



PRESENT:

Sue Sturgeon
Alison Blight
Leshia Chetty
Gary Headland

Chair of the Corporation



**MINUTE
NO.**

**ACTION/
RESOLUTION**

- 3.1 The Board received the 'Activate Learning 2024/25 Accountability Statement' which was taken as read.
- 3.2 The Chief Strategy Officer (CSO) provided a summary of the Accountability Statement's purpose and emphasised the Board's responsibility to ensure that Activate Learning meets local skills needs. The Local Needs Duty review occurs every three years to assess if the organisation is successfully meeting these needs, with an annual Accountability Statement outlining actions for the following year.
- 3.3 The CSO indicated that the key areas for attention were section C, which highlighted actions that the organisation took from the previous year's objectives; and D, which outlines the organisations objectives for the following 12 months.
- 3.4 The CSO reminded the Board that the Accountability Statement was an external-facing document, which will be uploaded to the Activate Learning website. Local authorities and employer-representative bodies such as the Chamber of Commerce may review the document, however, it is mostly for Governors to seek assurance on the colleges impact and for a select number of other stakeholders.
- 3.5 The Board noted that the Accountability Statement must be submitted by 30th June 2024, following approval by the Corporation Board and signature from the Chair of the Corporation.
- 3.6 The Board commended the CSO and his team on the Accountability Statement and recognised the improvements since the previous year's version. The document highlighted the hard work and dedication that the team had demonstrated throughout the 2023/24 academic year.
- 3.7 One Governor advised that they had emailed the CSO with some suggested minor amendments. In their view, the statement meets the DfE requirements, but it could benefit from some more storytelling to illustrate what has been done and the impact.
- 3.8 One Governor referred to the DfE guidance and suggested that the 'Our Purpose' section should link back to the Strategic Plan and its relationship to the Accountability Statement. Additionally, the longer-term strategic outcomes and actions arising from the Local Needs Duty should be included in this section. They also recommended that the 'Approach to developing the annual Accountability Statement and meeting our Local Needs Duty' section could include more details on the engagement with relevant education providers outside of the FE sector, such as independent training providers and universities.
- 3.9 One Governor questioned how often the Accountability Statement needed to be reviewed and sent to the DfE, and whether any feedback would be

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6.3 The CEO informed the Board that the staff survey results were positive including increased participation and significant improvements across most of the questions compared to the previous year. He thanked the Chief People Officer (CPO) for achieving the 10% increase in participation during a busy time in the academic year. The Board acknowledged that there would be some data variations due to

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7.13 The Board received the 'Curriculum Manager Report' which was taken as read.

7.14 The DCEO provided an update on the recruitment of the new curriculum managers following the Learner Journey review which was conducted last year. The Board noted that the Faculty Manager roles were found to be ineffective according to staff feedback, leading to challenges in retention primarily due to workload and compensation issues. In response, the roles have been redesigned over the past year, culminating in the recent appointment of new curriculum managers who are set to commence their roles on 1st August. A substantial investment of £500,000 has been made towards the development of a leadership programme named "Making the Shift." This programme, led by the Saskia Larson, Group Director of People & Development and Paul Newman, Executive Director Faculties and College (North) and other colleagues from HR. The transition to new curriculum managers aims to provide 10,000 leadership hours at this level, with further plans to appoint curriculum leads in the upcoming term. The DCEO advised that this was probably the most significant leadership transformation initiative that the organisation had made in some time, and it was extremely positive.

7.15 One Governor questioned what mechanisms would be used to track the Lead Practitioner roles. The DCEO explained that factors like learning walks and lesson observations will be recorded on the organisation's Clear Review system, which enables objectives and performance to be reviewed by line managers and the individual. The organisation is also able to report from the system which will indicate development areas.

8. Finance, Information, Estates and Equipment.

8.1 The Board received the Finance, Information, Estates and Equipment paper which was taken as read.

8.2 The COO reminded the Board of the strategic objective to remain at an ESFA financial health rating of 'good,' and confirmed that the organisation remains in the good rating and on target. The rating is influenced by EBITDA as a percent of income, solvency in terms of cash ratio, cash balance, and borrowing.

