

CORPORATION BOARD of UNITED COLLEGES GROUP
Wednesday 23 September 2020, 6 pm – By Zoom

Members Present: Nick Bell (CEO), Alex Fyfe, Tony Johnston (Chair), Desmond Bishop, Cathy Bird, Franklin Asante, Laura Griffin, Derrick Betts, Amish Nathwani, Jan Knight, Norman Whyte, Angela Drisdale Gordon, Ross Mackenzie, Matthew Green, Colin Smith, Lee Horsley

In attendance: Zoë Lawrence, Stephen Davis, Claire Collins.

1	<p>PROCEDURAL</p> <p>Welcome and apologies for absence The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies had been received from Amanda Thorneycroft, CFO.</p> <p>Chair’s Announcements</p> <p>I. Mary Elliott had stood down from her role as governor over the Summer for health reasons. Members thanked Mary for her significant contribution to the Corporation and her skilful chairing of the TLS Committee.</p> <p>II. Mary was the chair of the TLS Committee. A process had been undertaken to identify a new chair. CS had agreed to stand. This was uncontested at committee level. The Corporation approved the appointment of CS as TLS Chair.</p> <p>III. Stephen Hayes had stood down as staff governor over the Summer. The GSR Committee would be agreeing the process to fill this vacancy at its meeting the following week. Members thanked Stephen for his contribution to the Corporation.</p> <p>IV. The former student governors had now left the college and a process was underway to elect new student governors. Unfortunately, it had not been possible to complete this before this Corporation meeting. Members thanked Sukhveer Singh and Rose Sareami for their contribution to the Corporation and TLS Committee which had been greatly valued.</p> <p>V. Members recorded their congratulations to Misk Sharif-Ali who had recently received a silver Pearson Award for FE lecturer of the year. It was agreed that the Corporation would send a formal letter of congratulations.</p>	
2	<p>Declarations of Interest in the agenda items</p> <p>TJ declared an interest in item 8, Chair’s remuneration and that he would leave the meeting for this item.</p>	
3	<p>I. Approve minutes of meeting held 8 July 2020 The minutes were approved and would be signed as an accurate record.</p> <p>II. Matters arising There was one matter arising which would be taken forward via the F&GP Committee concerning the timing of the budget cycle.</p> <p>III. Request to raise Grey Box items No items were raised by members.</p>	
4	<p>STRATEGIC</p> <p>I. Coronavirus – Re-opening of Campuses</p>	

NB updated the Corporation on the measures taken to re-open the campuses to students from early September. The advice from Public Health England (PHE), and the Department of Education (DoE) was being followed. This had included physical changes to the layouts of some areas within the buildings, the introduction of one-way systems, increased cleaning, placing of hand sanitisers, changes to classroom layout and access to student resources. Staff had been invited back into the buildings in July, and their feedback was sought on how the arrangements would work in practice, and further improvements made as a result. Extensive risk assessments had been undertaken at a campus, faculty and individual level. Enrolment was moved online to prevent any prospective students from needing to attend at the campuses. Overall this had worked effectively. A policy on face coverings had been introduced in all communal areas.

Students' lessons were being provided half digitally and half face to face to be able to accommodate students in the buildings and allow for social distancing. Staff attendance has generally been good with most willing to return. All measures have been introduced in consultation with staff and relevant unions.

To date, two students had tested positive for the virus and necessary actions had been taken. Should another case be identified then that could trigger further action. The intention was to stay open, though if necessary, it would be possible to go back to full digital and remote learning if restrictions were increased. The government guidance is changeable, so practice was being kept under review.

SD explained that enrolment had been completed online and that this had progressed successfully compared with some other London colleges. Students had attended the campuses for induction which was now complete.

MG commented that in the past students sometimes ventured into residential areas and he asked how this was being policed. SD said that the number of students in the buildings at any one time had been significantly reduced to accommodate social distancing. In Paddington this was from 2000 to 500 students at any one time. Students' timetables also didn't allow for extensive opportunities for socialising. This would mitigate against some of the anti-social behaviour. Students have been reminded of their own social responsibilities.

AN sought assurance that it would be possible to revert to digital learning quickly in the event of more restrictive lockdown measures. NB confirmed that the organisation was in a good position to enable this quickly. 16-19 students were now entitled to have a device on loan, and the adult bursary would contribute to the cost of devices for older students. The timetable had also been designed to compress to online only provision.

TJ asked how severe any outbreak would need to be before closure would be considered. NB explained that the DoE definition was 2 or more cases within a two-week period was considered to be an outbreak. Depending on the size of the outbreak additional measures would be introduced. Cases were being reported and advice taken accordingly.

