

**CORPORATION BOARD of UNITED COLLEGES GROUP**  
**Wednesday 31 March 2021, 6 pm – By Zoom**

**Members Present:** Nick Bell (CEO), Alex Fyfe, Tony Johnston (Chair), Cathy Bird, Laura Griffin, Derrick Betts, Jan Knight, Angela Drisdale Gordon, Ross Mackenzie, Colin Smith, Temitope Alebiosu, Max Maalimey, Nadia Babar, Elom Tay, Amish Nathwani, and Grainne Brankin.

**In attendance:** Zoë Lawrence, Claire Collins, Amanda Thorneycroft.

<b>1</b>	<p><b>PROCEDURAL</b></p> <p><b>Welcome and apologies for absence</b></p> <p>The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies had been received from Matthew Green, Norman Whyte, Franklin Asante, Ofofonono Iwa and Desmond Bishop.</p> <p>The new members for whom this was their first Corporation meeting were welcomed and introduced. These members were Grainne Brankin, Elom Tay, Max Maalimey and Nadia Babar.</p>
<b>2</b>	<p><b>Declarations of Interest in the agenda items</b></p> <p>None were declared.</p>
<b>3</b>	<p><b>I. Approval of Corporation minutes</b>  <i>(Draft minutes were circulated in advance)</i></p> <p><b>The draft confidential and non-confidential minutes of 16 December, and the minutes of the Special Meeting of the Corporation held on 10 March 2021 were approved as an accurate record and would be signed by the Chair.</b></p> <p><b>II. Matters arising</b></p> <p>It was noted that the KPIs on retention and attrition which were to be included in the CEO’s KPI dashboard were currently not included on the version for this meeting. NB agreed to incorporate these for the next meeting and provide a verbal update within the relevant item at this meeting.</p> <p><b>III. Request to raise Grey Box items</b></p> <p>No items were raised by members.</p>
<b>4</b>	<p><b>STRATEGIC</b></p> <p><b>I. CEO Report &amp; KPIs</b>  <i>(Report circulated in advance)</i></p> <p>NB set out the main points of his report including the reopening of campuses on 8 March in line with government requirements, progress on lateral flow testing for coronavirus, the Ofsted Progress Monitoring visit in February and the subsequent external health check, and progress on enrolment for Summer 2021. Members noted the 16-18 year old student attrition levels, and how the marketing approach was aiming to address the deficiencies in the process from the previous year. The marketing efforts would be accelerated following the Easter break. Members noted that the attrition had contributed to a significant financial shortfall and efforts that were being made to rectify this which included presenting a business case to the ESFA. A response to this was expected by June. Financial planning was being taken forward on a range of scenarios though a slight budget surplus was still being forecast for the current year. The EAB tolerance level had now been set at 90% which was unlikely to mean there</p>

would be any clawback for UCG. The number of cybersecurity attacks on FE colleges was of concern. An external review of the college's security had been commissioned in response to this. This would be in addition to the internal audit and would involve a greater level of scrutiny and specific expertise. AN suggested that the external review links in with the scope of the IA. AT agreed to discuss this with BDO colleagues.

MM asked about the degree of financial shortfall and which areas were likely to be impacted. NB explained that it was currently too early to say as the detailed budget planning was still to be completed and decisions on funding were awaited. It may also be possible to use alternative sources of funding to fill some of the gap. However, if any reductions in curriculum were needed these were likely to be focused on agency staff and HPLs.

RM asked for clarification on the curriculum health check. NB confirmed that this had shown positive progress but that this was not yet sufficiently consistent for the college to be considered to be 'good'. RM asked if the trajectory of necessary improvement had been considered sufficiently ahead of the expected inspection timeline. NB confirmed this and that the monitoring visit would keep the focus and the current plans allowed time for the changes to embed and have impact.

AF asked what steps the college was taking to mitigate against the enrolment issues experienced the previous year; she noted the increase in A level provision. NB confirmed that this had been increased as the centre assessed grades were generally higher allowing more students to access A Level programmes. The previous year more of the lower-level learners had become NEETS (not in education, employment or training). The college was working with boroughs and involved in school liaison to address this. Marketing would also be more personal and targeted, focusing on relationships, interaction and keep warm activities to support engagement. A recent paper for the TLS Committee on the marketing approach would be shared with wider Corporation members for information. NBa confirmed the efforts being put in place to ensure positive communications with prospective students.

On the KPIs NB explained that some data was not yet available, and that the annual national NSS student surveys had been cancelled this year due to coronavirus. Achievement for 16-18 year olds was showing a slight improvement whilst there was a slight deterioration for adult learners. Attendance and engagement were positive, though attrition at the beginning of the academic year was of concern. It was noted that the number of managers from black and ethnic communities had increased by a third within a year.

