

SANDWELL COLLEGE

Minutes of the Board of Governors meeting held on Monday 2 December 2024 at 4.00pm Boardroom, Central Campus

Present:	J Tew	(Independent) – Chair in absence of AT
	L Capper MBE	(CEO Principal)
	N Anhu	(Staff Governor, Sandwell)
	M Ashford	(Independent)
	N Makin	(Independent)
	S Powell	(Staff Governor, Cadbury)
	H Singh	(Independent)
	S Lal	(Independent)
	S Smalling	(Independent) – joined via teams.
	M J Uddin	(Independent)
	A K Daulke	(Student Governor, Sandwell)
	E Shand	(Student Governor, Sandwell)
	B Babajan	(Student Governor, Cadbury)
	K Khalif	(Student Governor, Cadbury)
Apologies:	A Taylor	(Independent) (Chair)
	T Sharma	(Independent) (part)
	N Edwards-Yesufu	(Independent) - Maternity
	R Bearman	(Independent)
In attendance:	R Pickup	Executive Director, Finance & Resources
	B Beaty	Executive Director, HR and Organisational Development
	S Griffiths	Executive Director of Strategy and Development
	A Thompson	Executive Assistant to Senior Leadership Team (in ES absence)

		Action
1	<u>Welcome and Apologies</u>	
	<p>The Vice Chair (JT) in the absence of the Chair (AT) welcomed all present to the meeting.</p> <p>Apologies were received from AT, TS and NEY and were accepted by Governors.</p> <p>New Members: Lisa has joined as Principal and Chief Executive and Asa joined as Deputy Principal respectively on 4th November.</p> <p>MA was running late to the meeting.</p>	
2	<u>Declarations of any new personal or business interest or conflict with any agenda item</u>	
	There were no new declarations.	
3	<u>Board Membership:</u> Board reappointments Student Governor appointments	
	In the Clerk of Governors absence over the last four weeks, Abbie Thompson will now be assisting with note-taking. During this absence of the Clerk, the CEO and team have worked to get papers out on time and minutes of the committees will follow in full with summary slides presented for today.	