The Corporation asked that their thanks be recorded to the huge efforts from all those involved in enrolment and the necessary changes to the campuses for them to be able to re-open safely.

II. Government Policy Summary – Impact of July Chancellor Announcement - Update
(Document circulated in advance)

NB explained that this paper provided an update on the July government announcements and detailed some additional funding and potential grants that the college had received. These included a capital grant of £1.9m for this financial year for which proposals for expenditure would be discussed at the F&GP Committee on 7 October. A grant had also been applied for to support the Cockpit Theatre. NB's paper also drew members' attention to various FE publications over the Summer period, including an Open Letter in response to the Black Lives Matter Campaign, the College of the Future report, and Dame Mary Ney's review of FE Finance. These were likely to inform the forthcoming FE White Paper which is due in the Autumn.

ADG highlighted the Open Letter and how this impacts UCG. AN sought assurance that there was an EDI Action Plan with clear targets and KPIs. NB said that this was in development and a further meeting would be taking place the following week to review it further in light of the BLM campaign. He hoped to be able to bring a detailed plan with KPIs back to the Corporation in December.

III. Commercial Strategy
(Strategy circulated in advance)

This strategy was one of the underpinning elements of the wider Strategic Plan approved by the Corporation in July. This document proposed a range of opportunities to diversify income over the short, medium and longer term, and how this could be taken forward. The approach was initially lower risk, increasing as the commercial work developed. The strategy proposed the use of two subsidiary companies, one for core GFE activity, and the other for the Cockpit and lettings, and for any surpluses to be gift aided to the College. Governance arrangements for the subsidiaries would be reviewed by the GSR Committee. The memorandum and objects for these companies would be aligned with the Corporation. Investment would need to be made in bid-writers and a CRM system. The success criteria include an increased number of students and the aim to generate £2m surplus to reinvest.

MG welcomed the strategy but expressed concern that this did not adversely affect the Cockpit Theatre as a part of the community in the Church Street area. He acknowledged that the redevelopment and the focus of the strategy could make improvements but wanted to reiterate the community out-reach the theatre offered. NB recognised this point and said that any changes would be sensitive to this as part of the Church Street redevelopment.

DB commented that the strategy was innovative and forward thinking, and sought clarification on the extent the College was breaking into new markets for FE, and how much was tried and tested. NB explained that there were other college groups that had taken similar approaches in the short and medium term, but the longer-term aspects were more pioneering and at higher risk.

RM said he liked the paper but had a number of comments. The first of these was assessment of the market and market positioning with competitor analysis. He felt that it would be important to know the level of investment needed and whether this would be too much to be able to realistically compete in the market. He advised not to rush into the governance arrangements, to carefully consider the construct of this

	<p>including the balance between executive and non-executive roles, the right incentives and phasing. He also felt that the funding mechanism was important to take account of tax repayments and to be able to scale up. Branding of the companies was also another issue, whether these would be directly linked to the UCG brand or be separate. AF expressed concern about the possible governance arrangements and welcomed the opportunity to explore these further. She felt that it was important to ensure transparency with the Corporation and be clear of any delegated powers.</p> <p>NB confirmed that the governance arrangements would be discussed at GSR Committee the following week. He also agreed with the point raised on branding and that this would link with proposals on UCG branding expected later in the year. He thought that the marketing would depend on location.</p> <p>TJ was keen that the target to generate £2m surplus at this point be relaxed until more work had been done in developing aspects of the strategy further. CB felt that it was important for the company objects to be clear about what was out of scope and create some alignment of purpose with the college ethos and students.</p> <p>Pending consideration of the feedback and comments from the Corporation, members were content in principle to approve the overarching direction of this strategy.</p> <p><i>DBish joined the meeting from 18.50</i></p>	
5	<p>COMMITTEE MATTERS Teaching, Learning and Skills</p> <p>I. Student Achievement Summer 2020 <i>(Paper circulated in advance)</i></p> <p>SD set out the position on student achievement from the Summer assessment based on the paper. In general, two thirds of faculties had improved their results from the previous year, but most were below the national rates which had increased in 2019/20. It was pleasing to see that maths and science results had generally improved. JK queried why maths results had improved for 16 – 19-year-olds but had declined for adults in the same setting. SD said that he was not certain of the reasons for this but had considered whether it was due to closer scrutiny of 16-19-year-olds maths as an area of improvement following the Ofsted inspection. Further investigation of this would be undertaken in developing the SAR.</p> <p>AN pointed out that many of the results were below the college targets and below national rates and sought assurance on the level of confidence to be able to make improvements for next year. SD said that this required a multi-faceted approach as set out in the Teaching and Learning Operational Plan. Some improvements had been demonstrated and furthermore forensic work was planned, including monitoring the quality of digital delivery. He was confident that progress could be made.</p> <p>MG said that he was delighted with the A level grades and hoped that this gave a firmer footing for A levels going forward.</p> <p>CB asked what impact remote learning for vocational and A level courses had had on value added. SD explained that the college had not been monitoring VA in recent years and was planning to move from ALPS to LPUK to be able to do this in a timelier way.</p>	

This will be picked up alongside stretch and challenge and differentiation during this academic session.