AN asked if the students lost through attrition had been followed up. NB confirmed this, and that it was with minimal success. There had also been a re-engagement campaign with NEETS in January which had resulted in some learners returning to education. LG asked if the attrition levels were typical of other London colleges. NB said that there was a range, but it was thought that UCG were towards the upper end of this. No single reason had been identified, and it had affected other London colleges to a greater or lesser degree.

**The Corporation resolved to receive the CEO's report and KPIs.**

## **II. Risk Register**

*(Risk Register circulated in advance)*

AT reminded members that the relevant departmental risk registers had been reviewed by committees, and all had been seen by the Audit Committee. The risks with the highest residual risk were provided to Corporation. Many of the issues that were included in the risk register had been covered in the CEO report. JK reminded members that the risk appetite of the

Corporation was currently moderate and what this meant in terms of monitoring the risks. JK suggested that it may be an opportune time to revisit the risk appetite and test how this would work. TJ agreed that this was a good idea and asked the Audit Committee to discuss and propose the best way of taking this forward. GB commented that it may be useful to have a number of different risk appetites for different risk categories.

### **III. EDI Update – inc. Survey Results/Action plan**

*(Document circulated in advance)*

CC provided an update on the EDI action plan and work of the EDI Steering Group as summarised in her paper. This included partnering with the National Centre for Diversity to work toward investors in diversity accreditation. This process had begun with a staff survey. The response rate to the survey had been disappointingly low and was thought to be due to the length of the survey, survey fatigue with staff and limited changes made in response to previous surveys. On benchmarking UCG was in the lower quartile for the majority of questions. CC highlighted progress on the Aspiring Managers Programme and mentoring schemes. Some of the survey outcomes on staff being less favourably treated as a result of their race, gender or age were of concern, as were the percentage of those people who felt unable to report these incidents. CC explained that management behaviours were being developed which would be included as performance management measures and how these aligned with UCG values and EDI.

ADG, who is the lead governor on EDI and a member of the Steering Group, was keen to see measurable impact of the actions. She commented that the action plan had now been in place for some time and that it was now time to make the actions real. She expressed deep concern about the trend in regard to bullying and harassment and that this needed serious consideration. DBetts asked if the College had an anonymous hotline for bullying. CC said that there was not a hotline, but staff had used the whistle blowing policy allowing for incidents to be reported to the Director of Governance who has an independent role in the organisation.

MM said that he thought the disengagement from staff on the survey was due to it not being communicated well and that surveys were seen as a tick box exercise for management and not focused sufficiently on staff. He had attended an EDI focus group in January and found this to be stimulating and useful, but no feedback was provided from it for over three months. Internal communications were poor. He said that he had witnessed some bullying and harassment behaviours and considered whether this was as a result of the pressures staff were under. He had taken part in the management training and recommended that it be compulsory for all members of staff. He also strongly advocated 360° appraisal for managers.

AN referred to the free text comments in the report which appeared to indicate a lack of confidence in managers. He asked what SLT thought about this and what actions were being taken.

RM commented how the survey had shone the spotlight on bullying and harassment issues for which there should be zero tolerance, and that a robust response was needed from SLT. He challenged whether the disciplinary and investigative policies and processes were in place, their independence and the confidence of staff in those processes to feel able to use them. He suggested that the bullying and harassment aspects be decoupled from the EDI action plan and addressed separately to achieve some faster traction. ADG thought that it may be difficult for them to be separated as they were conflated with EDI. LG asked about the managerial approach to bullying and harassment and if staff understood the procedure and process when

	<p>an issue arises. There was general agreement that this issue needed to be separated out and for bullying and harassment cases to be captured separately.</p> <p>CC reported that there were issues with some prior cases not being dealt with well by the legacy colleges. In some cases, they were stalled and not brought to a conclusion which had weakened staff confidence in the process. She said that this was not acceptable. She acknowledged that communication with staff could be improved. It was hoped that the staff behaviours link to the performance management process would help to change the culture.</p> <p>TJ requested that a separate update report on the process for bullying and harassment incidents be prepared for the next Finance and General Purposes Committee in May.</p>
5	<p><b>COMMITTEE MATTERS</b> <b>Teaching Learning and Skills</b></p> <p><b>I. Ofsted Progress Monitoring Visit</b> <i>(Paper circulated in advance)</i> This item had been discussed within the CEO’s report however some further questions were raised by members. CS asked if the health check process had helped to develop the assistant principals. NB confirmed that this was this case and that it had had a huge positive affect on their development and ownership of the curriculum.</p> <p><b>II. Return to face-to-face teaching</b> This item had been adequately covered in the CEO’s Report.</p> <p><b>III. Link Governor Scheme – feedback</b> Each Link Governor provided a short commentary on their initial meeting with the relevant Assistant Principal, this included reference to the challenges, strengths and context in each career cluster. Members commented on how useful the meetings had been and were looking forward to next steps and further interaction with each area.</p>
6	<p><b>Property &amp; Infrastructure Committee</b></p> <p><b>I. Update Report - Offer on Olympic Office Centre</b> <i>(Paper circulated in advance)</i> NB provided an update to members following the Special Meeting of the Corporation on 10 March 2021. He confirmed that the bid for the FE Transformational Capital Grant had now been submitted, and that the drafting of contracts following the approval of the HoTs with Pinnacle was on track for approval in the Summer term. Additionally, an offer for the Olympic Office Centre had been accepted in line with the details in the paper. NB was seeking the approval of the Corporation to progress to HoT stage by the end of April with a timeline to exchange contracts thereafter pending review of the titles and surveys of the property, the securing of adequate funding and cash flow projections. AT described the options in regard to the funding of the purchase which included a rolling credit facility (RCF) and arrangement which the college had used previously from Barclays. This would be progress alongside detailed cash flow, budget and scenario planning which would be considered by the Finance and General Purposes Committee in June. Currently the cost of the financing was unknown. RM suggested that alternatives to the RCF with Barclays be explored and that a broker would be a possible way to do this. AT explained that many lenders were reluctant to lend to the FE sector, but she offered to follow this up with RM outside of the meeting for further advice.</p>

