

West Lothian College

26 September 2023

Board of Governors

Meeting of Tuesday 20 June 2023

Present: Alex Linkston (Chair of the Board of Governors)
Tony Sharkey (Vice Chair of the Board of Governors)
Abel Aboh (Non-executive Member)
Tom Bates (Non-executive Member)
Elaine Cook (Non-executive Member)
Seonaid Crosby (Non-executive Member)
Michael Greenhalgh (Non-executive Member)
Gavin Hamilton (Non-executive Member)
Rehela Hussain (Non-executive Member)
Richard Lockhart (Non-executive Member)
Moira Niven (Non-executive Member)
Sue Stahly (Non-executive Member)
Jackie Galbraith (Principal and Chief Executive)
Karine Bourdarias (Student Association President)
Blair Stewart (Student Association President)
Shelagh Fraser (Support Staff Member)
Neil Sinclair (Teaching Staff Member)

In attendance: Simon Earp, Vice Principal Performance and Improvement
Sarah-Jane Linton, Vice Principal Learning and Attainment
Jennifer McLaren, Vice Principal Finance and Corporate Services

1 Committee Administration

1.1 Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed all members to the meeting. Shelagh Fraser was welcomed to her first meeting as the newly elected Support Staff Board Member.

Apologies were received from Aruna Lopez.

1.2 Declarations of Conflicts of Interest

There were no declarations of conflicts of interest.

1.3 Minutes of the Meeting of 28 February 2023

The minutes of the meeting of 28 February 2023 were accepted as a correct record.

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1.4 Matters Arising

The Board of Governors noted that both actions have been completed.

2 Presentations

The Board of Governors heard two presentations on sustainability work being carried out across the college to achieve carbon savings in the college built environment.

2.1 Presentation: Net Zero Plan

Rory Hill, Sustainability Project Manager, introduced the Board to the concept of net zero and noted the Scottish Government target date of 2040. The presentation introduced the college's Net Zero Plan and gave the board a picture of the history around emissions and the reductions we are working towards. The Board noted the key Government target is net zero emissions by 2040 and a 43% reduction by 2027. Rory outlined how organisations can act to contribute to achievement of the target.

The Board was informed about the Net Zero Plan for Scottish Colleges and the implementation of the college's Strategic Oversight Group. This group will have responsibility to oversee work in progress and to give regular updates to the Board. There will also be sub-groups set up to address specific sustainable development goals of the college Net Zero Plan. The Vice Principal Finance and Corporate Services outlined to the Board how the Strategic Oversight Group will work in practice.

The Board heard that the college will report to the Scottish Sustainable Network using a standard reporting format.

The Vice Principal, Learning and Attainment described how we will use our own data analytics on student locations to report on sustainable travel. The Chair of the Board asked how we measure the carbon footprint of people working at home and it was reported this is largely based on estimates from Human Resources around the percentage of time staff work from home.

The Chair of the Board asked how the college will embed sustainability in the curriculum. The Board noted the Change, Sustain, Attain Unit has sustainability at its heart and we will be encouraging students to undertake the unit. This unit is tied in directly to UN sustainability goals. The Principal highlighted the work that was done in college to embed sustainability into all subjects, for example through the UN SDGs

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Teach-in week we hold each year where our students teach school children about sustainability.

The Board asked if there are sanctions to be applied if the college doesn't meet the target by 2040. It was confirmed there will still be some emissions from college activities but it is hoped these will be minimal. The Board were informed there is no formal action in place, civil or criminal, at the moment.

2.2 Presentation: Decarbonisation Project, Ameresco

Austen Bamford, Ameresco, presented the Board with an overview of the work done with the college to date. The Board also heard about the work Ameresco has done with UK wide organisations to deliver carbon savings in the built environment. Ameresco completed the college's initial evaluation as well as Edinburgh, Borders and Newbattle colleges.

The Board was informed Ameresco has been delivering the investment grade proposal over the last 4 months and discussed the individual projects being completed in Building No.4. Ameresco discussed the practical benefits of this project for college users as well as the reduction to the college carbon footprint.