	<p>Term Extensions: Neil's term ends in December and John's in March. Both Governors have agreed to extend their terms until the end of the current academic year to aid the transition period of leadership.</p> <p>Richard Bearman (Governor) has stepped down due to a work promotion but expressed interest in re-engaging with the College in the future.</p> <p>Natalie Edwards-Yesufu (Governor) is currently on maternity leave, with intentions to re-engage with the College once circumstances permit.</p> <p>New Student Governors and SU Presidents: Recently appointed - A K Daulke Sandwell College, B Babajan Cadbury College. Also present are Khalih and Ethan (as observers as Deputy SU Presidents and not student governors). They were welcomed and made a short statement about their motivation and their courses and having met with CEO earlier this week.</p>	
	The Board resolved to approve the appointment of Student Governors	
4	<u>Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Governors held on 7 October 2024</u>	
	Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Governors held on 7 October 2024 were reviewed and approved by Governors as a correct record of the meeting.	
5	<u>Matters Arising</u>	
	JT stated the issue raised .. which is to be covered in depth during the confidential session.	
	<u>STRATEGIC AND DEVELOPMENTAL</u>	
6	<u>Principal's Report</u>	
	<p>LC was welcomed the Board as her first meeting as Principal and CEO.</p> <p>LC commented that she is now 5 weeks into the role, alongside AG the new Deputy Principal for Curriculum and Skills. Emma Brannen, the new Senior Vice Principal for Quality and Student Success appointed in the summer, will be joining the College in January.</p> <p>LC presented the CEO & Principal's report. There are 2 annexes: a letter from FE Commissioner with a governance update and a letter from the new Skills Minister regarding funding, and which reflects the current position and future plans under the new government.</p> <p>LC presented on her recent all-staff briefings and engagement, and shared the initial thinking on the priorities going forward. She advised that there is work to do to focus on skills priorities and the necessary collaborations and partnerships and investment in facilities and equipment, a focus on how FE supports the new labour missions and skills priorities in the area and associated initiatives, and on ensuring that despite the SAR and QIP not being delivered by the previous team, to embrace the work of the college and move forward with pace on ensuring costed curriculum planning and quality improvement, drive achievements for this year. There is good financial management and planning and a need to invest in and locate cost effective delivery and use of space.</p> <p>Lisa has completed a due diligence and this will be shared in the confidential item.</p> <p><u>Key points of her presentation and subsequent discussion included:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>College Positioning:</i> Largest college in the West Midlands, top 10 nationally. Ongoing capital projects worth £33 million, set to complete by 2025-2026. <p><i>What's coming next:</i></p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>New Strategic Plan</i>: Focus on culture, collaboration, investing in infrastructure, digital and tech, and preparing for Ofsted inspection. • <i>Curriculum 2030</i>: Emphasis on new T levels, apprenticeships, and high-level skills. • <i>Policy changes</i> – post 16 strategy • <i>New Estates Strategy</i> to prepare for embedding new developments and procurement of new funding for capital projects • <i>Social Media and Marketing</i>: Significant increase in social media engagement and website clicks through a unified marketing approach. • <i>Ofsted year ahead</i>. Self-Assessment Report (SAR): Final SAR to be submitted by end of January in preparation for OFSTED inspection. <p>A clear set of objectives were presented to Governors. A potential away day for Governors was mentioned to discuss these future strategies further.</p> <p>Questions and points raised by governors included the timescale for the SAR and QIP and next steps, and student numbers.</p> <p>LC responded that there hadn't been a LQCC in the autumn. One was held at end of November and an extraordinary meeting will be held in January to sign off the SAR and take forward the QIP.</p> <p>LC intended to do in year recruitment and to maximise the funding to be pulled down in future years to achieve some in year growth. The estimate for this was c £600k. Student recruitment is currently circa 7350 (allocation c.7254).</p> <p style="text-align: right;">MA joined the meeting</p>	
	RESOLVED: Governors thanked LC for her report and the work taking place at pace.	
7	<u>Learner Voice report and short film (also presented in LQCC)</u>	
	<p><u>Content of video:</u> CEO introduced this as a new item for governors in relation to the governance review finding of the need to have more learner engagement at Board and for governors. It is 'unedited student voice' and is filmed by the media team across all settings. A six-minute video was played, featuring various student comments on support systems, canteen prices, break spaces, mental health support, and work experience.</p> <p>Positive feedback was received from students. They appreciated the support, friendly staff, and helpful learning environment that the college provides.</p> <p>Areas for Improvement said by students: More breakout spaces, affordable canteen options, clearer communication on changes, and better support for work experience relevance.</p> <p>Actionable Insights: Identifying campus-specific needs and ensuring support systems are uniformly available across all sites.</p> <p>Governors commented the film as useful and it will be good to see how this develops.</p> <p>ACTION: Continue developing short films and student engagement strategies.</p>	
	<p><u>Discussion</u> The film was welcomed as a new way to get more intelligence on student experience.</p> <p>Governors stressed the importance of Impact Measurement to ensure the college measures the impact of initiatives and quantify their effectiveness in student engagement and meeting need.</p> <p>Data Clarity: Need for clearer contextual data to understand metrics and make</p>	

	<p>sense of data in student engagement reports (e.g., what does 1,000 university placements represent relative to total students i.e., is that good or not).</p> <p>ACTION: Future reports to include benchmarking and 3-year trend data wherever possible.</p> <p>Quality vs. Quantity: Emphasis on ensuring quality in work experience programs rather than just the number of placements.</p> <p>These were noted by the Deputy Principal who commented that there was development work in place on impact and use of data by middle and senior managers and with MIS.</p>	
8	Data dashboard and final results 2023/24 update (also presented in LQCC)	
	<p>RP gave a brief overview of the new data dashboard and final results for 23/24.</p> <p>Key Metrics:</p> <p>16-18 Age Group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall achievement rate: 86.3% (national average: 81.7%). A Levels: 89.7% achievement rate (national average: 78.8%). AS Levels: 76.1% achievement rate (national average: 72.1%). <p>19+ Age Group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level three pass rates: 90.2% (national average: 92.2%). Noted differences due to vocational vs. A-Level focus. <p>T Levels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pass rate: 93% across six pathways. Noted as a new qualification with no existing national benchmarks. <p>GCSE English and Maths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> English pass rate: 34.8%. Maths pass rate: 22%. Context provided on the challenges of resit programmes and support systems in place. <p>Apprenticeships:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Total Apprentices: 47 Engineering Apprentices: 47% of apprenticeships, representing 11% of the entire cohort. Challenges in Engineering: Absorption of learners from a failing training provider a year and a half ago. Complicated Gateway process requiring coordination with external providers, taking up to six months. National assessor shortages affecting endpoint assessments. Performance Review: Last Ofsted Inspection (2022) Apprenticeships rated as Requires Improvement (RI). Current Status: Above ESFA threshold with ongoing improvements. Performance Review Process: Starting February, departments will have individual data as part of their performance reviews. Quality Improvement Plans: Alignment with KPIs to reduce gaps in ethnicity and attendance. 	
	<p>ACTIONS</p> <p>As discussed, and recommended by LQCC:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achievement trends needed for 16-18 and 19+ age groups, split by campus, gender, and ethnicity. Continue building interventions to achieve 90% attendance. Measure learners based on entry points. Implement the performance review process starting February. Align Quality Improvement Plans with KPIs. Specific Metrics: Questions about 	

