



**SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE AND STROUD COLLEGE**  
**FURTHER EDUCATION CORPORATION**

Approved minutes of a meeting of South Gloucestershire and Stroud College  
Further Education Corporation

Held on 23 March 2023

WISE Campus, New Road, Stoke Gifford, Bristol

<b>Present:</b>	David Hagg	(Chair)
	Douglas Blackstock	(Joined via Teams)
	Louise Bright	
	Sophie Chester-Glyn	
	Lynne Craig	
	Mike Croker	
	Matt Davis	
	Phil Eames	
	Paul Farrell	
	Kevin Hamblin	(CEO & Executive Principal)
	Dave Merrett	
	Irene Molodtsov	
	Gary Parsons	
<b>In Attendance:</b>	Rich Aitken	(Head of Finance)
	Gavin Murray	(Deputy Principal) (Joined via Teams)
	Jude Saunderson	(Chief Financial Officer)
	Sara-Jane Watkins	(College Principal)
	Sharon Glover	(Clerk)

The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming Paul Farrell to his first Corporation meeting. Members were also informed of the resignation of Catherine Green due to a change in her work commitments.

When asked, there were no requests received to un-star any of the starred agenda items.

1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Moira Foster-Fitzgerald, Sophie Green, Khadija Nisar and Rick Sturge.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

The Clerk reported and Corporation noted the following declarations of interests:-

- Paul Farrell – interest declared as a Director of a MAT in Bristol, Venturers Trust and a board member of GLA, a primary school MAT in Gloucester.
- As Directors of SGSCSL, the interests of Louise Bright, Kevin Hamblin and Dave Merrett were noted in the sub-lease of the John Huggett Engineering Hall within the CEO & Executive Principal’s report (item 14) and the report from SGSCSL (item 17)

### 3. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held 26 January 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

*Members from the Sustainability and Biodiversity Group were welcomed to the meeting.*

### 4. **Sustainability and Biodiversity**

The Principal reported that the Energy and Carbon report, a requirement of the ESFA, is nearly complete as awaiting external data input. The final report will be circulated outside of the meeting and confirmation was received of the College’s compliance with the latest ESFA version of the guidance. Members were provided with data on the College’s carbon footprint in comparison to the previous couple of years.

Members were presented with progress against the Sustainability and Biodiversity roadmap and attention drawn to areas of revision. Members were informed that SGS is viewed as a regional leader for low carbon energy. Assurance was provided that much has been completed with partners to ensure that they have sustainable agendas and Andrew Williams-Lock (Procurement Manager) was invited to update members on actions being taken by the Sustainability and Biodiversity Group.

The update covered actions being taken with waste, tree planting, vehicles, contractors, food waste, advertising and future focus. Tom Henderson (Learning Area Manager, Art & Design at Stroud campus) reported the development of a Level 3 sustainable future course, which is the first of its kind across the country. SGS Create is also piloting modules of this programme at Level 2.

Luke Read (Learning Area Manager, Enrichment) and Tom Spencer-Hutchings (Student) provided updates on student enrichment projects and student engagement activities taking place and planned for the future. The Principal also reported that at the College’s Careers Fayre, decarbonization and the Green agenda is a golden thread at this event.

Gary Parsons (Sustainability Governor Advocate) was invited to comment. Having attended meetings of the Group he would like to continue this engagement. It was commented how good it was to see the link of supply chains with estates and links

with the curriculum and that he was giving thought as to how sustainability could be built into the A level provision.

One member questioned whether the College has any links with other Colleges outside of the region. Having attended the recent South West Governance Conference, Lancaster and Morecambe College, had shared some of the actions being taken in support of the Green Skills agenda. The College Principal and Staff Governor provided examples of how SGS is working with other Colleges, local schools and how the College is looking to secure Strategic Development Funding in the next round.

Members asked whether the College would be applying for any awards and were informed that other Colleges are also doing a lot of good work and that exceptional work in this area would be needed in order to apply for any awards.

Members questioned whether there are any further actions that can be taken to encourage learners to use sustainable methods of travel to College or secure discounts from the local bus companies. Members were informed of an initiative being discussed with the local council for the establishment of a cycling academy whereby the council leases bikes to the College. The Principal raised that some of the College estate is highly inefficient and that work is needed longer term to address these areas. Members also suggested whether there could be more use made of social media to secure buy-in from learners. Members were informed of various project groups in place across the College where actions are followed up. Members asked about staff engagement and were informed that they welcomed the focus on the sustainability and biodiversity agenda.

