Executive Officer
Cheri Ashby	Group Executive Director
Bernard Grenville-Jones	Group Executive Director
Gill Davidson	Group Executive Director
Fiona Stilwell	Managing Director, Activate Apprenticeships
Paul Newman	Group Executive Director
Jon Adams	Group Executive Director
Shivender Parmar	Teacher, AaPS

**CLERK:**

Faith Hanks	Governance Executive Assistant and Interim Clerk to the Corporation
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## MINUTES

The meeting started at 16:00.

**MINUTE  
NO.**

**ACTION**

1.

**Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from John Cope (3/4) and it was noted that Jamie Edge, Angela Adimora and Megan Henderson would be joining the meeting slightly late. It was noted that Shivender Parmar was present as an observer.

The Chair informed the Board that Tracey James and James Dipple had resigned from the Board.

2.

**Declarations of Interests, Gifts and Hospitality**

No member declared any interest, gift or hospitality.

**MINUTE**  
**NO.**

**ACTION**

**3. Minutes of the Meeting of 01 February 2021**

The minutes of the meeting of 01 February 2021, having previously been circulated to the Board, were approved as an accurate record of the meeting. **All members were agreed.**

**4. Matters Arising from the Minutes of 01 February 2021**

The Clerk provided an update on the matters arising from the meeting of 01 February 2021, and noted that all actions were complete.

The Chair informed the Board that Lee Nicholls would be resigning at the end of the academic year, and noted that a formal farewell would be held at the Governors' Away Day in June.

**5. Strategic Planning Update, Away Day Reflections and any changes in direction from the Group Executive Team**

The CEO provided an overview of the Strategic Planning Principles, and reminded the Board that these were the parameters set when devising the new Strategic Plan. The CEO asked the Board to consider whether the Principles remained relevant given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Board considered the third principle around limiting physical merger opportunities to the South East region. It was noted that growth and merger opportunities would be discussed further at the Governors' Away Day.

*MH joined the meeting at 16:15.*

The Board considered the need to be agile, given the uncertainty caused by the pandemic, and it was suggested that the sixth principle could be amended to state that Activate Learning (AL) aimed to promote agility in "everything we do".

**Action:** Revise the third strategic principle in line with feedback around promoting agility

**Clerk**

**6. Student Voice and Student Feedback**

The Group Executive Director (PN) presented an overview of student feedback collected in line with the annual Student Parliament session, attended by Student Representatives across AL. It was noted that feedback covered four specific themes: online learning, enrolment, employment and skills for jobs, and enrichment.

*Online Learning*

PN noted that students had reported a range of experiences with online learning and that, overall, remote learning did not provide the full student experience compared to on-campus learning, particularly for students on practical courses. It was noted, however, that most students found the Activate Learning Online (ALO) platform and resources both useful and accessible, and students enjoyed aspects of online learning such as freedom. It was also noted that 85% of students reported their experience with online learning as either fair, good or excellent, and no students described their experience as poor.

*Enrolment*

PN noted that enrolment for 2020/21 had largely taken place remotely, with general feedback that the online enrolment form was easy to understand, although feedback indicated that the language used on the form could be more inclusive and accessible.

*Employment and Skills for Jobs*

PN noted that students had found the ALO careers service and UCAS takeover week helpful in providing a thorough understanding of next steps and pathways. PN advised that students had indicated that they would benefit from increased

contact with employers, which had been limited due to the pandemic, including opportunities such as mock interviews, work experience and careers fairs.

*Enrichment*

Due to the impact of the pandemic on enrichment activities, PN noted that students were keen to be provided with more opportunities to attend electives and clubs, and had a desire for more social spaces across the campuses. It was noted that students had provided positive feedback on the online Student Parliament event, which had facilitated cross-campus connections.

PN provided an overview of key learning points gained from the feedback, including: concerns around the communication of timetable changes, general apprehension around the ability for students to successfully complete their courses remotely (particularly for those on practical courses), and the need to more clearly signpost Student Support offices across the campuses.

*AA joined the meeting at 16:37.*

PN advised that feedback and student voice were integral aspects of the new Strategic Plan, and that a review of the student engagement team would be undertaken, particularly in response to student feedback around enrichment. The Board considered the views of students who had not responded to the feedback survey, particularly those of disengaged students who were likely not to have been reached by the survey.

*JE joined the meeting at 16:43.*

7.

**Quality**

The Board received the Curriculum and Quality Improvement Plan Update report, and the DCEO presented a brief overview of progress against the improvement priorities. It was noted that there had been good progress overall against the first improvement strand (Faculties), however there was a slight risk around maintaining the grading for the AaPS faculty, and the consistency of quality across the Technology faculty must be improved further to achieve a grade 2.

LN provided an update on progress around the second improvement strand (Apprenticeships), noting that good progress had been made in managing Performance Coaches, and employer feedback was good. It was also noted that the majority of apprentices had engaged well during lockdown (76%). Despite the improvements, LN noted that the movement to a grade 2 in Apprenticeships remained a risk, as it was likely that achievement rates would not recover to the national average rates until the 2021/22 year.

LN outlined progress against the third improvement strand (Group Services), including the success around attracting candidates to hard to fill vacancies, and gaining useful statistics from the Vacancy Filler platform. It was noted that some progress had been made in understanding and responding to high staff turnover, however improving the completion of exit surveys would help to further understand turnover. The Board considered the reasons for high turnover of staff in particular roles and whether existing staff members could be trained to fulfil the roles, including student leavers.

