

## West Lothian College

28 February 2023

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### Board of Governors

### Meeting of Tuesday 6 December 2022

Present: Alex Linkston (Chair)  
Sue Cook  
Jackie Galbraith  
Blair Stewart (Student Association President)  
Frank Gribben  
Iain McIntosh  
Moirá Niven  
Seonaid Crosby  
Neil Sinclair (Teaching Staff Representative)  
Richard Lockhart  
Abel Aboh  
Virginia Toyi (Support Staff Representative)  
Tom Bates  
Colin Miller  
Sue Stahly

In attendance: Rehela Hussain (Shadow Board Member)  
Tony Sharkey (Shadow Board Member)  
Simon Earp, Vice Principal Performance and Improvement  
Jennifer McLaren, Vice Principal Finance and Corporate Services  
Sarah-Jane Linton, Vice Principal Learning and Attainment

#### **Presentation: Pathways from Poverty**

The Board of Governors heard a presentation from the Director of Faculty of Access, Employability and Schools on the college's work to meet the government goal of a Fairer and More Equal Society.

The Board of Governors were given an insight into actions the college has taken to support students in hardship situations. These actions include free food options, washing machines and discretionary funding. The Board were informed that the college is being very bold in our practice and our practice is being recognised across West Lothian and beyond. We are empowering families to have improved choices and developing policies and procedures that meet the needs of our students.

The Board of Governors discussed the impact of the college's effective partnership working and praised the work of this team. The Director of Faculty emphasised that this work is now fully embedded and not simply a one-off action. Partners are delighted to be working on campus with the college.

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The Board of Governors asked what provision is made during holiday periods for students and were pleased to learn that we partner up with other organisations so that cover is provided when the college is closed for the holidays. Students have a safe place to be even when college is closed. The Board of Governors agreed this work is very impressive and should be continually emphasised to the Scottish Funding Council highlighting the college role as more than just an educator.

### **1 Board Administration**

#### **1.1 Welcome and apologies**

The Chair welcomed all members to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Elaine Cook and Karine Bourdarias (Student Association President)

#### **1.2 Declarations of Conflicts of Interest**

There were no declarations of conflicts of interest.

#### **1.3 Minutes of the Meeting of 20 September 2022**

The Depute Chair noted that co-opted members should be recorded as In Attendance. The Chair of Finance and General Purposes Committee also noted that she was not able to attend the Parliamentary session as planned.

#### **1.4 Matters Arising**

Actions 1 and 3 have been completed

Action 2: under consideration

Action 4: Action 4 has been considered and it has been agreed that a summary from committee meeting minutes will be brought to the Board of Governors meeting from February 2023.

### **2 Matters for Attention**

#### **2.1 Student Association Report**

The Student Association President discussed Sparkle survey results which are currently at 52% return rate and double the response rate on last year. Over 70% of comments are positive but comments have still to be fully considered. The full report will be available for the next board meeting in February 2023.

The Board of Governors heard that the Student Association have received 90 referrals for student support over the Christmas period which is an increased demand. The Student Association is also seeing

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increased demand for larger food and warm clothing. The Student Association President discussed the need for toiletries and informed the Board that staff have come forward with donations. Staff have also been generous in bringing in warm clothing. The Committee highlighted to the Student Association that there is a food network in West Lothian Council that the Student Association could link with for additional support.

The Committee praised the report and the great work done by the Student Association in a period of only 3 months. The Board also noted that opportunities for student feedback are excellent. The Board praised the way the Student Association Presidents have re-energised the way the Student Association engages with students as they return to on-campus learning.

### **2.2 Chief Executive Report**

The Principal discussed the national publication on student poverty and mental health. The college was asked to provide input to this and the follow up national coverage put the college in a very positive light. The 30 minutes documentary by Aidan Martin presented a great profile for the college.

The Board of Governors were updated on the Education Scotland annual engagement visit. The college achieved a Grade 1 which is the best grade, with no recommendations for improvement. This is extremely positive and an outstanding result. The Principal acknowledged the work of all the staff who gave input to this review as well as the Student Association.

The Board was informed that the Trust Project received a highly commended award at CDN awards.