Members were also presented with minor updates to the Sustainability policy for Corporation approval.

**The report was noted and it was resolved:  
To approve the Sustainability Policy.**

**Action: College Principal.**

*At this point members from the Sustainability and Biodiversity Group were thanked for their attendance and they left the meeting.*

## 5. **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Strategy**

The Chair confirmed that, subsequent to the last Corporation meeting, a meeting was held with the College Principal and Deputy Principal and some Corporation members, including the Safeguarding, DEIB and SEND governor advocates. There were changes suggested for the next version of the strategy and the benefit of holding a Governor Development session on the topic was proposed.

Members asked how feedback is dealt with from the REACH and LGBTQIA+ Groups and were informed that this is shared with the Senior Leadership

Team/Executive Team. via the Deputy Principal, with feedback into the Inclusion Group.

**It was resolved:**

**To approve the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Strategy.**

## 6. Quality Strategy

Members received a report outlining the key changes to the Quality Strategy to reflect subtle changes to the College's structure and the Skills and Post-16 Education Act. Members were informed that the strategy is designed to provide a framework for cross-College quality assurance and improvement activity until 2025. Members questioned whether the strategy was sufficiently equipped due to deep dive outcomes and it was agreed that it can be considered in more depth through a Curriculum & Quality Committee, should the formation of this committee be agreed. Members were informed that an external consultant had been engaged to carry out deep dives across the College and quality will be determined when inspected. It was reported that rapid progress had been made in areas of concern and the deep dives also provided an opportunity to celebrate the good practices in place.

Members discussed whether the strategy adequately reflects changes in Higher Education as the QAA has resigned as the Designated Quality Body and all assessments will now be carried out by the Office for Students. One member raised that useful reference material is behind a pay wall and it looked as if the College has not taken out membership so will not have access to this material.

It was suggested that should a Curriculum & Quality Committee be formed it could seek assurance that sufficient higher education information is being provided. Assurance was provided that retention is 94% in higher education and there is a high level of engagement with NSS. The College has been invited to participate in a national pilot for the development of Access and Participation plans due to the significant progress made by the College.

Members discussed the benefit of a governor reviewing a class and it was raised that some governors attended deep dives but as governors are not experts it would be difficult for them to make judgements on the quality of provision. Members were informed that deep dives take place during learning excellence weeks and governors were invited to shadow someone during these walks. From a SEND perspective, governors could action this once a year. Following a deep dive concerns had been raised about level of experience and the limited number of SEND staff with relevant qualifications. Assurance was received that a budget had been ringfenced together with a commitment for a certain percentage of the SEND workforce to be qualified.

Members raised that there are no hard targets to measure SEND provision. Confirmation was received that these are now in place and the action plan and progress made can be shared with the Corporation at the next meeting, in order to provide assurance of the rapid actions taken and progress made. One governor provided assurance that huge progress is being made although some concerns remain, for example, with EHCP and of the need to find sufficient support.

**It was resolved:  
To approve the 2022-25 Quality Strategy.**

**Action: Deputy Principal.**

7. **Skills and Higher Education Strategies**

The Principal reported that the Curriculum Strategy has been superseded by the Skills Strategy due to the development of the Accountability Agreements which are the new curriculum direction. Members were informed that campus-based reviews had been undertaken which have been used to help shape the priorities of the Skills Strategy. A Skills Strategy is also considered good practice by Ofsted and contextualises the work with employers and how the College is responding to local needs. Members commented that the Strategy provided positive marketing material for the College. When asked, confirmation was received that the overview of the campus reviews was an internal document and not published. One governor who had attended the reviews commented that the meetings went well and were very detailed. When asked, the Staff Governor agreed with their content.

Members commented that there was a sense that government policy incentives, for example lifelong learning, are being drowned in bureaucracy and there was a fear that this will deter providers and questioned how much the College should invest in this. The Principal reported on a recent visit by the Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education and that this had provided the opportunity for the College to promote the sector as highly innovative but is hampered by a disconnect with government and the amount of regulation and bureaucracy in place.

Members discussed whether every vocational area has been covered by the Employer Partnership Boards and whether health and social care had been included. The Principal agreed to investigate further and notify the governor of the current health and social care employers that have been engaged. Members were informed that the curriculum had been re-designed as a result of the outcomes of the Employer Partnership Boards. The Chair suggested that the strategy is shared with employers and other interested parties.

