



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

Approved minutes of a meeting of South Gloucestershire and Stroud College  
Further Education Corporation  
Held on 29 April 2021, via Microsoft Teams

<b>Present:</b>	David Hagg	(Chair)
	Louise Bright	
	Alicia Chappell	
	Lynne Craig	
	Mike Croker	
	Carly Dyson	
	Phil Eames	
	Roger Ellis	
	Catherine Green	
	Sophie Green	
	Kevin Hamblin	(CEO & Executive Principal)
	Dave Merrett	
	Ben Short	
Rick Sturge		
<b>In Attendance:</b>	Rich Aitken	(Head of Finance)
	Gavin Murray	(Vice Principal, Performance, Standards & Effectiveness)
	Sara-Jane Watkins	(College Principal)
	Sharon Glover	(Clerk)

1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Sophie Chester-Glyn (maternity leave), Nicole Clark, Matt Davis, Moira Foster-Fitzgerald and Jude Saunderson.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

The following declarations of interest were raised and noted by the Corporation:

- a) New declaration of interest for Kevin Hamblin in that his son, Joseph Hamblin, will be commencing a full-time role as Siobhan Baille's (MP for Stroud) Personal Assistant in her Westminster Office from 21<sup>st</sup> May 2021.

- b) New declarations of interest for Rick Sturge:
- Almondsbury Sports & Community Centre (CIO) – Joint Chairman
  - We Care Home Improvement Charity – non-remunerated Chairman of the Management Board.
- c) As Trustees of SGS Academy Trust the interests of Kevin Hamblin, Phil Eames and Lynne Craig were declared in agenda item 7.

3. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held 25 March 2021 were approved as a correct record, ready for signing by the Chair.

4. **Matters Arising From Those Minutes**

Actions on the action log were monitored and confirmation was received that they were all completed.

5. **Learner Charter, Behaviour Policy, FE & HE Learner Code of Conduct and Associated student rules and procedures**

The Vice Principal reported that there were no substantial changes to the documents presented as significant revisions had been undertaken last year. Members were informed that an SGS College Anti-bullying Charter has been added to address wider issues associated with bullying, including sexualised bullying, and that this accords with the Anti-Bullying policy already approved.

Members questioned whether the policies reflected that there has been an increase in online activity and whether this should be emphasised more in the documents presented. Although clarity is provided as part of learner induction, the Vice Principal agreed to explicitly add the inclusion of online learning.

**The report was noted and it was resolved:  
To approve the Disciplinary Policy and Procedure, the FE Learner Charter and Codes of Conduct, HE Learner Code of Conduct and the SGS Anti-Bullying Charter, subject to changes discussed.**

6. **Voice of the Learner Report**

The Vice Principal presented the report, which mostly related to the November Voice of the Learner activity, and confirmation was received that the usual FE Choices learner and employer satisfaction surveys did not proceed due to the ongoing impact of the pandemic. Members questioned the feedback communication in that although it

said “We Did” the narrative in some places suggested future actions. The Vice Principal provided assurance that the actions have been reviewed with the relevant teams and clarification received of the actions taken. The Chair of the Corporation also reported that at the Voice of the Learner meetings he had attended the facilitators had reflected back on actions taken.

The Vice Principal advised that he is working with the Student Enrichment Officer with a view to making the learner voice agendas more fluid and for more precise actions to be documented.

**The report was noted.**

7. **SGS Academy Trust Statement of Assurance**

The Head of Finance reported that the College had prepared a statement of assurance for SGSAT in 2019/20 which covered the 3-year contract from 1 September 2020 until 31 August 2023. As there are no material changes in the service level agreements for next year, there is no requirement to amend the statement of assurance. A new statement of assurance will only be required if the contract is renewed in 2023/24.

As Trustees of SGSAT the interests of Lynne Craig, Phil Eames and Kevin Hamblin were noted in this agenda item.

**The report was noted.**

8. **Benchmarking / Trend Analysis**

The Vice Principal reported that, due to the pandemic, there is no national achievement rate data covering 2019/20 and 2020/21 academic years. Members were informed that the only way to appreciate the national position is from voluntary communication of the positions of Colleges/Schools.

