

**CORPORATION BOARD of UNITED COLLEGES GROUP**  
**Minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee**  
**Wednesday 06 Oct 2021, 6 pm – by Zoom**

**Members Present:** Franklin Asante (Chair), Nick Bell, Tony Johnston, Ross Mackenzie, Alex Fyfe, Nadia Babar.

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

<b>1</b>	<p><b>Welcome and apologies for absence.</b>          Apologies had been received from Lee Horsley, and Laura Griffin. Laura had provided some questions in advance of the meeting which would be fed into discussions.</p>
<b>2</b>	<p><b>Declarations of Interest in the agenda items</b>          No declarations of interest were made.</p>
<b>3</b>	<p><b>Minutes of meeting held on 30 June 2021</b>          The minutes of the Committee held on 30 June 2021 were approved as an accurate record and would be signed by the Chair.</p> <p><b>Matters Arising</b>          The action point from the previous meeting had been deferred to the December meeting.</p> <p><b>Terms of Reference</b>          ZL proposed some slight changes to the ToR for this committee which had been highlighted in track changes on the draft. AF suggested that para 9 be made clearer and include reference to the committee making recommendations to the Corporation. Also for the independent member to be clarified to mean external member (not staff, student governor or the CEO). ZL agreed to make these changes. The ToR were agreed for recommendation to the Corporation for approval.</p>
<b>4</b>	<p><b>Enrolment Update</b>  <i>(Paper circulated in advance)</i>          SD provided an explanation of the process and action being taken to attempt to retain at least 100 16-18 year-old learners above target in order to qualify for some additional in-year ESFA funding. It was noted that enrolment of this age group had been difficult across London this year with a number of colleges not meeting their funded targets. There had also been an increase in NEATs. SD confirmed that the position on adult learners and apprentices was currently good and fee assessment had gone well as part of the enrolment process. Further marketing was being put in place for HE to increase that cohort. NB was optimistic that it may still be possible to achieve £650k of additional funding acknowledging that this was not at the £2.1m level originally in the budget. TJ noted that the current attrition levels seemed low at 20 Sept. SD acknowledged this, reporting a much better start to the academic year which had improved the student experience. TJ asked if the enrolment process this summer had been reviewed to identify what went well and areas of improvement. CC confirmed that this had been undertaken and that market research was being commissioned for further intelligence. SD said that one of the weaknesses was the lack of contact from the college between application and enrolment, plus school liaison. Both these areas were being looked into now in preparation for next Summer. FA suggested that it would be useful to understand why some students left in September. SD said that this was recorded. There had been some issues on class sizes and accommodation which were now resolved. TJ asked for a paper for the next meeting summarising lessons learnt, the</p>

	<p>exit interviews and the market research to clarify what actions would be taken through to next year.</p> <p>AF asked if the levels of adult and apprenticeships enrolments experienced by UCG were similar to other London Colleges. SD was not sure of this but would find out and feedback. He felt that the online learning options during lockdown worked well with adult learners. The sense of place was more important for the younger cohort. AT said that adult enrolment was more continuous during the term and also included subcontracted provision. Members welcomed the update.</p>
<p><b>5</b></p>	<p><b>HUMAN RESOURCES ITEMS</b></p> <p><b>i. Risk Register</b> <i>(Risk register circulated in advance)</i></p> <p>CC highlighted the main risks which had increased. These concerned senior management stability with the resignation of the CEO and a vice principal. The risk of not being able to attract high calibre staff had reduced. Members noted the risk register.</p> <p><b>ii. HR KPIs</b> <i>(KPIs circulated in advance)</i></p> <p>The KPIs for the staff survey response rate were considered to be too low. RM asked for CC's views on the reasons for this. CC said that feedback from staff included concerns about anonymity, that they were not convinced that they could not be identified from their survey response, particularly at team level. She said that the SLT planned to go out to talk with teams about these issues. TJ thought that the low response rate raised questions about the validity of the survey and queried if a shorter survey would increase the response rate. The current 60 question survey was completed in 5-10 minutes which was not considered to be too long. CC suggested that a series of shorter surveys covering the themes may be better, but this would not generate benchmarking in the FE sector that the QDP survey offers. TJ commented that the issues on anonymity were of concern that the culture of the organisation was such that staff felt uncomfortable about providing feedback, and that this needed to change. NB commented that the issues may be multi-faceted and there was a general lack of engagement from staff. NBab suggested that time be set aside on CPD days to complete the survey. SD said that this approach was taken in July, but still did not dramatically increase the response rate. The anonymity aspect appeared to be a deep rooted issue. AF asked what actions were being taken in response to staff feeling safe. CC said that this was generally to do with how the college managed incidents and bullying and harassment. SD said that he had received feedback that there was concern across London about the increased in youth violence and knife crime and wider societal issues which made staff feel less safe. The KPIs on safeguarding and health and safety training were realistic at 95%. This showed a small proportion of incomplete training to reflect new starters at the beginning of term. AF asked how the median gender pay gap was calculated. The paper from earlier in the year would be provided to AF following the meeting.</p> <p><b>iii. Bullying &amp; Harassment Training - Update</b> <i>(Slides circulated in advance)</i></p> <p>CC provided an update on the planned roll out of bullying and harassment awareness training which was to take place during the CPD days in October. TJ asked a question provided by LG on how feedback would be collected from the training and how the organisation would know whether it had been effective. CC said that they would ask staff for feedback from the training, in particular whether they would know what to do if they experienced bullying and harassment. This would be captured in a small survey at the end of</p>

the training. TJ requested that this feedback be brought back to the committee at the December meeting. A poster campaign would also accompany the training. FA asked if there was any scope for inclusion champions who would be independent individuals that staff could turn to for support. CC said that this arrangement had been attempted for EDI but none of the staff volunteered. This was thought to be largely due to workload and capacity. RM commented that the training needed to be more than the slides and noted that a clear statement of zero tolerance for bullying and harassment appeared to be missing. He suggested that the slide pack could benefit from more examples, and clarity on what staff needed to do. He did not think that the five options were very clear. He suggested the process be simpler, more explicit with an emphasis on being confidential. CC noted these comments. Members welcomed the update.

