

Zoom call @4.30pm

	AGENDA	Type	Lead
1	Apologies and Declarations of interest	Discussion	Ross Martin
2	Minutes and Matters Arising of Meeting of 3 December 2020	Approval	Ross Martin
3	Minutes of Committee Meetings Learning & Student Experience Committee – 11 February 2021	Noting	Davie Flynn
4	Principal's Report	Discussion	Ken Thomson
5	Chairs Update (Verbal)	Discussion	Ross Martin
6	Student Association Report	Discussion	Andrew Smirthwaite
STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLEMENTATION			
7	NxGen	Presentation	Kenny MacInnes
8	Learning and Digital Skills Ambition	Presentation	Helen Young
9	Scottish Government Draft Budget 2021/22	Discussion	Alison Stewart
10	Interim Outcome Agreement 2020-21	Approval	David Allison
GOVERNANCE			
11	External Board Effectiveness Review	Discussion	David Archibald MHA Henderson Loggie
OPERATIONAL OVERSIGHT			
12	EIS Dispute (Verbal)	Discussion	Kenny MacInnes
13	Review of Risk	Discussion	All
14	Any Other Competent Business	Discussion	All
FOR INFORMATION			
Governing a College using virtual meetings (Nov 20)			
Outcome Agreement Self Evaluation 2019-20			
Forward Agenda			

Zoom Meeting, (Commencing at 4.30pm)

Present: Ross Martin (Chair)
Dr Ken Thomson
Hazel Burt
Andrew Caldwell
Andrew Carver
Trudi Craggs (Vice Chair)
Lorna Dougall
Davie Flynn (Vice Chair)
Katherine Graham
Jennifer Hogarth
Alistair McKean
Ken Richardson
Aleksandrs Petrovskis, Forth Valley Student Association Vice President (FVSAP)
Andrew Smirthwaite, Forth Valley Student Association President (FVSAP)

Apologies: Naila Akram
Beth Hamilton
Liam McCabe

In Attendance: Andrew Lawson, Depute Principal and Chief Operating Officer (DPCOO)
David Allison, Vice Principal, Information Services and Communications (VPISC)
Kenny MacInnes, Vice Principal Learning and Student Experience (VPLSE)
Alison Stewart, Vice Principal Finance and Corporate Affairs (VPFCA)
Stephen Jarvie, Corporate Governance and Planning Officer and Deputy Board Secretary (CGPO)
David Archibald, HLA Henderson Loggie
Craig Anderson, Hospitality Business Development Manager (HBDM) for B/20/021
Ype Vanderschaaf, Chef Manager (CM) for B/20/021
Anna Vogt, Head of Equalities, Inclusion and Learning Services (HEILS) for B/20/022
Monica Medina, Diversity Coordinator (DC) for B/20/022
Helen Young, Head of Learning and Quality (HLQ) for B/20/023
Iasha Craig, Foundation Apprenticeship Work Placement Coordinator (Observer)

The Chair opened the meeting by noting the thanks of the Board for the work by the Principal, Senior Management and staff on continuing to offer provision under the current circumstances.

B/20/015 Apologies and Declarations of interest

As noted above

B/20/016 Minutes and Matters Arising of Meeting of 22 October 2020

The FVSAP noted that the figure provided at the last meeting in relation to participation levels of students on the FVSA had been an error at the time but that the level reported had now been achieved.

25 February 2021

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

- a) The minutes of 22 October 2020 were approved.

B/20/017 Minutes of Committee Meetings

HR Committee – 5 November 2020

Davie Flynn, who chaired this meeting, noted that the meeting had focussed primarily on Covid and health and safety within the College, including staff health and wellbeing, and the Board welcomed the work undertaken in ensuring the safety and well-being of our students and staff.

He also reported that there had been discussion on the EIS-FELA action short of strike and the College's response to this.

Finance Committee – 17 November 2020

Ken Richardson, who chaired this meeting, reported on the discussions surrounding the College accounts. He highlighted the level of additional work that the Finance team and VPFACA had had to complete to reach this point, confirming that the Committee along with the Audit Committee had endorsed the accounts for approval by the full Board, and he thanked the staff for their work in this regard.

He also discussed the challenge from Finance and Audit members to some of the language used in the External Auditors annual report and that the Committees had requested that Ernst and Young review this.

The VPFACA confirmed that it had been a challenging audit which had required significant work from her team to meet the External Auditors' information requests and agreed that this had not been reflected accurately in the tone of the report.

Audit Committee – 17 November 2020

The Chair reported that, beyond the points above, it was important to note that the External Auditors were issuing an unqualified audit opinion. She echoed the concerns regarding the amount of work that had been necessary and informed members that the Committees had queried whether this level of work had been justified. Discussions with the Auditors had taken place regarding this.

B/20/018 Principal's Report

The Principal presented his standing item noting that, while it had only been six weeks since the last meeting, there had been a significant amount of activity.