ADG asked if it would be possible to see the results by learner groups. SD said that it was too early for this at the moment due to constraints on MI resourcing, but it was hoped to be able to bring this to the TLS Committee in November.

The SAR validation meeting would be taking place on Monday 26 October and members were asked to inform ZL if they were able to attend.

II. Initial Enrolment Numbers

Enrolment was still progressing. Numbers were currently above the funded target with sufficient scope for attrition. Work was continuing to trace some students who had started but not completed the enrolment process. The use of centre assessed grades (CAG) had resulted in some grade inflation, leading to students enrolling at HE rather than FE and an upward shift of entry levels in FE. Some adult programmes were also now fully funded which was having a positive impact.

III. Digital Learning – What have we learnt?

(Paper circulated in advance)

SD presented a paper on plans for digital learning. This was closely linked to the Strategic Plan, and the Teaching and Learning Operational Plan. It set out the intentions to move forward under key themes including IT infrastructure and HR.

TJ asked who would lead this area of work and where would sit in the organisation. SD explained that this would be led by a newly appointed Assistant Principal who has experience in ed-tech learning. New immersive classrooms were being developed using some of the £1.9m funding which would enable class sizes to be increased with the same level of resource. This was of particular value given social distancing.

DB enquired if pre-recorded lectures would be used. SD said that he was keen on a model of learning on demand rather than through timetables, using a case load approach. It may also be possible then to monetise the digital product and link this with the commercial strategy.

RM liked the emphasis on student engagement and thought that this would be an opportunity to link this with branding and social media as a potential quick win. This could be a way of differentiating UCG from its competitors building on the transformation of the student experience through online enrolment.

IV. Ofsted Action Plan - Update

(Paper circulated in advance)

Members noted the intention of Ofsted to conduct a non-judgemental visit in the Autumn term. It was not known with the impact of coronavirus restrictions to what extent this would be a physical visit or desk based. Members welcomed the overview and noted the paper.

V. Safeguarding Policy and Annual Report

(Paper and policy circulated in advance)

	<p>This policy had been reviewed in line with the changes made to Keeping Children Safe in Education earlier in September. The Corporation approved the policy and received the Annual Report.</p> <p><i>NW joined the meeting at 7.30 pm</i></p>	
6	<p>Wembley & Willesden Project Committee (SEE CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES)</p> <p>I. Project Update</p>	
7	<p>Finance and General Purposes</p> <p>I. Pension Fund – Legal Charge on Paddington Green <i>(Papers circulated in advance)</i></p> <p>NB presented the documentation which made the case to place a second legal charge on the Paddington Campus which would reduce the pension risk analysis and as a result the percentage of the College’s pension contributions. This would provide a saving of £500k per year for three years. Members were content to approve the signing of the deeds on the basis that there were no significant changes to the documentation which was currently still in draft form. It was required that the deeds be signed by 30 September 2020.</p> <p>II. EoY Financial Position <i>(July management accounts circulated in advance)</i></p> <p>NB described the key elements of the end of year financial position including some of the changes to income and expenditure since the July Corporation meeting. It was noted that this was done on a prudent cash basis and moneys not received in year were not included. It was agreed that a view on the accounting of the £2.6m expenditure from the Wembley Project could be considered at F&GP in due course. It was understood that should a decision be taken to write this off it would not change the deficit sufficiently to impact on the banking covenants.</p> <p>AF queried whether more savings could have been made from flexibilities in the staffing structure once the workload decreased due to lockdown. This had not been possible due to managing staff absence from C19 infections and the need to continue to deliver teaching in challenging circumstances.</p>	
8	<p>Governance, Search and Remuneration (SEE CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES)</p> <p>I. Chair Remuneration</p>	
9	<p>AOB</p> <p>The date of the next meeting 16 December 2020</p> <p>The meeting closed at 9.00pm</p>	

Minutes taken by Zoë Lawrence 24 September 2020

SIGNED:

Date:

Tony Johnston, Chair

ACTIONS

Ref	Action	Owner	Status
06i 8/7	To review the budget development processes to enable F&GP to have sight of reforecasts and proposed budgets earlier in the business planning cycle.	AT/NB	CF / F&GP
04ii	For an EDI action plan with KPIs to be brought back to the Corporation for the December meeting	NB/CC	On agenda