	<p>the low pass rate in T Levels Maintenance, Installation, and Repair (74%).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Importance of understanding how current performance aligns with college ambitions and previous years' data. <p>The CEO advised that the new Executive is setting out a new data dashboard with three years of data, national benchmarks and targets, as this isn't currently in place</p>	LC
	RP left the meeting	
9	<u>College SAR and QIP update</u>	
	<p>It was noted that the College's SAR and QIP was not in place when the new CEO joined the College, making deadlines tight to complete. A draft SAR had been created with the team.</p> <p>One governor challenged that the 22/23 SAR was in place and could that not be used as a template and updated.</p> <p>The CEO replied to say that it was included as part of the material for a starting point, however it needed to reflect the strengths and weaknesses of 23/24 and use relevant data The previous SAR had been 'light touch'. As Ofsted were coming in next year and with a new framework it was important to understand the position of the current provision and use it as a basis for the SAR.</p> <p>Governors noted a special LQCC meeting is required to approve the SAR for the end of January 2025. Governors acknowledged that as a result of this, the College is behind schedule and not where it should be as a college, so a date for the special LQCC meeting needs to be finalised as soon as possible. The SAR will then be submitted to Ofsted.</p> <p>Governors were advised that SAR validation panels have been scheduled in the diary and a new QIP is due to be created and completed, which will give a much more intelligent and measurable QIP.</p> <p>ACTION SAR approval will be arranged for a January Board meeting, following LQCC scrutiny.</p>	CEO/Chair
10	<u>Safeguarding annual report 2023/24 (also presented in LQCC)</u>	
	<p>The report was presented by the Safeguarding Lead Paul Smith. This was a good round up of the current baseline for the last period.</p> <p>Statistics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Total Incidents (Last Academic Year): assuming 2,632. Increase: 27.1% compared to the previous year. Mental Health Incidents: 27% of total. Breakdown: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children: 52% Adults: 48% (previous year: 74% children, 26% adults) <p>Key Issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher reporting of sexual assaults and violence among females. Rising incidences of forced marriage (from 9 in 2022 to 17 in 2023). <p>Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budget cuts affecting external agencies' ability to provide support. Increased burden on college staff to fill gaps left by reduced external support. <p>Strategies and Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaboration with partners like Women's Aid for targeted support. Implementation of suicide first aiders and mental health first aiders. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Securing additional funding for wraparound care (Thrive project). • Early intervention programs and mentor training. • Holistic approach addressing various aspects of mental health and safeguarding 	
	<p>Actions being taken:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased training for staff on handling mental health issues. • Development of a strategy to engage students in coproducing solutions. • Introduction of an international accreditation process for safeguarding. <p>Governors commented that this was a thorough report and questions were asked about the burden on college in view of other agencies with dwindling resources, and how the staff felt. There was a question about mandatory staff training and BB stated the numbers had increased rapidly to much higher levels, and were now in 90 percentages.</p> <p>The CEO stated that the college would be undertaking the Incyte award for safeguarding for all sites.</p>	
	PS left the meeting	
	<u>FINANCE AND RESOURCES</u>	
11	<u>Management Accounts</u>	
	<p>RPi presented the finance reports:</p> <p>The College is in a steady state and ahead of budgeted plan. There was a discussion about in-year investment needed and how this will be managed and where provision had been made, the management of risk for Capital, and to set out a new three-year financial strategy from 2025 onwards.</p> <p>Management Accounts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Month 2: £300,000 surplus. • Month 3: Projected £100,000 surplus, driven by lower agency costs. • Cash Position: Higher due to delayed capital payments. 	
12	<u>Student Union Accounts 23/24</u>	
	<p>Student Union Accounts:</p> <p>The accounts are in a steady state and will return to a surplus following some investment in activities this year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This year: £120 deficit. • Previous year: £495 surplus. • Positive management of funds despite deficit. 	
13	<u>Capital Projects update</u>	
	<p>SG gave a brief overview of our Capital Projects and their current positioning:</p> <p>Cadbury Phase 4:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly complete, on schedule. <p>Shaftesbury Phase 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modular building largely completed with some snagging issues. <p>Learning Campus at Smethwick:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional funding of £1 million allocated for equipment this goes ahead 	