**iv. Family Friendly Policies**

*(Policies circulated in advance)*

CC set out what the Family Friendly Policies covered and that this was an extension of the current scope. TJ asked on behalf of LG what had changed and how the policies would be communicated to staff. CC said that the previous policies were limited and out of date. These new ones covered new areas and were of more benefit to staff. She said that the policies would be communicated internally. TJ pointed out that the benefits to staff in the new policies could be a good news story for the college. It was understood that they were standard policies within the FE sector, but may attract people from outside the sector in providing flexible working. CC said that a hybrid working policy was also being developed. LG had also asked if the EDI team had been involved in their development and checks had been made on the use of inclusive language. CC said that she would check this. SD commented that a new intranet was in development and was soon to be launched. This would provide a better interface for staff to access information including policies. It was noted that an internal communications strategy was in development. **The Committee approved these policies.**

**v. Probation Policy**

*(Policy circulated in advance)*

CC explained that this new draft probation policy was an improvement on the existing policy which was now out of date. **Members agreed to recommend the Probation Policy to Corporation for approval.**

**vi. Staff Survey and Action Plan**

*(Paper circulated in advance)*

The survey was also discussed under the item on HR KPIs (see above). CC acknowledged that that the actions taken to date in response to staff feedback were not filtering further down the organisation. It was hoped that this would be facilitated by the internal communications strategy and more support for managers. It was agreed that a consistent approach was needed to create the desired cultural change. TJ asked if the internal communications strategy was being developed in house or commissioned externally. CC confirmed it would be external. He also commented on the gap since the survey had been completed and that no communication with staff on the responses had yet been made. FA suggested that it may be of benefit for a reminder of the actions taken as a result of the previous year's survey to be sent out before the next questionnaire. Members noted the staff survey report and action plan.

**6 FINANCE ITEMS**

**I. Finance Risk Register**

*(Risk register circulated in advance)*

Members noted that none of the risks had increased since the previous meeting and some had reduced. This was largely a result of the positive year end position. Members noted the risk register.

## **II. EoY Outturn – July Management Accounts**

*(Papers circulated in advance)*

AT presented the July Management Accounts which provided a very good outturn for the year. She acknowledged that there was a significant difference from the original and reforecast budget and explained some of the main reasons for this which were detailed in her paper. She also provided a summary of the provisioning on larger material items. Members acknowledged the favourable financial position and how this was all the more important at the current time with the college taking out additional loans. Members recognised that the accounts would be subject to external audit in the coming weeks.

TJ noted the levels of depreciation on the Paddington Green Campus and asked what impact the depreciation of the new building at Wembley Park would have on the financial position of the college and whether this was likely to affect the financial health rating. AT confirmed that the level of depreciation would be high because there was only a small proportion of funding from capital grants for the Wembley Project. The options may be to decide to run at a loss or to absorb some of the depreciation. It was probable that it would impact on financial health as this aspect was included in the ratings.

AF asked if it was possible for the £4.7m in the 'Other Income' section in the management accounts to be broken down. She also asked about the increase in debtor days towards the end of the year. AT said that this was due to two large invoices from the Boroughs which had distorted the figures.

The Committee thanked AT and her team for their hard work and congratulated her on achieving this outcome for the college.

## **III. Budget Reforecasting**

AT updated the Committee on her plans for reforecasting the budget in year. The full £2.1m in-year funding from the ESFA for the additional learners above target would not be received. This was currently included in the budget. It was hoped some additional funding would be received depending on the levels of attrition between now and RO4. On this basis AT advised that she would expect to prepare a budget reforecast in January or February 2022, based on the December management accounts. This would also allow time for payroll to settle to be able to plan a more accurate reforecast. Members welcomed this approach.

## **IV. Wembley Project – Update**

NB provided a short update on the position of key aspects of the project. He thanked members for their support in approving the Written Resolution for the Stage 2 FE Transformation Grant Bid which would be submitted to the Department of Education the following day. Network Homes were now starting to put on pressure for a date for exchange and completion of the purchase of the OOC. AT explained that the formal term sheet for the RCF was still awaited though the pricing had been confirmed. The legal documentation would then be drawn up. FA asked if the lower priced option which included the transfer of UCG's banking to Barclays had been taken. AT said that the banking arrangements were not ideal for the college so this option had not been pursued. Members were agreeable to this approach to minimise the level of disruption it may cause. Members welcomed the update.

<b>7.</b>	<b>AoB</b> No items were raised.
	<b>Date of next meeting</b> <b>1 December 2021</b>  Meeting closed at 7.50 pm

Minutes taken by Zoë Lawrence 07/10/2021

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

**Franklin Asante, Chair**

<b>Ref</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Status</b>
<b>26/05</b> <b>4iii</b>	A paper on recruitment linked with the reward strategy be a main item at the Finance & Resources Committee in the Autumn term.	CC	<b>On Dec agenda</b>
<b>4</b>	Enrolment paper for the next meeting summarising lessons learnt, the exit interviews and the market research to clarify what actions would be taken through to next year.	SLT	<b>On Dec agenda</b>
<b>5ii</b>	Staff feedback on the Bullying & Harassment awareness training to be brought back to the committee at the December meeting	CC	<b>On Dec agenda</b>
<b>5iv</b>	To check that inclusive language had been used in the development of the Family Friendly policies.	CC	<b>On Dec agenda</b>