Having considered the information available in the public domain the Vice Principal reported an increase in headline retention and achievement, which is above the national position. There has been a positive shift in the curriculum with all Colleges increasing achievement by 4% with SGS remaining in the top quartile. Over the last four years there has been a 2/3% incremental improvement and SGS remain in the top quartile. The only exception being English and Maths provision which, although an improvement has been evidenced, it is not as rapid in comparison to other Colleges/Schools. One of the reasons for this being that SGS students sat examinations rather than receiving teacher assessed grades; which tends to have grade inflation.

The Vice Principal read out a statement from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in relation to the large increases in progress and the jump in the proportion of students making positive progress in English and Maths qualifications, which, they say, cannot

be interpreted as a change in underlying performance. Although progress at SGS is in line with the local authority area it is not yet where it needs to be.

In relation to adult provision there was a national decrease in learners, especially after March. However, at SGS the reverse has occurred with achievement rates, in the main, remaining stable. This was considered to be a very good outcome with improvement evidenced and SGS remaining in the top 25% of Colleges.

During 2019/20 there was a small reduction in Apprenticeships completions at the College. However, this compares favorably against the national picture where 23.3% of apprentices, expected to complete in 2019/20, ended the academic year with an unknown outcome because they were yet to complete. SGS remained steadfast during the pandemic and is in the top quartile.

During the pandemic female learners have performed better than male learners and there are negligible differences in the performance of other ethnic learners. The overall achievement rate has improved, which is a pleasing outcome.

Although it is challenging to compare the College's outcomes with its competitors, the College has performed better when compared to the national picture.

Members congratulated the College and one member questioned where the national rates had been obtained. Members were informed that data had been received from the AoC, which is then sense checked against the ONS. The Vice Principal offered to share the links used with this governor.

The Vice Principal reported that outcomes this year and next year will be different due to the pandemic and the impact of limited face-to-face schooling at Key Stage 4.

**The oral report was noted.**

**Action: Vice Principal.**

9. **CEO & Executive Principal's Report**

Confidential Item.

10. **Principal's Report**

The Principal reported on the following:

- a) Staff Survey results – Following the reopening of the College on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021 staff were encouraged to complete a “return to work” survey to gauge feedback on its reopening. There was an overwhelmingly positive response to the way in which the College had operated during COVID-19 and 98% of staff felt that the College had communicated well throughout the pandemic. With 77% of staff

having had one or both vaccinations this had helped the College's approach to re-opening. Members congratulated the Executive Team for the positive outcomes of the staff survey.

- b) Safeguarding – There has been an increase of the number of safeguarding concerns raised in comparison to last year and a full update was appended to the report. In light of the launch of “Everyone’s Invited” website, SGS has updated its safeguarding section on the College website, which has received a positive reaction. When asked, members were reassured that there is sufficient College resource to deal with the increase in safeguarding concerns.
- c) 2021 National Student Survey response rates and potential concerns – Although there has been an increase in response rates, which is positive, the outcomes need to be treated with some caution due to students’ dissatisfaction about the University of Gloucestershire’s “no detriment” policy and its lack of application to the 70+ SGS students. Members were informed that a formal complaint to the UoG has been made, via the Chair of the Corporation, after informal complaints and discussions have not yielded any further flexibilities. Members were alerted that SGS student dissatisfaction may impact negatively on the survey results but this was not of SGS’s doing. The Chair of the Corporation advised that he would circulate a copy of his letter to the Corporation. One Corporation Member offered to share with SGS their University’s “no detriment” policy as they are keen to avoid disparities and the stance taken by UoG did not appear to be fair or equitable. Members questioned whether UoG are adopting the same approach with other Colleges they work with. Members were informed that SGS is the only College with this level of top ups so is really only an SGS issue. The Vice Principal advised this may result in a class complaint to the OIA and SGS does feel that the UoG policy is unfair.
- d) National Star College – The College has been approached for a small subcontract proposal for WECA Adult Education funding. The National Star College’s provision is too small for them to hold a direct contract; hence they are requesting a subcontract with SGS to provide for 6 learners. National Star College are a grade 1 provider with an exceptional national reputation for their provision for learners with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. With shared learning, added value and strategic benefits of a partnership with National Star College this makes the subcontract worthwhile and Governors support of this proposal was sought.
- e) Bids – The College has been inundated with tender opportunities following many initiatives arising from government. Further information about the bids was referenced in the report and since writing the report further bid opportunities have arisen and the Executive Team are reviewing what to take forward.
- f) Bristol Talent – Appended to the report was an agreed Memorandum of Understanding with City of Bristol College for this joint initiative and Corporation endorsement was sought. SGS will shortly be going to market for a Project