The Board were impressed with the Education Scotland result and passed on thanks to all staff. The Board discussed the messaging we should use to promote our excellent results and noted that we should be highlighting the quality of our academic excellence, which is still being achieved, as well as the great socially valuable work we are doing.

### **2.3 Regional Board Chair's Feedback – verbal update**

The Chair gave an update on recommendations made to the minister to fill board vacancies. We are still awaiting a response.

The Chair highlighted the awards received at the College Development Network event on 25 November 2022 and passed on the Board's

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congratulations to all involved. The Chair also congratulated the Principal on her achievement of the Chamber of Commerce Award for Women in Business 2022. The Chair also recognised the value of this award in recognising the significant contribution the college has made to economic activity in West Lothian.

The Chair updated the Board of Governors on Colleges Scotland: Thinking the Unthinkable Conventions. The Conventions are exploring the future of the sector and potential changes needed to cope with reducing resources. The Chair reported that colleges have been asked to plan on the basis of flat cash over the next 3 years which will mean a considerable cut in funding. The Chair emphasised the importance of keeping morale high through positive messaging.

The Chair highlighted the importance of additional credits received this year and the need to keep pushing for a review of credit allocations to ensure we get a fair share, or bigger share, of funding.

The Board discussed the situation in some other colleges where there is under-recruitment and whether the Scottish Funding Council could be minded to re-allocate funds to the college where credits can be delivered. The Principal emphasised that the college is agile enough to deliver additional credits.

The Chair confirmed that he will no longer be Chair of the Employers Committee from December 2022.

### **2.4 Strategic Risk Register**

The Depute Chair of the Board introduced the strategic risk register and asked members if they had comments for discussion.

The Board agreed the biggest risk to the college is remaining financially stable while meeting pay award claims. The Board discussed comparative salaries between Scotland and England with Scottish teachers being paid more than their English counterparts. The 2% set aside for pay increases does not allow for inflationary pressure and is unlikely to be acceptable in the current situation. The Board noted a concern that this will result in industrial action since the Government will not commit to additional funding to support a pay award to staff.

The Board discussed risk 3.1: To generate a break even or surplus position.

It was noted that permission for a deficit was given by the Scottish Funding Council in 2021-22. Discussion took place on whether we are

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still aiming for that or a breakeven position. The Vice Principal, Finance and Corporate Services highlighted threats to the budget including pay awards and a reduction in funding from the Young Person's Guarantee Fund and Developing the Young Workforce Fund since these may not be in existence. The Vice Principal, Finance and Corporate Services emphasised the deficit in 2021-22 was planned for investment to support learning. The Board agreed that this action was appropriate but noted we should not be aiming to tolerate a deficit and the college should aim to set a break-even budget for this year.

The Board also commented on a possible risk of disadvantaging the college through continuing to show good financial health and receiving less funding as a result.

On risk 3.2, the Board asked what the workforce feeling is on the pay award. The Principal confirmed this is devolved to unions as a national issue but that staff are kept informed of any potential implications from budget planning. The Board agreed we should be proactive and transparent on salary awards. The Board commented that if the pay award and job evaluation scores are combined, this actually puts the risk into the RED high-risk category.

The Board discussed risk 6.1: Cyber security, and whether we are content this risk is sufficiently reduced and that the Disaster Recovery Plan is in place and operational. The Vice Principal, Performance and Improvement reported the Cyber Security Plan is gold standard. The Chair of Audit Committee confirmed the committee has considered this risk. The Board agreed that we are now in a much stronger position to face any cyber-attack. The Vice Principal, Performance and Improvement also confirmed the college is working with West Lothian Council to bring cyber security plans together and carry out scenario planning.

The Chair of Learning and Teaching Committee reported that quality concerns noted under risk 2.1 do not require further discussion since there is evidence that mitigations put in place are working.

The Depute Chair of the Board asked if the Board is content the risk register presents an accurate reflection of the college situation and that all possible risk mitigations are in place.

The Board agreed the risk register is accurate and the college is doing all it can do to mitigate risks.

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### 3 Matters for Approval

#### 3.1 Annual Report and Financial Statement

The Vice Principal, Finance and Corporate Services reported this paper has been discussed extensively at both Finance and General Purposes and Audit Committees. The Audit Committee is recommending this paper to the Board for approval.

