

**CORPORATION BOARD of UNITED COLLEGES GROUP**  
**Monday 30 March 2020, 6 pm – By Zoom**

**Members Present:** Nick Bell (CEO), Glenys Arthur, Lee Horsley, Alex Fyfe, Tony Johnston (Chair), Colin Smith, Desmond Bishop, Cathy Bird, Franklin Asante, Rose Sareami, Stephen Hayes, Laura Griffin, Derrick Betts, Amish Nathwani, Jan Knight, Mary Elliott.

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

<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 Norman Whyte, Matthew Green, Sukhveer Singh, and Angela Drisdale Gordon.</p>	
<b>2</b>	<p><b>Declarations of Interest in the agenda items</b></p> <p>None were made.</p>	
<b>3</b>	<p><b>I. Approve minutes of meeting held 18 December 2019</b></p> <p>The minutes were approved and would be signed as an accurate record.</p> <p><b>II. Matters arising</b></p> <p>The matters arising had been completed. It was noted that the retention and punctuality data had also be included in TLS Committee papers.</p> <p><b>III. Request to raise Grey Box items</b></p> <p>No items were raised by members, though attention was made to the ESFA Funding Audit Report and its positive outcome.</p>	
<b>4</b>	<p><b>STRATEGIC</b></p> <p><b>I. CEO Report (inc. KPIs)</b>  <i>(Paper circulated in advance)</i></p> <p>NB apologised that due to time constraints he had been unable to produce a more detailed report, but he hoped that the content of the report provided a useful overview and indicated trends on the KPIs. NB highlighted the work of the Short Life Working Groups set up as part of the Ofsted Improvement Plan. It was also acknowledged that this was Claire Collins' first Corporation meeting, and members acknowledged the immediate impact she had made in improving HR structures and processes. The IFMC had been submitted at the end of February.</p> <p>Given the position with Covid 19, business planning had been pushed back to the next academic year with a budgeting approach being taken in the interim. Student attendance had improved during February, but it was uncertain at the moment if this would continue with remote learning. Punctuality and predicted achievement, particularly for 16-18 year olds, was up on the previous year at the time of the report.</p> <p>It was anticipated that given Covid 19 that the Ofsted Monitoring visit was likely to be delayed until the Spring 2021. The lesson observations that were taking place during March had been paused. The financial position prior to Covid 19 was on track for a small surplus, however, it was not certain what the outcome would now be and remodelling of the budget would take place over Easter. The College was fortunate to</p>	

be in a good cash position, one not shared by many FE colleges. The Staff Survey showed the same level of satisfaction as that of May 2019, so there was more work to be done on this to make improvements.

TJ asked what the SLT's key areas of focus would be in the coming weeks. NB said that it was necessary to do some analysis of the current situation with Covid 19, consider the economic forecasting, the opportunity to bring forward the digital strategy, and any opportunities for skills providers to do more work. There needed to be a slowing of the Wembley and Willesden Project to be able to fully understand the risks affecting the project. **Members resolved to receive the report.**

## II. Covid 19 Update

*(Report circulated in advance)*

NB expressed his huge thanks to all colleagues across the organisation for their hard work in transferring provision from one of traditional face to face delivery to online teaching and learning within two weeks. This had been a significant change. The College had been considering the transfer ahead of the official government closure of schools and colleges based on the need for safety of staff and students. Assessment of the situation, given the degree of staff absence from illness and self-isolation, had concluded that it would not be safe to keep campuses open. w/c 23 March students were doing self-guided study at home, whilst the college was preparing equipment and training staff to be able to deliver online teaching from w/c 30 March.

Despite the request from Government regarding students with high needs and EHCPs it had not been possible to continue provision at the College for these students. This was due to levels of staff illness and protecting those with underlying health conditions. All parents had been contacted. Other than Paddington all other college campuses had closed, and only staff needed for business continuity purposes were permitted at Paddington. Arrangements had been put in place so that any staff needing to come into Paddington did not need to use public transport.