The Board considered the timely completion of Apprentices, noting that this had been an area of concern in the past. The Managing Director of Activate Apprenticeships advised that catch-up plans were in place for all vocational learners and those who had struggled to complete their learning due to the pandemic, and it was noted that a number of students had not been able to complete their end point assessments due to the temporary closure of assessment centres. The Group Executive Director (BGJ) assured the Board that the Apprenticeships Team were aware of and in regular contact with all learners who were yet to complete their end point assessments.

**MINUTE**  
**NO.**

**ACTION**

**8. Strategy**

The Board received the Strategic KPI Summary, which was taken as read, and the DCEO provided a brief overview of the areas of strong performance and areas of risk. The Board considered the target around adult recruitment, and noted the impact of the pandemic in limiting the ability to reach the target. JVK informed the Board that she had been working with JA and his team and was impressed with how AL were approaching adult recruitment, in terms of the alignment with providing courses that were relevant to relevant employment opportunities and skills shortages.

*The meeting was adjourned at 17:22 and reconvened at 17:32.*

**9. Finance**

The Board received the Finance Update and the CFO presented an overview of the forecast noting that, since the February Corporation meeting, the implications of the pandemic had led to a further reduction in EBITDA. It was noted that the current projection was a 3.1m reduction in EBITDA from the original budget and therefore a 1.4m reduction from the January forecast, which was largely attributed to the Adult Education Budget (AEB) funding clawback, the delay in the launch of the international nursing programme, and the negative effect of the foreign exchange rate on the funds received from The Oxford Partnership (TOP). It was noted that AL were challenging the proposed threshold for the clawback of AEB funding.

The CFO provided an overview of the areas where income reduction was most significant, noting that the majority of these areas were expected to return to being profitable when staff and students had returned to campus in greater numbers. The CFO noted that income losses had been experienced widely across the FE sector as a result of the pandemic, and colleges with diversified income had suffered much greater proportionate income losses.

The Board considered the mitigations outlined in the Finance Update and which would have an impact in the current year, and the CFO noted that it was likely that AL would receive funding for costs incurred as a result of onsite COVID-19 testing. The Board considered the extent to which the pandemic was responsible for the EBITDA reduction, and asked for assurance that the losses would be recovered. The CFO assured the Board that he was confident income streams would recover, and it was noted that the TOP funds would significantly impact cash balance, which was expected to be 17.5m at the end of the year.

**10. Risk Register**

The Board received the Risk Register, which was taken as read.

**11. CEO Report**

The Board received and noted the CEO Report, and the CEO provided a brief update on recruitment and COVID-19. The Board remarked that there had been no COVID-19 cases directly identified on any of the campuses.

*JE left the meeting at 18:08.*

**12. Link Governor Updates**

The Apprenticeships Link Governor (DG) provided a verbal update on recent activity within the Apprenticeships division noting that, although recruitment had fallen slightly due to the pandemic, AL were performing above the national average, and recent employer feedback was positive. DG noted that the areas of focus for the Apprenticeships Team were on setting the right targets for the 2021/22 academic year, and strengthening employer links.

**MINUTE**  
**NO.**

**ACTION**

The International Link Governor (DM) provided a brief update on activity within the International division, noting that the division had suffered significantly as a result of the pandemic. It was noted that restrictions on international travel had prevented various provisions from running, such as the rowing course attended by Chinese students. Despite this, DM noted that the International Team was strong, and there were promising international opportunities such as the Nursing Programme.

**13. Board Dates 2021/22**

The Board received and approved the 2021/22 Schedule of Meetings. **All members were agreed.**

**14. Search and Governance Committee**

The Board received the minutes of the Search and Governance Committee meeting on 29 March 2021, and the Committee Chair provided a brief update on the meeting, noting that KS and MH had joined the Committee.

**15. Use of the Corporation Seal**

The Board received the Use of the Corporation Seal report and approved the following applications of the corporation seal:

- Deed of Indemnity – 08 February 2021
- Transfer Agreement and Transfer Deed – 24 February 2021
- Renewal Lease – 24 February 2021
- Licence to Assign – 16 April 2021

**All members were agreed.**

**16. Policies**

The Board received and approved the following policies:

- Corporate Ethics Policy
- Information Security and Data Protection Policy

**All members were agreed.**

**17. Risk & Compliance**

The Board received the Annual Safeguarding Audit, and the Safeguarding Link Governor (MW) advised that more detail would be provided on the increase in LADO referrals after further investigation, following discussions at the Safeguarding Committee meeting earlier that day. The Board approved the Annual Safeguarding Audit. **All members were agreed.**

**18. Health & Safety Update**

The Board received the Health & Safety report, which was taken as read.

**19. Audit and Risk**

The Board received the minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee meeting on 15 March 2021 and the Board Effectiveness report.

*SP, BS, MH, LN, CA, BGJ, GD, FS, PN and JA left the meeting at 18:20.*

**20. Any Other Business**

No other business was raised.

**21. Dates of Upcoming Meetings**

07 June 2021

19 July 2021

21 – 22 June 2021

**The meeting closed at 18:35.**

Chair .....Date .....

### **SUMMARY OF ACTIONS**

<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsible</b>
Revise the third strategic principle in line with feedback around promoting agility	<b>Clerk</b>