Members were informed of a date for their diaries of 30<sup>th</sup> June 2023 as the College is arranging a stakeholder engagement conference at WISE campus.

Members were also presented with the Higher Education Strategy, with the strategic intent of growing this provision by 10% per annum through the consolidation of courses, having considered the depth and breadth of this provision. Members were informed that this was an ambitious strategy which aims to increase income by increasing class sizes using existing resources. The Chair advised that Higher Education provision will also form part of a wider College curriculum review of contribution so this is possibly an interim strategy pending that review.

Members questioned how the growth targets had been derived and how the strategy had been informed by stakeholders. Members were informed that much work had

been undertaken, engaging with current and prospective learners and there had been more focus on attending events and speaking to the sector. Employer engagement continues to be developed to ensure that the offer fits with local need together with links to higher technical qualifications.

Members questioned how the predicted student numbers had been prepared and were informed that this had been a fine balance between work resources and the ambition of staff, but was considered to be manageable. Confirmation was received that if year one goes well then there will be more ambition for the following year and a view will be taken after year one. Members noted the intent to grow the cohort whilst not continuing with student accommodation, which was a key part of the strategy. Members questioned where the students would come from. Members were informed that the ONS reclassification had driven a change in the direction for student accommodation and the College will be looking to attract undergraduates, higher apprenticeships and adults together with a greater focus on progressing local students. Members were also informed that the economy has had an impact on the attraction of Higher Education and that SGS provides a non-traditional route to higher education. There is also an increase in students that have declared needs, however, positive feedback received suggests that these learners feel supported at SGS.

The Chair summarised that the strategy was very ambitious and would need substantial marketing and was price sensitive. The strategy should be considered as interim as curriculum reviews are taking place.

**The report was noted and it was resolved:  
To approve the Skills and Higher Education Strategies.**

**Action: Principal.**

8. **Teaching, Learning and Assessment Report**

The Principal reported an increase in the investment of coaches to support staff with Teaching, Learning and Assessment due to the recruitment of new staff over the last 18-months. Staff recruitment and the impact on quality of provision is a challenge across the sector. In addition, the change in learner behaviours are also challenging for staff.

Members asked how SGS is responding to Artificial Intelligence as a huge opportunity but also poses challenges for assessments. Members were informed that the College has a forward-thinking digital team who always look to exploit Microsoft 365. The impact of AI on plagiarism in Higher Education is being investigated further and the Deputy Principal agreed to provide Corporation with an update.

**The report was noted.**

**Action: Deputy Principal.**

9. **External Board Review**

The Clerk reported that a Group of Corporation Members had met and considered research undertaken by the Clerk on various companies used for External Board Reviews. Three companies were approached for further information about their offer and costs. Following further consideration, the Group is inviting the Corporation to approve the appointment of Governance4FE to undertake the SGS External Board Review at a cost of £5,000. The Chair reported the need for External Board Reviews every three-years.

**It was resolved:**

**To appoint Governance4FE to undertake the SGS External Board Review at a cost of £5,000.**

10. **Governance Structure**

The Chair reported that a group of Governors met to discuss the current governance structure in light of feedback received on the Corporation meeting assessment forms and as part of the Governance action plan. A proposal was presented for the introduction of a Curriculum & Quality Committee and Financial Development Group. However, following discussion at the pre-Corporation meeting it was suggested that the Committee was renamed to the Skills & Quality Committee. Corporation agreed that skills was only one part of the focus, the main being on learning, therefore a Learning & Quality Committee was deemed to be a more appropriate name.

The Chair advised that the Financial Development Group would not be a formal Committee but used as a means of governor input as critical friends to provide detailed scrutiny at key stages of financial planning development prior to presentation to Corporation. Although it was appreciated that these changes were aimed at reducing the amount of reports presented to Corporation, Members raised that the changes should not add to the burdens of senior staff and to not lose sight that financial and curriculum matters still remain the responsibilities of all governors. It was suggested that there is no restriction on membership numbers for the Financial Development Group and that all governors should receive an invitation to attend meetings. The Clerk reported that the Corporation Business Plan had been reviewed and relevant reports for a Learning & Quality Committee removed with a view to reducing the number of Corporation meetings held. The Clerk suggested the option of piloting these changes and to review in a years' time.

The Chair proposed that Lynne Craig is appointed as Chair of the Committee, should she be willing, and expressions of interest from governors to join this Committee and the Financial Development Group were invited to the Clerk. The draft Terms of References were agreed in principle with a view to presenting final versions for approval, at the next meeting, along with governor appointments to the Learning & Quality Committee.

