

MEETING OF MEMBERS

Minutes of the virtual meeting held on 9 March 2021 at 1pm

Present: R Carter (Chair) M Wagner
N Wingfield Digby J Bloomfield

In Attendance: E D'Souza, Chair of Trustees
M Ward, MAT Governance Advisor
N Savvas, CEO
S Gales, Board Secretary
S Howard, Sponsor appointed representative
T Elkin, Trust Clerk

1 Declaration of Interests

Members confirmed that they had no conflicts of interest to declare in relation to the items of the agenda.

2 Appointment of Chair

The Members recognised RCarter as Chair of the meeting.

3 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence. RCarter welcomed all those in attendance.

4 Minutes of meetings held on

• **5 May 2020**

The minutes of the meeting were **unanimously agreed** as an accurate record.

• **8 December 2020 (extraordinary)**

The minutes of the meeting were **unanimously agreed** as an accurate record.

5 Matters Arising from the meetings held on

• **5 May 2020**

The matters arising from this meeting are all being considered as part of the Governance Review being undertaken by MWard.

• **8 December 2020 (extraordinary)**

All matters arising from this meeting have been completed.

6 Articles of Association

MWard informed that the Board Secretary submitted the amended Articles of Association to the ESFA on 18 February 2021 and are still awaiting confirmation from them as to whether the proposed amendments to the Articles are acceptable, so no further action can be taken by Members at this meeting.

7 2019/20 Financial Statements and Annual Report

Members received and considered the financial statements for the year ending 31 August 2020, which had been provided to and approved by the Trust Board at the meeting held on 11 December 2020 and have been filed with the ESFA and Companies House.

ED'Souza summarised that despite the pandemic, lockdown and resulting rapid shift from physical delivery to e-learning, the quality of education at the sixth form colleges remained incredibly strong. One Sixth Form College remains in the top 10% of schools and colleges nationally as it has for the past 6 years, with 83.3% of A Level students achieving grades A*-C and 100% of BTEC Level 3 courses achieving D*D*D*-PPP. ED'Souza noted that Abbeygate Sixth Form College opened and has already made great strides in emulating the success of One Sixth Form College, in the west of the county.

Action

NSavvas added that the success of Abbeygate Sixth Form College is a testament to the strength and benefits of Group working with our sponsor. Working as a Group and sharing expertise both within the Trust and with our sponsor, has supported Abbeygate Sixth Form College to establish and recruit to a wide variety of courses, attract high-calibre experienced teachers and to build relationships locally with schools to raise awareness of the new institution. Working with the sponsor, also enabled Abbeygate Sixth Form College to open on time in state-of-the-art nearby premises (utilising a building owned by the sponsor) despite delays to the new build which would otherwise have delayed the opening thereby disadvantaging students and incurring more costs to the Trust. As the new build opened in phases, using the specialist expertise and staff capacity across the Group enabled Abbeygate Sixth Form College to focus their limited resources on student-facing staff which truly enriched student experience, benefitting from the efficiencies of shared services. These efficiencies have also enabled Abbeygate Sixth Form College to focus on delivering a wide range of A-Levels with an array of extra-curricular and enrichment activities to support students in the region effectively. This is especially important as a growing number of local school sixth forms are becoming financially unsustainable and are opting to significantly reduce and/or close their provision creating a growing need for Abbeygate Sixth Form College's specialist A-Level provision. The financial security of being in the Trust and from operating efficient shared services with the sponsor, means that the Executive is not pressured to lower entry requirements at Abbeygate Sixth Form College or widen the offer beyond A-Level (e.g. into vocational qualifications which would put it in direct competition with the sponsor). This arrangement gives security to the Executive/staff to focus attention on enrolling students onto the right course at the right level, to best support students to achieve and progress.

ED'Souza observed that from a financial perspective, again in the context of a pandemic and a myriad of associated unforeseen costs relating to Covid-19 mitigation measures and resources to support eLearning, the Trust is performing very well. The audited accounts show an increase in reserves for the year (excluding restricted fixed asset funds and pension reserve) of £287,638 and a total reserve position (for unrestricted funds) of £1,304,149; and a surplus of income over expenditure even after a substantial programme of investment in both the estates and IT infrastructures totalling £413,000.