The Board was informed that the Building Management System across the whole college will be upgraded as part of this project and that wireless radiator valves will be installed in rooms, giving more control over room temperature.

The Board discussed the benefits of the Buildings Management System and noted how this can be used by teaching staff for student learning.

Action 1: Board Governance Advisor

Circulate Net Zero Presentation to Board Members

The Chair of the Board thanked both speakers taking the time to attend the meeting and for their interesting and informative presentations.

3 Matters for Attention

3.1 Student Association Report

The Student Association gave an update to the Board on the key activities the Student Association has been progressing throughout the academic year. The Board noted the Student Association has kept them well informed through detailed reports to the Learning and Teaching Committee and to the Board of Governors.

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The Board was interested to know how the Student Association Ambassador role has worked given the workload issues noted in the Student Association report. The Student Association Presidents confirmed that, in the coming year, Ambassadors will be able to select projects they feel are appropriate to the time they have available which will reduce pressure on individuals.

The Student Association asked the Board for feedback on the format of reporting. Board Members confirmed they are happy with the current format.

The Student Association thanked the Board for making them feel so welcome this year and for their patience and support. The Board thanked the Student Association for their hard work and congratulated the Student Association on their shortlisting for the NUS Scotland College Student Association of the Year and NUS Scotland Staff Member of the Year awards.

3.2 Chief Executive Report

The Principal introduced her report to the Board and highlighted the publication of the Withers Report. This is a favourable report for the college sector that is recommending significant changes to the education system. The report recommends structural and cultural change to give parity of esteem to college funding allocations. The Principal offered to send a summary of this report to Board Members.

The Principal also highlighted the Purposes and Principles Report from Scottish Government which will align with the Withers report and the review of qualifications through the Hayward Report.

The Board noted that the college has had another successful year and asked if the college feels newly appointed Government Ministers will be a positive impact on the college. The Chair reported that new Ministers appear to be listening to the college sector and may be a positive force for change.

Action 2: Principal

Board Members to receive a summary of the Withers Report

3.3 Regional Board Chair's Feedback

The Chair gave the board an update on the current financial status of the sector and the financial challenges ahead.

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The Board was given an update on key projects being carried out through Colleges Scotland to address the flat cash situation.

3.4 Strategic Risk Register

The Chair of Audit Committee reported that the Audit Committee was comfortable with the current risk register ratings against tolerances and asked for comments from the Board. The Board was comfortable with risks noted at the present time.

Board Members discussed the Risk Management Workshop held on 3 May 2023 and the tolerances that had been agreed against risks. The Board noted that the high-risk criteria in the Risk Register for 2023-24 are not within Board control.

The Chair of Audit Committee noted the Risk Register should be discussed in more depth at Board level in 2023-24 but that discussion should be focused by exception.

The Board was content to agree the risk mitigations as set out in the 2022-23 Risk Register and the risks and Board tolerance levels as set out in the draft Risk Register for 2023-24. The Board was also content to agree the risk management process for 2023-24.

4 Matters for Approval

4.1 Annual Report 2023-24

The Vice Principal, Finance and Corporate Services noted this item was extensively discussed at the Finance and General Purposes Committee as this is the first deficit budget presented to the Board.

The deficit situation was discussed and agreed at the Board Strategy Day. The board noted the adjusted operating position will be a deficit of £467K.

The Chair discussed the college's strategy to address the deficit by year 3 without cutting credits and courses. The Board discussed the importance of keeping staff motivation high which will be critical in getting through the challenges of the current financial situation. The Board was informed that a financial forecast will be brought to the Board in September which will show the deficit position over a 3-year period bringing the college to a balanced budget. The Vice Principal, Finance and Corporate Services confirmed the Scottish Funding Council will gather information on the position across all colleges and will report to Scottish Government. The Principal reassured the Board

that the college does not want to be in a deficit position and is working hard to ensure we address this.