**It was resolved:**

**a) To implement a Learning & Quality Committee and Financial Development Group and to provide in principle agreement to the draft Terms of References.**

b) **To appoint Lynne Craig as Chair of the Learning & Quality Committee.**

**Action: Corporation Members.**

11. **Financial Planning Framework**

Confidential Item.

12. **Management Accounts Exception report**

The Head of Finance reported an improved forecast surplus with the College just maintaining “good” financial health. Due to the reprofiling of core funding the usual March low point has improved with a new low point now being July.

Following the outcome of the WECA funding audit there was an unadjusted audit error which was reported to Corporation together with confirmation of the National Skills Fund claw back which had been slightly over the provision within the 2021/22 accounts. The ESFA funding audit outcome still remains outstanding and an extension to file the accounts has been agreed with ESFA.

When asked, confirmation was received that the staff vacancies have assisted with the financial position. Members commented that the accounts demonstrate the College’s dependency on High Needs income and growth. The Principal reported the need for a strategic review of the curriculum.

**The report was noted.**

13. **KPI Report**

Members received the report and the Deputy Principal was thanked for the exception-based report. Members were pleased to note the increase in Safeguarding training completion rates.

**The report was noted.**

14. **CEO & Executive Principal’s Report**

Confidential Item.

15. **Principal’s Report**

Members received the Principal’s report containing various updates. Members were informed of a successful WECA bid for additional funding for Horizon 38. However, there is the need to spend the funds by the end of March and the Head of Finance was congratulated for his support in this respect.



**The report was noted.**

16. **14-16 Stroud Campus**

Members received a progress report on the development of SGS Create, together with minor revisions to the SEND policy. The Principal reported receipt of 55 applications. When asked whether the target number of applications would be achieved, there was confidence that targets will be achieved with a further open day event planned.

Members questioned whether there was a risk that ESFA approval would not be provided on time. Members were informed that guidance due on 29<sup>th</sup> March was awaited. A meeting with the ESFA has been scheduled for 3 April and they have been fully briefed. Members recognised the great progress made.

**The report was noted and it was resolved:  
To approve revisions to the SEND policy.**

17. **SGS Commercial Services Limited**

Confidential Item.

18. **Search Committee**

Confidential Item.

19. **Progress against College Improvement Plan**

Members received a report detailing progress against the College Improvement Plan.

**The report was noted.**

20. **Code of Good Governance for English Colleges Consultation**

The Clerk reported the AoC's intent to dispose of the existing Code of Good Governance and that a new Code has been developed, which is being consulted upon. Corporations' views on how they wish to engage in the consultation process were sought.

It was suggested that the Chair of the Corporation and Clerk to the Corporation prepare a response, together with any other governors that wished to be directly involved, and then circulate the response to other members to invite comment.

**The report was noted.**

**Action: Chair of the Corporation and Clerk to the Corporation.**

21. **Gender Pay**

Members received the SGS College Gender Pay Gap report, which will be posted on the College website and be completed on the government portal prior to the deadline of 31 March 2023.

**The report was noted.**

22. **Written Resolution and Application of the Corporation Seal**

The Written Resolution regarding the surrender of ABC within part of the John Huggett Engineering Hall, Berkeley and the application of the Corporation Seal to the Deed of Covenant, Deed of Surrender of Interests and Deed of Surrender of the lease for part of the John Huggett Engineering Hall were noted.

23. **Corporation action log**

Members noted that all actions had been completed.

24. **Assessment of meeting**

A summary of feedback in relation to the meeting held 26 January 2023 was received.

25. **Items of Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

26. **Confidentiality**

Members agreed that due to business and personal sensitivities, Financial Planning Framework report (item 11), CEO & Executive Principal's report (item 14), SGSCSL report (item 17), Search Committee minutes (item 18), and minutes 11, 14a-d, 17 and 19 should be treated as confidential.

27. **Date of Next Meeting**

Thursday 27 April 2023 at 4pm, via Microsoft Teams.

The meeting commenced at 5.12pm.

Irene Molodtsov joined the meeting at 5.55pm (during item 6).

Gavin Murray joined the meeting at 6.20pm (during item 7)

Dave Merrett left the meeting at 7.17pm (during item 11)

Douglas Blackstock left the meeting at 7.25pm (after item 11)

Rich Aitken left the meeting at 7.49pm (after item 16).

The meeting closed at 8.22pm.

The meeting was quorate.