	<p><b>The Corporation approved the acceptance of the offer as set out in the paper and subject to the further information requirements were content for the HoTs to be prepared by the end of April 2021.</b></p>
7	<p><b>Finance and General Purposes</b></p> <p><b>I. Standing Financial Instructions</b> <i>(SFI circulated in advance)</i> The Standing Financial Instructions had been reviewed by the Finance and General Purposes committee and were being recommended to the Corporation for approval. <b>The Corporation resolved to approve the Standing Financial Instructions.</b></p> <p><b>II. Tuition Fees Policy</b> <i>(Draft policy circulated in advance)</i> The Finance and General Purposes Committee had reviewed this policy and were recommending it to the Corporation for approval. <b>The Corporation resolved to approve the Tuition Fees Policy.</b></p>
8	<p><b>Audit Committee</b></p> <p><b>I. Health and Safety Policy</b> <i>(Draft policy circulated in advance)</i> The Audit Committee had reviewed this policy and were recommending it to the Corporation for approval. Members had no further comments on the policy and <b>the Corporation resolved to approve the Health and Safety Policy.</b></p> <p><b>II. Risk Management Policy</b> <i>(Draft policy circulated in advance)</i> The Audit Committee had reviewed this policy and were recommending it to the Corporation for approval. It was acknowledged that changes would need to be made in due course to reflect the proposals being developed on risk appetite, but the <b>Corporation resolved to approve the Risk Management Policy</b> in its current form until that work was complete.</p> <p><b>III. Business Continuity Policy</b> <i>(Draft policy circulated in advance)</i> The Audit Committee had reviewed this policy and were recommending it to the Corporation for approval. TJ asked whether plans were in place to test the policy and the Business Continuity Plan it described. AT said that there were no plans currently to do so but this could be considered. GB agreed that testing was important and queried the level of the business continuity plans whether these were at departmental level or a single plan. <b>The Corporation resolved to approve the Business Continuity Policy.</b></p>
9	<p><b>Governance, Search and Remuneration Committee</b></p> <p><b>I. Ratification of co-opted governor</b> <i>(Paper circulated in advance)</i> LG sought the Corporation's approval to appoint Natalie Dweh as a co-opted member to the Corporation following a successful interview process. Natalie was currently Associate Head Teacher at a large primary school in Brent, was the Designated Safeguarding Lead at the school and also a former alumni of CNWL. Natalie would begin her tenure as a co-opted member and take full independent membership from 1 August 2021 following the departure of Jan Knight when her term of office comes to an end. There would be an opportunity to</p>

	mark Jan's departure and thank her at a later date. Member welcomed the appointment and the skills set that Natalie would bring. <b>The Corporation resolved to approve the appointment.</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>AoB</b>  The date of the next meeting 7 July 2021  The meeting closed at 8.25 pm

Minutes taken by Zoë Lawrence 01 April 2021

**Post meeting note:**

A paper setting out proposals for the 2021 enrolment process was sent to members on 21 April 2021 for information in response to discussions made at Corporation and other committee meetings.

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

**Tony Johnston, Chair**

**ACTIONS**

Ref	Action	Owner	Status
<b>16/12 04i</b>	To include attrition/ retention rates in the KPIs	NB	
<b>16/12 08ii</b>	For a fire drill to take place at the Paddington campus	AT	
<b>04ii</b>	For the Audit Committee to prepare a proposal on risk appetite	JK/ZL	
<b>04iii</b>	A separate update report on the process for bullying and harassment incidents be prepared for the next Finance and General Purposes Committee in May.	CC	