The Board was content to approve the report.

#### 3.2 Letter of Representation

The Board was content to approve the Letter of Representation

#### 3.3 Outcome Agreement Self Evaluation 2021-22

#### 3.4 Draft Outcome Agreement 2022-23

#### 3.5 Curriculum Plan 2023-24

The Chair of Learning and Teaching Committee reported that these papers have been discussed in detail at the Learning and Teaching Committee and that the Committee had no concerns. The reports reflect a good news story. The Board reflected positively on the college getting over 60% of staff back to work on campus. The Board also commented positively on the 700 laptops loaned out to students and agreed the college was doing the right things to support students in their learning.

#### 3.6 Procurement Strategy

The Chair of Finance and General Purposes Committee discussed the key points in the paper and highlighted the standard pro-forma being used. The Finance and General Purposes Committee confidently recommends the strategy to the Board of Governors for approval.

The Board of Governors was content to approve the strategy.

#### 3.7 Protocol for Board Member Attendance at Meetings

The Board of Governors was content to approve this protocol but suggested the protocol should cover attendance at all events including meetings.

##### **Action 1: Board Secretary and Governance Advisor**

Amend protocol wording to cover all events.

#### 3.8 Procedure for Appointment and Removal of Committee Chairs

The Board was content to approve this procedure.

## **4 Committee Matters**

### **4.1 Learning and Teaching Committee Update**

The Chair of Learning and Teaching Committee gave an update on the presentation from Faculty Directors and informed the Board that this was to be included as a standing item on future agenda.

The Committee had discussed the Outcome Agreement for last year, this year and the coming year. It had been agreed this was an important document and should be kept to the forefront of future discussion.

The Curriculum Plan is much more flexible and reflects confidence in the management team being able to meet credit targets. All indicators are going in the right direction.

The Committee was pleased to see progress made on quality enhancement issues brought to the previous meeting.

The Board of Governors noted this update.

### **4.2 Finance and General Purposes Committee Update**

The Committee had discussed financial management risks and noted the positive actions being taken by the Executive Team to mitigate these risks.

The Finance and General Purposes Committee noted that the college is in a good position with regard to credit delivery.

The decarbonisation project was discussed in some detail. The Committee noted some concern that the project may come up short due to increases in material costs. It was agreed that funding may limit what can be achieved from the project but that we should not overspend on this project.

The Board of Governors noted the significant achievement in obtaining the £2 million funding.

The Board of Governors were informed that the college is making a £500 payment to FE students prior to the festive break.

The Board heard how the Committee had discussed the increase in staff turnover and that there was no indication of specific reasons for this.

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The Board of Governors noted the update from the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

### **4.3 Audit Committee Update**

The Chair of Audit Committee gave an update on the main points of discussion from the meeting including the Annual Report to the Board of Governors, External Audit Annual Report and the Health and Safety Report.

The Chair of Audit Committee highlighted to the Board of Governors that the college had achieved a clean audit for the last 3 years and that staff had been commended for their work on this. This was noted as a significant achievement for the college.

#### **4.3.1 Audit Committee Annual Report to the Board of Governors**

The Board of Governors noted this report and had no further questions on the Audit Committee Annual Report.

#### **4.3.2 External Audit Annual Report to the Board and Auditor General for Scotland**

The Board of Governors noted the very positive External Audit Annual Report and the unqualified opinions from the External Auditor.

#### **4.3.3 Health and Safety Report**

The Board of Governors noted the Health and Safety Report

### **4.4 Chairs Committee Update (verbal)**

The meeting did not take place as there were no items for the Chairs Committee agenda.

## **5 Any Other Business (AOB)**

- 5.1 The Chair highlighted the Scottish Government National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET) and encouraged members to read this paper in advance of the Strategy Day on 24 January 2023.

## **6 Review of Board Meeting and Supporting Papers**

The Board of Governors was happy with the meeting and with the quality of supporting papers.



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The meeting ended with a showing of the college's annual Christmas Video which has been produced by the marketing team for the third year.

### 7 **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 28 February 2023 at 4.30 pm.