

**CORPORATION BOARD of UNITED COLLEGES GROUP**  
**Minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee**  
**Monday 18 May 2020, 5.30 pm – by Zoom**

**Members Present:** Tony Johnston (Chair), Nick Bell, Franklin Asante, Alex Fyfe, Lee Horsley.

**In attendance:** Zoë Lawrence, Amanda Thorneycroft, Paul Bradley, Stephen Davis

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| <b>1</b> | <p><b>Welcome and apologies for absence.</b><br/> There were no apologies. 100% attendance.</p>  |  |
| <b>2</b> | <p><b>Declarations of Interest in the agenda items</b><br/> No declarations of interest were made.</p>   |  |
| <b>3</b> | <p><b>Minutes of meeting held on 25 March 2020</b><br/> The minutes of 25 March 2020 were approved as an accurate record and would be signed by the Chair.</p> <p><b>Matters Arising</b><br/> There were no matters arising.</p>   |  |
| <b>4</b> | <p><b>STRATEGIC</b></p> <p><b>i. Covid 19 Update</b><br/> <i>(Paper circulated in advance)</i><br/> NB provided the committee with an overview of the activities and arrangements which had been put in place in response to the coronavirus pandemic. In summary, he highlighted that there had been a positive response from staff and students to remote working. 500 laptops and dongles had been issued to provide access to the internet to enable online learning. Ofqual had confirmed the cancellation of the summer exams which would now be awarded through teacher assessment. It was noted that Ofqual would moderate results with the previous years' achievement which might make it difficult for the college to get recognition of any improvement in performance this year.</p> <p>Student engagement with remote learning was similar to that when the buildings were open at 77- 79%. Regular weekly management meetings were taking place which included the trade unions. Big White Wall had been offered to staff for support with mental health and anxiety issues. Staff engagement had continued; there had been a virtual staff meeting with the SLT that day, which Jan Knight had also attended as an observer. Two short staff surveys had been conducted. The results of the second survey would be shared with governors in the coming days.</p> <p>Government guidance on re-opening the college buildings was still being updated. Currently, there were suggestions colleges might provide some face to face teaching for Y1 A level students from 1 June. The SLT had considered this option, but as the students were engaging well remotely, and there would be significant risk in using public transport with many students and staff travelling across London, a decision was taken not to re-open the buildings at this time. Modelling work on the use of the campuses incorporating social distancing would take place to pilot building use and movement of people which staff would be asked attend.</p> |  |

It was currently the plan for all enrolment to take place where possible online. This would be more straight forward for re-enrolments, but less so for new students. Solutions were being considered which could include phone contact and possibly some face to face meetings by appointment observing social distancing. In terms of enrolment numbers, there was a 5% increase in the number of 16-19 year olds this year, plus the post coronavirus pressures on the labour market may push younger people into education. The 2008 recession saw an increase in college students. There was likely to be market turbulence for HE also. The curriculum offer would include online as well as face to face provision. NB said that it would be important to be ready to be able to respond to procured training and skills opportunities. A more detailed paper on marketing and enrolment would be included on the TLS agenda on 8 June.

AF was supportive of online enrolment but queried if this was accessible to all cohorts of students. NB said there would be support for digital literacy and alternative methods would be offered and promoted. SD said that it would be important to reconfigure the delivery model and maximise entry points. Additional strands of skills funding had also been announced by the London Mayor to support people back into the workplace. Business Development would be instrumental in accessing and enabling this. It would also need to be balanced with ensuring high quality provision.

The marketing campaign was also being reviewed to target social media online and less print media, as this was more likely to reach the intended audience. It was possible that coronavirus would mean that students would travel shorter distances so there may be merit in focusing marketing in the local area. It may also be worth considering whether there were any savings to be made in reducing the marketing spend on printed media.

FA supported the enrolment and marketing plans, particularly as there was likely to be less travel, it would be worthwhile focusing on social media to attract local students. It was acknowledged that coronavirus had provided an opportunity to trial remote learning and it would be necessary to take on board student feedback for improvements. To maintain productivity next academic year, and implement social distancing measures, a combination of remote and face to face learning would be necessary. Coronavirus had brought about a significant change in student behaviours with increased use of MS Teams and OneDrive. Key workers had been brought in to support any students that were not engaging. Feedback from students was also informing the marketing efforts. Members noted the paper.

**ii. Outline Covid 19 Return to Work**

*(Paper circulated in advance)*

A sub-set of the Coronavirus Working Group had been looking at measures in preparation for the college buildings re-opening safely. The paper set out the issues for staff and students covering physical, emotional and cognitive issues over the short medium and longer term.

TJ asked whether those students doing courses with practical elements would be returning to the college buildings. SD said that they were currently awaiting advice from the awarding bodies on this issue regarding a licence to practice. The position was changing on a daily basis. The emotional welfare of some staff was also to be taken into consideration, plus trade union advice was for staff not to return at the current time. It was noted that the Corporation would need to be assured of health and