	<p>with Towns Fund underspend– or partial amount.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to secure more space for adult and higher education. • SL and JU declared interest in being involved with future meetings with the NHS re the Midland MET. 	
14	<u>Health and Safety update</u>	
	The health and safety report and summary were reviewed by Governors. Governors asked for attendance by Director Capital and Estates at Audit to discuss this in more detail, and this is arranged for the next Audit Committee.	RP
15	<u>HR Report</u>	
	<p>BB presented the HR report that sets out the recent contribution of the HR function to the work of the College.</p> <p>Key points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment Efforts: A successful event promoted the College as an employer of choice, particularly for Learning Support Assistants, leading to 14 new appointments. 39 vacancies remain. • Targeted Retention Scheme: The College has been involved in the Department for Education's retention scheme, offering up to £6k in payments to eligible staff. • Casework: The number of cases remains low, including one claim currently progressing through early conciliation with ACAS. • Employee Assistance Programme (EAP): The launch of the College's first EAP has seen initial engagement. • Sickness Absence: Sickness absence rates remain low, well below industry benchmarks and last year's figures. • Developmental Initiative: A new program for employees in supervisory or junior managerial roles will be introduced in the new year. • Policy Work: Preparations are underway for the new statutory duty on employers to prevent sexual harassment at work. • Internal Communications: The 52nd edition of the HR Matters publication was delivered, supporting internal communication. • Staff Benefits: The staff benefits package will be expanded to include an electric vehicle salary sacrifice scheme. • Staff and Recruitment: Ongoing efforts to reduce vacancies and enhance recruitment strategies. Engagement with trade unions has been positive. <p>BB was thanked for the report. Governors requested further detail on the impact of the retention scheme, and the impact of new approaches on recruitment when this had been embedded.</p>	BB
16	<u>Audit Committee update meeting held on 19 November 2024</u>	
	Governors noted the assurance given and progress made on Internal and external audit activity, as received by the committee.	
17	<u>Financial Year-End 2023/24</u>	
	<p>17.1 <u>Annual Report of Audit Committee to Board of Governors and the Accounting Officer – 2023/24</u></p> <p>The Board received the report from the Audit Committee, which states: The Audit Committee is pleased that during 2023/24 all levels of assurance from internal audit reviews have been “reasonable”. The audit opinion in relation to the financial statements audit is unmodified and in relation to the regularity assurance review is unqualified.</p> <p>Notwithstanding the internal auditor’s assessment that “For the 12 months ended 31 July 2024, the head of internal audit opinion for Sandwell College is as follows: “The organisation had an adequate and effective framework for risk management, governance and internal control. However, our work has identified further enhancements to the framework</p>	AT