He, with support from the DPCOO, updated members on the EIS-FELA action short of strike (ASOS) and the recent final offer from the College that had been rejected by Union reps. He reported that this would now go to a ballot of EIS-FELA members and that the College was issuing communications to ensure staff and key external

25 February 2021

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

stakeholders are aware of the nature and detail of the offer being made by the College.

He informed members that one aspect of the ASOS which had initially been implemented by EIS-FELA was the refusal to mark attendance registers. He highlighted the potential serious impact of this on the College's ability to support NHS Track and Trace had been mitigated by the College's forward planning however the EIS FELA had noted independently their wish to cease this action but to progress to the next stage of the ASOS.. .

Following discussion, the Board reiterated their support for the College Management in relation to this matter.

Members also indicated a desire to be kept informed as regards communications in relation to this matter.

Members noted that part of the final offer from the College had a financial implication and asked for this to be quantified.

The VPFACA informed members that the additional cost was circa £35,000 and that the College budget could support this.

The Principal noted that this was the last meeting of the DPCOO who was retiring and acknowledged past comment from the Board on succession planning within the College. He informed members that, while the core Senior Management Team would consist of the four remaining members, the composition of the Leadership Management Team was being expanded to allow more College managers to gain experience of strategic planning, executive level decision making, governance etc. to prepare them for future activities and possibilities.

He informed members that a new working group would be commencing in the New Year looking at how the College returns to in campus operations. He noted that this would be a large group to ensure the College gains a number of perspectives. He noted a recent conversation he had with a student at one of the Student Council meetings which highlighted the need for this.

He updated members on recent discussions with Gannet Developments on possible uses of the old Falkirk campus site noting that, as the College has a 50/50 profit share contract with the developers.

The FVSAP raised an objection to this contract from an environmental perspective.

25 February 2021

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

The Chair acknowledged that there were challenges as industries such as BP transition away from fossil fuels and that the College should be engaging with our industrial partners to support a just transition.

The Principal confirmed that a more detailed report on our sustainability agenda would be brought to the Board. The Chair welcomed this and requested that it tie into the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework and feed through to our own climate action plan.

The Principal informed members that, as noted previously, this was the last meeting for the DPCOO who was retiring from the College. He provided members with an overview of the DPCOO's career with, and significant contribution to, the College.

The Chair noted that he has asked members for their thoughts on the DPCOO which he had composed into an ode, which he read out to the members.

The DPCOO thanked everyone for their kind words and thoughts and reflected on his career with the College.

a) Members noted the content of the report

B/20/019

Chair's Report (Verbal)

The Chair updated members on a range of areas he had been working on since the last meeting. He highlighted a potential future conflict of interest in relation to the development of the old Falkirk Campus site, informing members that he had existing relationships with potential members of the development consortium and, as such, confirmed he would not take part in any future discussion on this matter.

He updated members on developments nationally via the Employers Association, confirming the acceptance by lecturers of the pay offer and progress towards achieving agreement with the support staff unions.

He noted he had been undertaking some work on behalf of the Chairs group, looking at role of each College in their respective regional economies, to develop a picture sector-wide, which will help to inform the SFC's review of the sector.

a) Members noted the content of the update

B/20/020

Student Association Report

The FVSAP presented a report on the activity of the Forth Valley Student Association (FVSA).

He outlined the results of the recent executive member elections, noting that there had been some developments since the announcement of the vote outcome.

25 February 2021

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

He updated members on the recent student council meetings and thanked SMT members for attending these. He outlined ongoing efforts to obtain feedback from students on a number of topics.

The FVSAP reported to members on the ongoing "Walking Challenge" activity for the College.

The FVSAP reported on activity within Student clubs and groups.

He also thanked Davie Flynn for his contribution to the FVSA advisory board and noted that the new member on the advisory board would be Trudi Craggs.

He informed members that the Student Council had considered some resolutions in relation to changes to the constitution relating to the executive officers roles and that these would be brought to the Board for approval in due course.

Members queried what happened to the results of the additional feedback the FVSA was sourcing from students. The FVSAP confirmed that, where appropriate, issues raised via this feedback would be passed to the appropriate section of the College for consideration.

Members noted the upcoming holiday period and the challenges this can bring in relation to students mental health and queried whether the FVSA was promoting the range of support mechanisms available both within the College and externally.

The FVSAP confirmed some information had been sent out but that this was something being worked on at this time. He also highlighted the increased participation this year in clubs and societies which offers students another route to make connections.

a) Members noted the content of the report

B/20/021

Food Hub

Craig Anderson, Hospitality Business Development Manager gave members a presentation on the Food Hub pilot, a pilot which arose from the challenge from the College for staff to give something back to their communities at a recent staff development event. Staff were acutely aware of the challenges of food poverty and, as such, reached out to local charities to see where the College could help.