Manager, with costs shared equally between both Colleges, and this may lead to wider partnership working.

- g) Full-Time Applications and Acceptances 2021/22 – Applications are looking positive with further 16-18 growth at Bristol but a decline of full-time applications at Stroud campus, which is of concern. An increase in demographics at Stroud is not anticipated until 2025 and a review of the curriculum delivery at Stroud campus is being undertaken.
- h) Confidential Item

**The report was noted and it was resolved:**

- a) **To approve the sub-contracting proposal with National Star College, subject to due diligence.**
- b) **To endorse the Bristol Talent Memorandum of Understanding between SGS and City of Bristol College.**

**Action: Chair of the Corporation.**

11. **Management Information**

- a) Management Accounts exception report - The Head of Finance presented a summary of key variances and concerns as identified in the March 2021 Management Accounts. Members were informed of the forecast surplus versus the budget surplus and that the forecast tends to stabilise at this point in time. Attention was drawn to the non-pay costs and that ESFA have provided their first allocation towards COVID-19 exceptional expenditure. However, this is currently being queried as it does not reflect the number of lateral flow tests processed and there is a problem with the ESFA modelling. This has been recognised by the ESFA and the College should be able to recoup its expenditure.

Members were informed that funds ring-fenced for the repayment of the loan facility in 2023 have been transferred to a separate bank account held, as detailed in the report.

Members questioned whether there was a further update on the student debt position. Members were assured that the College continues to reduce the debt as reported in Key Performance Indicator FR3. Data is in the process of being collected for referral to the formal debt collecting agency and that good provision has been made in the accounts for the bad debt position.

The Chair raised that, having spoken to the CEO & Executive Principal and College Principal, he was keen for a consolidated pay award to be considered over 1 or 2 years, subject to affordability.

**The report was noted.**

- b) Primary Risk Registers (including SGSCSL) - Members were presented with the risk registers showing the ten highest scoring severe and major risks for SGS and SGSCSL. Members raised that cyber risks were discussed at the Audit Committee and that there should be an overarching risk around cyber and questioned whether this had been taken into consideration in the preparation of this report. Members were informed that due to a timing issue it had not been included in the register. It was suggested that there may be a need for a governor advocate position with a special interest in cyber security and that this could be considered as part of the presentation of the Audit Committee minutes or at the Governors' Strategy Away Day.

**The report was noted.**

12. **Staff Member Election Procedure**

The Clerk reported the expiry of Roger Ellis's (Staff Governor) term of office on 31 July 2021. Members were invited to consider the Staff Member election procedure in order that succession planning takes place in advance to fill the up and coming vacancy.

**The report was noted and it was resolved:**

- a) **That a replacement for Roger Ellis should be sought and that preference is for nominations to be received for individuals from one of the Stroud/Berkeley based campuses.**
- b) **That the Staff Member appointment is to be for a four-year term of office.**
- c) **To approve the Staff Member election procedure.**

13. **Audit Committee**

Minutes from the meeting held 11 Mar 21 were noted. Phil Eames (Vice-Chair of the Audit Committee) reported the following:

- a) The Committee had reviewed various policies, with changes informed by the work of RSM, which are being recommended to Corporation for approval. The Head of Finance informed that RSM had suggested the removal of the Fraud Response Plan from the Anti-Bribery, Anti-Corruption and Anti-Fraud policy as this was too transparent to potential fraudsters and the plan will now have limited access. The Chair of the Corporation raised that governors have been invited to complete anti-fraud awareness training.
- b) The Group IT Director attended the meeting to present on cyber risks and it was suggested that this should be an overarching risk in the risk register. Members were informed that a couple of governors had spoken with the Group IT Director to challenge the technicalities of the approaches taken by the College in relation to cyber risks. Ben Short reported that one of the greatest risks are people in relation to data breaches and phishing. However, he took comfort having spoken to the Group IT Director and also knowing that the College has Cyber Essentials

certification, which would need processes in place to receive the certification. The area of focus is the protection of staff and learners whilst using technology at College and at home. A further meeting is planned to discuss the human layer of security. Although considered to be a volatile area the governor had no major concerns.