	<p>of risk management, governance and internal control to ensure that it remains adequate and effective</p> <p>The Audit Committee recognises that this has limitations and represents an evaluation of only those operations that have been reviewed. Identification and management of risk is the responsibility of the College's management team</p>	
17.2	<p><u>Financial Statements and Regularity Audit</u></p> <p>Governors received the following reports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 17.2.1 Audit Finding Report 2023/24 ▪ 17.2.2 Regularity Self-assessment 2023/24 ▪ 17.2.3 Letter of Representation <p>Governors noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual accounts have been reviewed and approved by auditors. • Minor adjustments have been made with no significant impact. <p>Governors received the above reports.</p>	
17.3	<p><u>Reconciliation of Period 12 Management Accounts (July 2024) to the Financial Statements 2023/24</u></p> <p>Governors noted:</p> <p>Between the year-end management accounts and financial statements, the only amends were</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. £112k fixed asset reconciliation - This was highlighted at board that work was being finalised on fixed assets and there was a likely £100k improvement to the position 2. £1,173k understatement of capital accruals – invoice dated 1st August. This adjusts the balance sheet total for work in progress. <p>Item 1 was adjusted before the accounts were finalised and submitted for audit, and Item 2 was identified during the Audit.</p>	
17.4	<p><u>Internal Audit Annual Report 2023/24</u></p> <p>Governors received the Internal Audit report and noted:</p> <p>A total of nine 'medium' priority and 13 'low' priority actions were raised across the three reviews undertaken during 2023/24. No 'high' priority management actions have been raised</p> <p>The opinion of the IAs is that the organisation has an adequate and effective framework for risk management, governance and internal control. However, our work has identified further enhancements to the framework of risk management, governance and internal control to ensure that it remains adequate and effective.</p>	
17.5	<p><u>Sandwell College – Members Report and Financial Statements 2023/24</u></p> <p>Governors received the report and statements, and resolved to approve they be signed by the Chair.</p> <p>ACTION: Members Report and Financial Statement to be signed off by the Chair, AT</p>	
17.6	<p><u>Risk Register</u></p> <p>A new risk register heatmap and board assurance framework will be produced for June meetings and there will be a risk appetite workshop for governors following this. Governors noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing updates and colour-coded risk levels. • Focus on learner recruitment, quals reforms and apprenticeships. • Plans to develop a Tier 2 risk register for departments as part of new developments 	

18	<u>ESFA assessment of financial health</u>		
	18.1	Governors noted correspondence from the ESFA which declared the College as having outstanding financial health.	
19	<u>Update from committees:</u>		
	19.1	<u>Search & Governance – 21 October 2024</u> The committee chair highlighted the key points from the committee's discussions.	
	19.2	<u>Finance & Strategy – 21 November 2024</u> The committee chair highlighted the key points from the committee's discussions.	
	19.3	<u>LQCC – 28 November 2024o</u> The committee chair highlighted the key points from the committee's discussions.	
20	<u>Policies/documents:</u> Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblowing) Procedure		
	BB commented on the College's current whistleblowing policy. Governors noted the minor updates to reflect job titles and procedures.		
	ACTION: It was resolved that the policy be approved and published on the website.		BB
21	<u>External Governance Review action plan</u>		
	<p>External Governance Review: Governors noted that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress is being made against the action plan • Recruitment of new governors is taking place through Peridot agency. • There is a focus on balancing strategic and operational roles. • Link Governor Roles are to be developed • Enhancing connections between governors and specific departments. • Plans to develop a co-produced strategy involving student input. • Training needed for governors are to be sorted and training planned <p>ACTION: A link governor scheme will be refreshed and put in to action for coming term.</p>		ES
22	<u>AoC Code of Good Governance - Compliance assessment</u>		
	The document was reviewed by Governors and progress to date noted.		
	ACTION: Further work to be continued by the Clerk		ES
23	<u>Board of Governors/Senior Postholders' Expenses</u>		
	RPI gave an overview of the total values expenses were claimed by Senior Leaders and Governors in 23/24		
24	<u>Register of Use of the College Seal</u>		
	It was noted by JT that the College Seal had been used 3 times since August 2024 for agreements associated with Capital Projects.		
	The use of the seal was signed by AT and JT.		
	<u>FOR INFORMATION</u>		
25	<u>Any Other Business</u>		

	<p>Concern that the meeting had overrun was raised. It was suggested that the meeting time allocated be extended from 2 to 3 hours to take account of the current level of business.</p> <p>John Tew stated that the chairship was provided on the day by the vice chair due to absence and therefore it was generally agreed the meeting had done well to complete with a short overrun.</p> <p>ACTION: The CEO will review the planner and agendas with the Clerk on her return. Consideration will be given to extending meeting times and/or better scheduling.</p> <p>Staff and Staff Governors left the meeting</p>	LC/ES
26	<u>Determination of Confidential Items</u>	
	It was resolved to approve all recommendations.	
27	<u>Confidential Item</u>	
	Capital Item – see confidential minute	
28	<u>Date and time of next meeting</u>	
	Wednesday 12 March 2025, 3.30pm	

The meeting ended at 6.30pm.