

ACTIVATE LEARNING FURTHER EDUCATION CORPORATION CORPORATION BOARD MEETING

Meeting date: **15 June 2022**

Venue: **Microsoft Teams**

PRESENT:	Sue Sturgeon (6/6)	Chair of the Corporation; <i>as indicated in the minutes</i>
	David Goosey (6/6)	Vice Chair of the Corporation
	Gary Headland (2/2)	Chief Executive Officer
	Pauline Odulinski (6/6)	<i>As indicated in the minutes</i>
	Malcolm Wicks (6/6)	
	Emma Shipp (6/6)	
	James Voûte (6/6)	
	Julia Von Klonowski (4/6)	<i>As indicated in the minutes</i>
	John Cope (3/6)	
	Dan Willis (4/4)	Staff Governor; <i>as indicated in the minutes</i>
	Henry Chukwu (3/4)	Student Governor; <i>as indicated in the minutes</i>
Lesha Chetty (2/2)	<i>As indicated in the minutes</i>	
IN ATTENDANCE:	Steve Ball	Chief Financial Officer
	Cheri Ashby	Deputy Chief Executive Officer
	Bernard Grenville-Jones	Group Executive Director
	Fiona Stilwell	Group Executive Director
	Gill Davidson	Group Executive Director
	Jon Adams	Group Executive Director; <i>as indicated in the minutes</i>
	Paul Newman	Group Executive Director
Faith Hanks	Senior Governance Officer	
CLERK:	Perry Perrott	Director of Governance and Clerk to the Corporation

MINUTES

The meeting started at 17:02.

<u>MINUTE NO.</u>		<u>ACTION</u>
1.	Apologies for Absence	
1.1	Apologies for absence were received from Dermot Mathias (5/6), Kathy Slack (5/6), Elis Blundell (3/4) and Andy Stone (5/6).	
1.2	An update was provided on the Governance Handbook review earlier that week and it was noted that the updated Handbook would be circulated to the Board for discussion at an additional Board meeting over the summer.	
2.	Declarations of Interest, Gifts and Hospitality	
2.1	There were no declarations of interest, gifts or hospitality.	

**MINUTE
NO.**

ACTION

3. Minutes of the Meeting on 13 April 2022

3.1 The Board approved the minutes of the meeting on 13 April 2022, subject to an adjustment to action 2 (rather than a deep dive session, it was agreed that the CEO would review the Risk Register before it was presented to the Board in July), and the addition of a comment from the Chair in section 6 around the consideration of the energy situation. **All members were agreed.**

4. Minutes of the Part II Meeting on 13 April 2022

4.1 The Board approved the minutes of the Part II meeting on 13 April 2022, subject to an adjustment to the numbering in section 5. **All members were agreed.**

5. Matters Arising from the Minutes of 13 April 2022

5.1 The Board received the Matters Arising, noting that all due actions had been completed.

6. Finance

Management Accounts and Year-End Forecast

6.1 The Board received the Finance Update report, which was taken as read, and the CFO provided an update on the latest view which showed a deficit of £2.7m, given the emerging risks around rising inflation and utility costs, the loss of the Tier 4 visa status, and the optimistic forecasting for income streams that had not materialised. It was therefore noted that there were lessons to be learnt for the 2022/23 budget, and the CFO advised that growth assumptions were being carefully considered.

6.2 The CFO noted that the cash balance and financial health remained strong.

LC joined the meeting at 17:13.

6.3 The Board considered whether any of the savings in staff costs could continue into the 2022/23 year, and it was noted that this was being addressed as part of the budget planning process. One Governor asked about the staff to income ratio which was above the FE Commissioner benchmark of 65%. This was in part due to reduced income without being able to make the commensurate reduction in expenditure. The ratio is used as one of the tools to indicate financial health and GET are committed to improving the ratio by both increasing income while also being more efficient and economic in the use of resources. It was important to recognise that the investments that Activate Learning had made on improving the quality and relevance of our education provision (including the investment in new programmes that were subject to lagged funding) had a negative impact on the ratio but were nevertheless good investments. GET also committed to consult with the FE Commissioner team when appropriate to understand good practice across the wider sector.

6.4 The Board also considered the impact of the loss of the Tier 4 visa status, noting that only half of expected international income had been delivered over the period. The Board were assured that, in the context of the sector, Activate Learning's financial position was strong and there were clear mitigations in place, however there was work to do around eliminating the 'optimism bias' across the organisation, including training for budget holders.

6.5 The Board reflected on the discussion, noting that there were clear lessons to be learnt, and the Chair highlighted the importance of ensuring there was capital available to invest in the estates.

The minutes of the remainder of this item are recorded under confidential cover.