The Board agreed the deficit is justifiable in the current circumstances and were content with the plan to address the deficit. The Vice Principal, Finance and Corporate Services reported that other colleges are in a much less comfortable situation than we are. The Board was pleased to note that we are continuing to invest in college premises, despite the current financial pressures, to ensure our students have the highest quality learning experience.

The Board was content to approve the budget for 1 August 2023 – 31 July 2024.

5 Committee Matters for Information

5.1 Learning and Teaching Committee Update

5.1 (i) Education Scotland Annual Engagement Report

The Chair of Learning and Teaching Committee reported on the extremely positive update given to the Learning and Teaching Committee from Education Scotland. The Board heard that Education Scotland had noted many examples of sector leading practice and were recommending other colleges contact West Lothian College to learn from our practice. However, it was noted that the college does not intend to become complacent and will continue to seek out continuous improvement opportunities. The Board was informed that this report goes to the Scottish Funding Council who had congratulated the college on the report.

The Board congratulated the college on this very positive report.

The Board also heard that interesting presentations had been given to the committee from Faculty Directors.

The Board of Governors noted this update.

5.1 (ii) Learning and Teaching Strategy

The Board was informed the Learning and Teaching Committee had discussed the four strategic aims of the Strategy and agreed the aims will provide a clear direction for the development of learning and teaching approaches. The Learning and Teaching Strategy was recommended to the Board for approval.

The Board approved the Learning and Teaching Strategy.

5.2 Finance and General Purposes Committee Update

The Board was informed of the presentation from the Workforce Development Team and was impressed by the overall success rate achieved in this faculty. The Committee was most impressed by the culture of commitment to the students and to securing repeat business.

The Buildings and Contents Insurance Renewal was recommended to the Board for approval. The Board was assured the renewal provides a high level of cover for the college but with a significant cost saving.

The Committee reported there were no surprises in the Management Accounts which were discussed at length by the Committee.

The HR and People Development report raised a concern about staff turnover and absence rates. The Committee received assurance that this is a sector wide issue and the college is confident there are no specific issues to be addressed.

The Board was content to approve the Insurance Renewal.

5.3 Audit Committee Update

The Chair of Audit Committee informed the Board this was the first meeting attended by Audit Scotland who are the college's new external auditors. The Board were informed that all audit reports were positive.

5.3 (i) Health and Safety Quarterly Report

The Board were informed the Health and Safety Officer was leaving the college for a new post with Stirling University. The Committee had discussed the report which was positive and wished the Health and Safety Officer well in her new role.

5.3 (ii) Digital Strategy

The Board was informed that the Committee had discussed the Digital Strategy which had been presented to Audit Committee for recommendation to the Board of Governors. The Audit Committee agreed the report was substantial and robust and gave a high level of comfort to the Committee that the college is progressing well in this area. The Audit Committee recommended the Digital Strategy to the Board for approval.

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The Board was content to approve the Digital Strategy.

5.4 Chairs Committee Update (Verbal)

The Chair of the Board informed the Board about the appointment of Vice Chairs to the Committees. Appointments have been made to Audit and Finance and General Purposes Committee. A Vice Chair to the Learning and Teaching Committee will be appointed in August 2023.

The Board approved these appointments.

6 Any Other Business (AOB)

The Chair of the Board of Governors noted this was Neil Sinclair's last meeting as Teaching Staff Member. The Chair noted Neil's positive contribution to the Learning and Teaching Committee and to the Board over the last 4 years. The Board thanked Neil for his hard work and professionalism shown during difficult discussions.

7 Review of Board Meeting and Supporting Papers

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

7.1 Scheme of Delegation

The Board approved the revised Scheme of Delegation

7.2 Standing Orders

The Board approved the revised Standing Orders

7.3 Board Self-Assessment

Non-executive Members remained after the meeting closed to participate in a self-assessment workshop. The Board recorded areas of strength and areas for development which will inform the Board Development Plan for 2023-24.

8 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 26 September 2023 at 4.30 pm.