The Members asked the CEO if he could gauge how long it might be until Abbeygate Sixth Form College finances were in the black? NSavvas commented that his priority is financial sustainability aligned to the Trust's strategic objectives, rather than short-term financial targets which might divert resources and/or operations away from the Trust's strategic objectives. As such, the Executive is investing in student services (high calibre teaching staff, wrap around student support services, enriching training for staff which improves quality, etc.) and identifying further ways of working together (both central Trust services and shared Group services) to afford high-calibre staff and achieve efficiencies, so that we can continue to support our students and community.

The Members asked the Chair how the Trust's financial position compared to other similar Trusts nationally. ED'Souza replied that all evidence he has seen – in his role as a National Leader of Governance; in conversations with Sir Richard Atkins, Sir David Carter, David Hughes, auditors and fellow Chairs; and through other forums – the Trust is bucking the national trend, in what is likely to become an ever more challenging sector with tighter-budgets predicted and student gaps in learning to overcome.

The Members congratulated the CEO for his outstanding leadership, which has navigated such difficult and unprecedented times, and achieving such strong outcomes for students and for the Trust. Similarly, the Members thanked the Chair of Trustees for his leadership of the Trustee Board and the CEO.

8 Any Other Business

- **Update on ASFC and OSFC**

ED'Souza summarised the four key priorities the Trust Board is monitoring through the LGBs, and NSavvas updated on the progress on these four areas:

1. Remote teaching and learning

Peer groups have been established between Abbeygate Sixth Form College and One Sixth Form College to share A-Level best practice between institutions, and between One Sixth Form College and West Suffolk College to share Vocational best practice between institutions; as well as between all three institutions to share best practice about quality, CPD, student experience, work experience and careers advice and guidance. This has helped enrich teaching, learning and assessment processes and share resources to support and benefit our students; and offered peer support for staff as they seamlessly transitioned to a new way of delivering lessons.

2. Wellbeing and safeguarding

Throughout lockdown extensive work was undertaken to help students engage with e-learning and to continue to offer wrap-around student support with wellbeing and to ensure safeguarding. As such, all students were RAG rated by their risk of not achieving and were then proactively contacted, monitored and supported according to their rating (e.g. red = daily, amber = every 2 days, green = weekly). Teams monitored key metrics to monitor trends and causes for concern. Personal Progress Tutors continued to meet with students virtually and many different methods were used to promote wellbeing and student support services to students. Teams across the Trust also worked closely together to cover staff absences to ensure the students were not disadvantaged / remained supported.

3. Return to College

Working as a Group the Executive were able to navigate the plethora of guidance from the Government, Public Health England, unions, etc. in order to best prepare staff and students for a return to College. This included rapidly implementing Covid-19 mitigation measures, creating a reporting system to notify all relevant staff of positive cases, setting up and resourcing an internal track and trace system for staff and students, and then Lateral Flow Testing facilities for both colleges. Working with the sponsor and using its' connections in the region, Abbeygate Sixth Form College has benefitted from being able to use the Lateral Flow Testing facilities at the University Studies centre; which has not only relieved onsite physical capacity but also removed the unbudgeted costs associated with staffing and resourcing a Lateral Flow Testing facility, so that resources can be utilised to support students. One Sixth Form has established an onsite Lateral Flow Testing facility to best support students and staff.

4. Equitable course assessment

Following the cancellation of A-Level and GCSE exams, the Executive are working to standardise the methodology used to evidence and calculate assessment gradings, and to remove any unconscious bias.

• **Farewell to Richard Carter**

RCarter notified the Members that he is resigning as a Member effective from 10 March 2021. ED'Souza and NSavvas, on behalf of the Trust, thanked RCarter for his support of and immense contribution to, the Trust. The Members thanked RCarter for his incredible chairing especially in unprecedented circumstances.

The meeting ended at: 2.19pm