8.3 The Board noted that the organisation had forecasted to close out the year with £18M in cash, with some variability particularly around capital expenditure over the Summer. The organisation has had a schedule of Summer works for many years, much of it is funded by grant funding from the LSIF but some is self-funded. The timing of the grant funding is subject to some variability depending on the activity which could lead to a shift, if any, to the closing cash balance.

8.4 The COO highlighted that the long-term unrestricted cash balance is placed at £10M, which is at the top of the sector benchmarks.

depreciation calculations due to capital grant releases and timing differences.

- 8.10 The COO highlighted that the negative variances on Apprenticeships, Higher Education, and commercial income had been significantly offset by improvements made by the 16-18 income, particularly through exceptional growth funding due to a 10% increase in learner numbers and specific growth on high needs elements two and three.
- 8.11 The Board noted that half of the £1.8M investment fund had been allocated in response to the increased learner numbers in the 2023/24 academic year, and in return to push income growth for the 2024/25 year. The other half had been awarded to process improvements, such as the EQUOO Mental Health randomised control trial.
- 8.12 The COO informed the Board that a portion of the investment fund was being held back to invest in the early recruitment of staff for the 2024/25 academic year. The Board noted that there is a chance that it won't get committed this year depending on the timing of the recruitment so there is an opportunity for a-6.6 (o)1mf f

- 8.15 The Board discussed the match funding for Merrist Wood. The COO informed the Board that although no contract had been signed yet, the organisation was to commit £2.4M out of a £22M project being phased out over five years from completion of the project so the organisation would not begin paying for at least another two years. One Governor advised that it would be useful to understand some of the possible funding risks and the obligations. The COO provided assurance regarding the funding structure. He clarified that the project is fixed at £2.4M, primarily allocated for maintenance and refurbishment grants focused on the college building's condition. He emphasised that the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) related to student numbers are not applicable in this contract, given its condition-based nature. Lesha Chetty offered to contribute insights based on her experience with past DfE projects. The CEO acknowledged the importance of addressing any material conditions during the approval process, ensuring thorough consideration at the Board level.
- 8.16 The Board noted that the £200K under achievement of income in the property area was a stretch budget target that hasn't been a priority for the team as they have prioritised on trying to improve the state of the organisations facilities and responding to issues rather than seeking that external income. It was flagged early in the process and offset.
- 8.17 The Board discussed the utility costs. The COO advised that during the energy crisis the organisation was largely shielded from the worst of it due to long-term contracts at fixed rates. Now, there are challenges because these long-term contracts are expiring or becoming less favourable leading to increased uti(i)2.6 (ng t)6.6 (he-6 (i)2.6 ons)s -6.6 (o)10.5 6TJ0 Tc 0 Tw ()2 (Tw 0.272

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**ACTION/
RESOLUTION**

9.2 The Board noted that it was the first health and safety report for the Corporation, and it was considered best practice within the sector to

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**ACTION/
RESOLUTION**

11.3 The Board retrospectively approved the use of the Corporation Seal for the Unilateral Undertaking Contract for the Merrist Wood campus.

RESOLUTION: The Board retrospectively approved the use of the Corporation Seal for the Unilateral Undertaking Contract at Merrist Wood campus.

Board

Policies.

11.4 The Board received and approved the following policies:

- Health and Safety Policy.
- Statement of British Values.

RESOLUTION: The Board approved the Health and Safety Policy.

RESOLUTION: The Board approved the Statement of British Values.

12. AOB and date of next meeting.

12.1 The Board noted that the next meeting was due to take place Tuesday 9th July 2024. The Chair encouraged all Board members to attend as the budget would be discussed.

12.2 The Chair notified the Board of the Business School Event taking place on 27th June at Reading campus. A Governor was requested to attend the event to support the apprentices and to network with the employers who will be present.

12.3 Lauren Ward reminded the Board that Governors can supply feedback regarding the recent Governance and Strategy Day that took place on Tuesday 14th May 2024. Governors were also encours L