The Vice Principal raised that cyber attacks across the sector are of concern and the College does its own internal phishing with staff and learners and the recent JISC training resources have been reviewed. Members raised the need for cyber response plans as cyber is an emerging risk which poses risks of GDPR breaches and the potential for fines. Ben Short offered to provide guidance to the Group IT Director.

The Head of Finance reported that a table top exercise of the Fraud response plan has been scheduled and any synergies would be considered and raised with the Group IT Director.

The Chair of the Corporation questioned whether there should be a governor advocate role created with special responsibilities around this topic. Following discussion it was agreed that an Information Security Advocate role should be created and a role description developed to ensure that there is clarity of the role and that it does not overstep into operational management.

- c) It was reported that the Committee had received the Higher Education framework assignment report from RSM, which had received “substantial assurance” and congratulations were provided to the Assistant Principal, HE & Adult and her team.
- d) It was also reported that, following the Audit Committee meeting, confirmation had been received from the Head of Finance that the risk assessment for the finance department had been expanded, which also included payments to suppliers, students and staff.
- e) Following discussion of the timeframes for the digital strategy audit it was agreed that it would be more beneficial to carry forward this audit onto next year’s audit plan. Following discussion between the Chief Financial Officer and College Principal Corporation approval was sought to replace the digital strategy audit with a student debt review.
- f) Following negotiation of KPMG’s audit fee for 2020/21 Corporation approval of their fee of £36k was sought.

**It was resolved to:**

- a) **To approve the Anti-Bribery, Anti-Corruption and Anti-Fraud Policy; Fraud Response Plan; Counter-Fraud Strategy; Anti-Money Laundering Policy; Declaration of Interests Policy and Treasury Management Policy.**
- b) **To create an Information Security Advocate role to be filled by Ben Short and a role description is to be developed by Ben Short, Mike Croker and Phil Eames (Chair and Vice-Chair of the Audit Committee).**
- c) **To approve the replacement of the digital strategy with a student debt review in the current RSM audit plan.**
- d) **To approve KPMG’s 2020/21 audit fee of £36k.**



**Action: Ben Short, Mike Croker and Phil Eames.**

14. **Review of Governance SAR action plan**

Members received a progress report against the Governance action plan.

**The report and progress against the Governance action plan was noted.**

15. **2021/22 Calendar of Meetings**

The 2021/22 Calendar of Meetings was received.

**It was resolved:**

**To approve the 2021/22 Calendar of Meetings.**

16. **Other Items of Urgent Business**

There was no other business raised.

17. **Confidentiality**

Members agreed that due to business sensitivities the following items are to be retained as confidential: CEO & Executive Principal's report and appendices (item 9), confidential part of the Principal's report (item 10), Fraud response plan (item 13b) and minutes 9a-c and 10h.

18. **Assessment of meeting**

A summary of feedback in relation to the meeting held 25 March 2021 was received.

19. **Date of Next Meeting**

Thursday 10 June 2021 at 4pm via Microsoft TEAMS.

The meeting commenced at 4.04pm

Ben Short joined the meeting at 4.06pm (during item 2)

Sophie Green joined the meeting at 4.10pm (during item 5), left the meeting at 4.52pm (during item 10) and re-joined at 5.02pm (during item 10)

Catherine Green joined the meeting at 4.13pm (during item 6)

Carly Dyson left the meeting at 5pm (during item 10) and re-joined the meeting at 5.27pm (during item 13)

Rick Sturge joined the meeting at 5.32pm (during item 13)

Mike Croker left the meeting at 5.43pm (after item 16)

The meeting closed at 5.45pm.

The meeting was quorate.