Online teaching would be regularly reviewed to monitor standards. The Easter break would also provide the opportunity to consider operational improvements ahead of the beginning of the Summer term. There was no indication at the current time when schools and colleges would be allowed to reopen. It was anticipated that it was not likely to be before the Summer break. The College had offered the use of its buildings to the wider efforts to manage the Covid 19 pandemic.

CB asked how the college was dealing with safeguarding students. SD said that this was a whole college approach. Details of who to contact if a student was feeling vulnerable had been made available. Student support services had been redeployed to provide additional support to students. Safeguarding arrangements had been communicated to students and where relevant their parents.

AN asked if teachers were available to answer students' queries. SD said that this was the case through Teams and other media such as promonitor. It was likely that teaching would develop into a caseload approach so it would be clear who students could approach for help.

DBetts asked about the teaching of practical skills, and access to on the job training. SD acknowledged that this element of learning was not possible at the current time, but it

was hoped that these elements could be picked up as soon as the restrictions on Covid 19 were lifted. For apprenticeships, this may constitute a break in learning which may impact on funding. The construction industry was yet to be suspended, however, there was still a duty of care for staff and students to be considered.

RS said that she was doing some work which had been set, and communicating via Teams. As an A level student, it was currently uncertain how grades would be decided. More information from Ofqual was due that week. Overall, RS said that students had not been negative about the changes.

The F&GP Committee, the previous week, had approved an increase to the free school meal payments and for these to continue for students currently in receipt of it.

Only one member of staff had been confirmed as having Covid 19, though a significant number were self-isolating. As there was no access to testing it was difficult to know the potential levels of infection. Staff directly employed would continue to be paid. A decision to continue to pay contract and agency staff until the end of April had been taken by SLT. This would be further reviewed by the SLT to try to provide more financial security beyond that time. Overall, staff were generally content with the level of communication, and decision-making by the SLT. Members noted that a separate cost centre had been set up to help manage the financial impact.

AT reported that she was hopeful that the levels of government funding for 16-19 and adult provision would continue to be paid on profile. It was likely though that tuition fees were at risk for the Summer term. Borough funding for high needs learners was also currently uncertain. Losses from lettings and the Cockpit theatre were also expected. Savings may be able to be made on utilities in the buildings.

NB said that looking ahead it would be useful to reassess the strategic position in the Autumn term, including the economic impact and how this would affect the strategic aims. In the shorter term it was necessary to consider how Covid 19 would impact marketing for enrolment, and the likelihood that enrolment may be brought forward to the end of July. A level and GCSE results were expected ahead of usual timescales. It may be necessary to consider online enrolment or other ways to manage social distancing.

AN suggested that the college use the achievements of its digital delivery as part of its marketing campaigns.

TJ thanked all the Corporation, the SLT, and all UCG staff for all their hard work in testing and difficult circumstances and noted that this was not without a level of personal risk. He noted that the SLT had been on the front foot in their planning which had been to the college's advantage. He expressed the Corporation's admiration and gratitude for everyone's efforts.

**The Corporation resolved to receive the report.**

### **III. Risk Register**

*(Risk register and action plan provided earlier on 30 March)*

AT highlighted the increasing risks. These were mostly academic and financial risks as a result of Covid 19 and had been discussed in detail earlier on the agenda. It was noted