DW and HC joined the meeting at 17:52.

7. Quality

Higher Education (HE) Quality Update

7.1 The Board received the HE Quality Update report, which was taken as read, and the DCEO provided an update on the Access and Participation Plan, the additional student funding and the support for the three HE students affected by the loss of the Tier 4 visa status.

7.2 One Governor highlighted the low survey completion rates for Counselling students, and the DCEO advised that, while this was a legacy challenge, there were numerous channels in place to receive feedback from these learners, including focus groups.

7.3 The RAG-rating of targets within the Improvement Plan was praised, however it was noted that the targets marked as 'in progress' should include expected timescales.

7.4 One Governor queried the impact of the new OfS guidance around access plans, and the DCEO noted that Activate Learning was well-placed, particularly with the existing strong links to schools via the Activate Learning Education Trust and the online learning initiatives.

7.5 The Board considered student recruitment for HE courses and it was noted that, while the application rate was as expected for the period, acceptances were lower than expected. It was noted that many of the prospective mature applicants were affected by the rising cost of living, which had affected applicant numbers. It was noted, however, that the summer period usually saw a rise in applications.

SS and JA left the meeting at 18:06 and DG assumed the role of Chair.

7.6 The CEO advised that, while HE was a challenging market, there were emerging opportunities for new programmes including degree-level apprenticeships in policing and business. The DCEO reminded the Board that three of the campuses had been awarded university-centre status, which continued to be promoted to prospective applicants.

7.7 The Student Governor shared an experience in relation to support during his HE course, and the DCEO offered to discuss the feedback with the Student Governor offline. The Student Governor was thanked by the Board for sharing his experience.

Ofsted Preparation Update

7.8 The Board received the Ofsted Preparation report, which was taken as read, and the DCEO thanked Governors for joining the recent Ofsted training session. PO, CP and SS were also thanked for their support so far with the preparation process. It was noted that further training sessions had been scheduled for staff and a safeguarding 'test and review' exercise arranged.

7.9 The Director of Governance asked the Board to look out for updates on BoardEffect in relation to key training and preparation information, and it was

**MINUTE
NO.**

ACTION

noted that Link Governors played a critical role in sharing their observations with the Board.

7.10 One Governor offered to share a sample briefing document containing key questions that Governors were expected to ask in preparation for an inspection.

ACTION: Share the sample inspection briefing document with the Board via BoardEffect

DoG

8. Standing

CEO Report

8.1 The CEO provided a verbal update, noting the success of the recent Group Leadership Team Away Day. The CEO highlighted Safeguarding as a critical focus, given recent incidents, and noted that the Safeguarding Link Governor would be kept updated on any developments.

8.2 The CEO informed the Board of the ONS review of the status of colleges, however it was noted that the implications were unclear at this stage.

Inclusion Link Governor Update

8.3 The Inclusion Link Governor (PO) provided a verbal update on a recent visit to the Reading Campus, and noted that a full report would be shared via BoardEffect.

9. Governance, Risk and Compliance

Away Day Reflections

9.1 The Board briefly discussed their reflections on the Governors' Away Day the previous month, and the Director of Governance informed the Board that the results of the Away Day feedback questionnaire were available on BoardEffect.

Health, Safety and Environment Policy

9.2 The Board received the Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) Policy and the Vice Chair requested that the mobile phone section of the policy was reviewed and updated.

9.3 Subject to the adjustment outlined above, the Board approved the HSE Policy. **All members were agreed.**

ACTION: Review and update the mobile phone section of the HSE Policy

DoG

Use of the Corporation Seal

9.4 There were no new uses of the Corporation Seal to report.

PO and JVK left the meeting at 18:45.

Search & Governance Committee Recommendations

9.5 The Board received and approved the recommendation to extend the terms of office for PO and JVK to 31 July 2023, given their specialist knowledge and to provide continuity whilst preparing for an inspection. **All members were agreed.**

9.6 Board members noted their thanks to PO and JVK for their valuable contributions and continued support.

10. Any Other Business

10.1 The Director of Governance advised that, following the poll circulated to Governors, 2022/23 Board meetings would be held on Tuesdays. It was noted

MINUTE
NO.

ACTION

that the meeting invitations and other Board correspondence would be shared via BoardEffect instead of via email, for security purposes.

The meeting closed at 18:48.

Chair Date



SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

	ACTION	DEADLINE	RESPONSIBLE
1.	Minute no. 7.10 – Ofsted preparation Share the sample inspection briefing document with the Board via BoardEffect	20/06/2022	DoG
2.	Minute no. 9.2 – Health, Safety and Environment Policy Review and update the mobile phone section of the HSE Policy	20/06/2022	DoG