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|   | <p>safety and safeguarding measures prior to buildings re-opening for staff and students. Members noted the paper.</p> <p><b>iii. Financial Risk Register</b><br/><i>(Paper circulated in advance)</i><br/>AT highlighted the main changes to the financial risk register some of which were included in the reforecast paper. The increased risk of fraud was noted.</p> <p><b>iv. HR Risk Register</b><br/><i>(Paper circulated in advance)</i><br/>CC highlighted the increased risks to staff in response to coronavirus and the mitigating actions that these concerns were taken seriously and efforts were made to create a safe working environment. The risk concerning losing employment tribunals had been lowered as measures had been put in place for this to be less likely.</p>   |  |
| 5 | <p><b>FINANCE</b></p> <p><b>i. Financial Reforecast (C19 Impact)</b><br/><i>(Paper circulated in advance)</i><br/>This reforecast was based on the reforecast position completed in January 2020. Currently it was expected that there would be a deficit in the region of £900k by year end. The main areas where income had been reduced were the GLA procured income that was paid in arrears. This provided short courses to unemployed people to support them back into work. Recruitment to these courses stopped when lockdown was imposed. AF asked if it was possible to reduce costs to minimise the loss of income. AT said that it was not possible to furlough the staff as they were direct employees not subcontracted. This was considered to be a sunk staff cost. It may be possible to increase recruitment going forward to partly recover the position.</p> <p>Despite the Boroughs being instructed to support the supply chain it was expected that there may be some non-payment of this income. The forecast had been prudent in this regard.</p> <p>Tuition fees were unlikely to be achieved. TJ pointed out that this was a recurring issue and that a private sector organisation would be unable to tolerate the level of non-payment. He suggested that a review of fee assessment and credit control be undertaken to protect the business. NB agreed that this should be done in preparation for the next academic year. AT explained that it was sometimes difficult due the timing of the course starting and the decision on the loan being granted that in some cases to protect achievement the fees were written off. The impact of coronavirus has resulted in some students losing their jobs and being unable to pay their fees.</p> <p>AF recognised the prudent methods employed in the reforecast but asked how much flexibility there might be in the reforecast. AT said that it was unlikely that the deficit would be significantly reduced and there may be additional items that arise going forward.</p> <p>AF asked what the position was on reducing agency staff costs and pay for catering, security and cleaning staff contracted to the college. NB confirmed that at the last meeting it had been agreed to pay agency staff until the end of April then review. It had been possible to release some agency staff no longer delivering curriculum and</p> |  |

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|   | <p>there was also a review of HPL hours which may be able to create some savings. Government guidance received after the last FGP meeting required publicly funded organisations not to furlough workers supported by public funding. Approximately 7% of the college's total income comes from non-public funded sources so this percentage would be applied to help our security and cleaning contractors in their furlough decisions.</p> <p>LH suggested that savings from the marketing budget may be a useful option. Savings from reduced use of utilities in the buildings was noted. Members noted the reforecast.</p> <p><b>ii. Management Accounts (March)</b><br/> <i>(Dashboard and commentary provided in advance)</i><br/> The March management accounts were provided for information and did not reflect the current position in respect of the impact of coronavirus which was set out in the reforecast.</p>  |  |
| 6 | <p><b>HUMAN RESOURCES</b></p> <p><b>I. HR Workforce Development Strategy</b><br/> Due to time constraints this item was deferred to the next meeting of this committee.</p>  |  |
| 7 | <p><b>AOB</b></p> <p><b>Information Technology Strategy and Development</b><br/> <i>(Paper provided in advance)</i><br/> PB introduced his paper and explained the infrastructure options being considered and how this would inform the forthcoming strategy. He explained how the hybrid model, part cloud and part own servers, was currently the preferred approach as it would help manage costs initially as part of a transition, would support business continuity and indicate the direction of travel to cloud based storage in future. It would also be able to accommodate the current MIS systems which were currently less compatible with a cloud-based system. NB reiterated this, in that discussions with SLT had concluded that the hybrid approach would be the best option at the moment with view to moving to full cloud in the longer term. He said that it was necessary to align business processes to the cloud environment. Part of the longer-term strategy would be to improve Wifi in certain areas of the buildings, refresh some hardware, and also to train and support staff with the necessary skills to use the IT.</p> <p>TJ asked if there was any indication of the scale of the cost at this point; the scale of the investment needed. PB confirmed that this was not yet costed, as the focus had been on the strategic options currently. It was likely that the work would be phased to match the available resources. A fully costed strategy paper would be brought to this committee in September.</p> <p>LH commented that the demand for cloud-based systems was likely to increase. It was noted that cloud storage would be considered as operational expenditure rather than capital as it was charged by data utilisation. Therefore, it would be necessary to review business processes to reduce the amount of data being stored to that which was needed to keep costs manageable.</p> <p>TJ asked what the barriers were to the two separate pro-solution systems being brought together. PB said that this was being worked on at the moment and was likely to conclude</p> |  |

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|          | <p>in July. SD explained that there was no unified tenancy for pro-solution, but it was possible to create a bridge and use a data warehouse for business intelligence.</p> <p>NB explained that the paper was setting out the staging post for the committee and some visibility about the work being taken forward and the decisions being made. The paper was for information. TJ expressed caution in that previous investment in IT had been significant but had not provided the required outcomes. The committee would want to understand the cost implications going forward. Members noted the paper.</p> |  |
| <b>8</b> | <p><b>Date of next meeting</b><br/><b>1 July 2020</b></p> <p>Meeting closed at 7.31pm</p>  |  |

Minutes taken by Zoë Lawrence 18/05/2020

**SIGNED:** ..... **Date:**

**Tony Johnston, Chair**

| <b>Ref</b> | <b>Action</b>  | <b>Owner</b> | <b>Status</b>  |
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| <b>4i</b>  | NB to circulate the results of the second staff survey to governors.                                       | NB           | <b>Complete.<br/>Circulated in<br/>SLT briefing 22<br/>May</b> |
| <b>5i</b>  | To conduct a review of tuition fee assessment and credit control to reduce the loss of non-payment of fees | NB/AT        |  |
| <b>7i</b>  | Fully costed IT Strategy paper to be provided to the F&GP Committee for the Autumn Term meeting 2020       | NB/PB        |  |