	<p>that the completion of the business intelligence work was at risk as it was currently uncertain whether this could continue remotely. Risks concerning retaining key curriculum leaders and the HE QSR outcome had reduced. A more detailed risk register for Covid 19 was being developed.</p> <p>TJ sought that risk 9.3 relating to the Wembley &amp; Willesden Project be further reviewed as there were now significant additional risks with Covid 19 to take into account.</p> <p><b>The Corporation resolved to receive the risk register and action plans.</b></p> <p><b>IV. Equality, Diversity &amp; Inclusion Update</b>  <i>(Paper circulated in advance)</i></p> <p>NB presented ADG's short paper and EDI action plan for information. The College was now in a strengthened position in this area. A new EDI policy was in development and would shortly be ready to be reviewed by the Corporation. Consideration was being given to external benchmarking leading to an EDI accreditation. Thanks were expressed to ADG for her contribution and influence in taking this area of work forward. <b>The Corporation resolved to receive the report.</b></p>	
5	<p><b>COMMITTEE MATTERS</b>  <b>Teaching, Learning and Skills</b></p> <p><b>I. Ofsted Action Plan Update</b>  <i>(Paper circulated in advance)</i></p> <p>SD reported that the Short-Life Working Groups had continued virtually despite the lockdown, and were expected to complete by 3 April. Work on the action plans would continue over Easter to bring together the outcomes into three main workstreams. It was acknowledged that remote working would slow progress concerning impact in the classroom. SD said he would be writing to Ofsted about the time lost with the college closure and seek that it be accounted for in the re-assessment timeline.</p> <p>ME asked if the lesson observation programme was continuing with no classroom teaching, and what CPD and support was continuing for those identified needing it from the first lesson observation window. SD said that it had been agreed with the trade unions to suspend the lesson observations at the current time. A number had been done before closure, but it was now suspended. There had been significant levels of CPD for staff in preparing for online teaching delivery in the last few weeks. Additionally, learning coaches were also continuing online. Lessons and learning from the introduction of digital delivery were being captured and would be utilised going forward. Upskilling staff would continue. SD was thankful to the staff for their co-operation and ambition in moving to the digital platform in the past few weeks, and that this showed sector leadership in this area.</p> <p>SH and DBishop as staff governors said that the College had moved a long way in the last few weeks and it was hoped that the training they had received would have a longer-term value and impact.</p> <p>AN asked if resources were available to be able to monitor current national and international practices in e-learning with view to implementing this at UCG. SD said that Esam Baboukhan was the college's resident expert in this area and was also</p>	

	<p>seconded to Microsoft a number of days a week. New vice-principle roles would also have responsibilities in the area of e-learning. AoC would also be cascading best practice. The report of the College of the Future was also likely to include recommendations on digital delivery. <b>The Corporation resolved to receive the report.</b></p> <p><b>II. A levels – Update</b> ME updated members about the SLT proposal to suspend A levels earlier in the academic year. Following discussion at TLS Committee it was resolved not to suspend A level but to narrow the provision. The Curriculum Planning and Review Process was still to conclude so it was currently not possible to report which A levels would be retained. This was likely towards the end of April. ME asked how this timing might affect enrolment. SD was not concerned about this at the current time.</p> <p><b>III. Safeguarding Update</b> <i>(Paper circulated in advance)</i> The report provided a summary of safeguarding activity up to February for this academic year. It was acknowledged that there was now a single reporting process across the Group for safeguarding. CB asked what support had been put in place for the 17 students who were included in the homeless category. SD said that nothing specific had been put in place. Some of the students were ‘sofa surfing’. He agreed to look into this and feedback. <b>The Corporation resolved to receive the report.</b></p>	
6	<p><b>Finance and General Purposes</b></p> <p><b>I. Standing Financial Instructions</b> <i>(Paper circulated in advance)</i> The Standing Financial Instructions had been reviewed by the Finance and General Purposes Committee at its meeting on 25 March. The main changes included authorisation for the Group Principal to £50k. This would enable timelier processing of invoices at the Willesden Campus, and was likely to be time limited until a single process for accounts payable was in place. Members also considered the temporary amendment to the SFIs to accommodate home working during Covid 19 lockdown. This would increase the authorisation level for budget holders from £5k to £50k for a time limited period, and not require the use of purchase orders (POs). This was mostly for transactions by direct debit. AF made clear that the F&amp;GP Committee had been supportive of this pending that the process made clear the role of finance staff in providing scrutiny and challenge. <b>The Corporation approved the Standing Financial Instructions and the temporary amendments.</b></p> <p><b>II. Tuition Fee Policy</b> <i>(Paper circulated in advance)</i> This policy covered FE and HE tuition fees. It had been reviewed by the Finance and General Purposes Committee on 25 March. The policy largely reflected the funding rules. Though there was more discretion for HE the previous year’s fees had largely been retained. F&amp;GP Committee had sought that flexibility be considered for refunds in light of Covid 19. NB said that this would be done on a case by case basis. AF noted that HE student numbers may be capped as a result of Covid 19, and whether this may impact the college in due course. <b>The Corporation approved the Tuition Fees Policy.</b></p> <p><b>III. GDPR Policies</b> <i>(Paper circulated in advance)</i></p>	

	<p>These policies has been reviewed by the Finance and General Purposes Committee on 25 March and were recommending them to the Corporation for approval. <b>The Corporation approved the GDPR policies.</b></p>	
7	<p><b>Audit</b></p> <p><b>I. Health and Safety Policy</b> <i>(Paper circulated in advance)</i></p> <p>The Audit Committee had reviewed this policy at its meeting on 4 March. Some additional changes had been made following a helpful contribution from Norman Whyte. The Audit Committee were recommending the policy to the Corporation for approval. <b>The Corporation approved the Health and Safety policy.</b></p>	
8	<p><b>Wembley &amp; Willesden Project Committee</b></p> <p><b>I. Project Update</b> <i>(Project Report provided in advance)</i></p> <p>NB provided an update of the discussions from the Wembley &amp; Willesden Project Committee the previous week. The Committee had concluded that the economic and financial impacts of Covid 19, which would create a significant level of uncertainty for the college and the wider economy, mean that it would not be possible to exchange contracts on the land swap by the end of April. Furthermore, it would be necessary to conduct a detailed risk assessment to understand the implications going forward. The Committee concluded to slow the project, which would to a greater extent be inevitable in the circumstances in any case, and reduce project consultancy spend as far as possible. NB also explained the options which had been considered in providing the outstanding £10m security for the Brent loan, and that the Committee had been in favour of pursuing a loan facility offered by Quintain depending on the particulars of the arrangement.</p> <p>The agreement for the Brent loan were still progressing slowly, and would continue to do so. It was anticipated that there would be further delays as a result of Covid 19. The terms sheet for the loan remained outstanding. The properties for the security were currently being revalued. The due diligence being undertaken by PWC on behalf of Barclays was progressing, though it was becoming increasingly difficult to do remotely. There was a risk that some of the due diligence would not be valid for very long given Covid 19 impact, and may need repeating. It was important for the college to fully understand the impact of Covid 19 on its own financial position before making any further commitments. <b>The Corporation resolved to receive the report.</b></p>	
9	<p><b>GSR</b></p> <p><b>I. Appointment of Members</b></p> <p>Following the resignation of Peter Child, the GSR Committee recommended Derrick Betts to be a full member of the Corporation. <b>The Corporation ratified this appointment.</b></p> <p><b>II. Governor Buddying/ Mentor</b></p> <p>JK proposed three new mechanisms for improving and supporting governors as set out in her paper. These included exit interviews for governors who were leaving, a buddying or mentoring arrangement and a governor friend. Members were supportive of these suggestions and agreed for them to be taken forward.</p>	
10	<b>AOB</b>	

	The date of the next meeting 8 July 2020	
	The meeting closed at 8.31 pm	

Minutes taken by Zoë Lawrence 31 March 2020

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

**Tony Johnston, Chair**

**ACTIONS**

Ref	Action	Owner	Status
5iii	To provide information on safeguarding and support measures for the 17 homeless students in the safeguarding report.	SD	