The scheme has expanded from an initial demand of 300 meals to over 1,000 frozen, nutritious Christmas dinners that are due for delivery in the coming weeks. These meals will be delivered to a range of third sector charity partners as well as our own Time4Me students who may not otherwise have access to a Christmas dinner.

25 February 2021

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

He confirmed that the College was actively pursuing funding to enable similar offerings in 2021 and that one of the charity partners has already indicated a willingness to work with the College if funding becomes available.

Members welcomed the presentation and the work being done to support our wider community and noted that it should be explored whether this can be built into the appropriate course curriculums as another way to support the activity.

- a) Members noted the content of the presentation and asked for an update to be brought to a later Board meeting

B/20/022

Tackling Racism

Anna Vogt, Head of Equalities, Inclusion and Learning Services (HEILS) and Monica Medina, Diversity Coordinator (DC) presented to members on the Tackling Racism on Campus project.

Anna Vogt informed members that the College was approaching the end of the current equalities duty cycle and that an overview report on activities, which is required to be publicised via our website, would be brought to the Board in the new year.

Monica Medina discussed the key considerations in the report, noting that the College had signed up to the declaration to advance racial equality in the College.

Members noted the report discussed the need for senior level commitment and asked whether assigning a Board member would be of benefit.

Anna Vogt and Monica Medina agreed that this would be helpful and, following discussion, Lorna Dougall volunteered to be the Board member for this.

- a) Members noted the content of the report

B/20/023

Strategic Partnership with SERC

Helen Young, Head of Learning and Quality (HLQ) presented a paper on the development of strategic partnerships with South East Regional College (SERC), Northern Ireland.

She outlined the activity that had taken place to date, with a range of joint work at student and staff development levels and sought approval for the Board to develop a funding proposal to the Forth Valley Arm's Length Foundation (ALF) for additional resource to expand on the relationship with SERC. She noted that appendix 1 of the report outlined potential areas for this expansion.

25 February 2021

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

She also highlighted the intention to have an extraordinary meeting of the SERC Board of Management in January, to which members would be invited to attend. This meeting would look at progress to date between the two colleges.

Members queried the relationship between the ALF and the College. The VPFACA confirmed that the ALF was independent of the College and would decide on any applications. She also noted that the purpose of the ALF was to support further education in Forth Valley so it was appropriate to apply to them for funding.

Members queried if there was enough funding in the ALF to support this. While not having an exact figure, the VPFACA could confirm to members that there was funding available as the College had not drawn down as much funding as anticipated for the new Falkirk campus.

- a) Members noted the content of the report and approved the submission of an application for funding to the ALF

B/20/024

Annual Report and Financial Statements 2019/20

The VPFACA presented the annual report and financial statements for 2019/20, noting that these had been considered and endorsed for Board approval by the Finance and Audit Committees on 17 November 2020.

She highlighted that the accounts had a range of technical accounting treatments applied to them and highlighted the fact that the College had achieved an underlying operating surplus of £1.1m for the year, had been deemed to be a going concern by the External Auditors and had received a clean audit report.

Members noted that there had been additional work and associated cost to meet the requirements from the external auditors, as discussed at the Committees, and asked whether this had been resolved.

The VPFACA noted that, while there was still an additional cost, following discussions with the external auditors and with the assistance of the Chair of Audit and the Chair of the Board, a reduction in the fee had been agreed.

- a) Members approved the Annual Report and Financial Statements 2019/20

B/20/025

External Auditor Annual Report and Letter of Representation

The VPFACA noted that this had been discussed under the previous item but reiterated the key points of the College receiving a clean audit report with no adjustments or recommendations this year.

She noted that Finance and Audit had queried the tone of some of the recommendations when considering this report at the meeting and reported that the

external auditor had reviewed the report and made some minor changes in response to the concerns raised in the final version of the report.

The Chair of Audit noted that one of the issues this year had been the changes to the audit scope agreed in May which were made in October. Going forward, the Committee would expect to see any changes earlier than this to allow for negotiation on both the fee and the level of work.

The VPFACA confirmed that there had been some minor, Covid related changes, to the letter of representation but that it otherwise matched the previous year's letter.

a) Members approved the External Audit Annual Report and Letter of Representation

B/20/026

Audit Committee Chair's Report to the Board of Management

The Chair of Audit presented their annual report to the Board, noting that there were not significant issues to highlight.

a) Members approved the content of the report

B/20/027

Board Committees Membership

The VPFACA reported that, following the appointment of new members and discussions with the Chair, a revised committee membership had been developed and was being proposed for approval.

a) Members approved the Board Committee membership

B/20/028

External Governance Effectiveness Review (verbal)

The VPFACA introduced David Archibald, who is a partner at our internal audit firm HLA Henderson Loggie. She noted that he would be undertaking the external review of board effectiveness as required by the Code of Good Governance.

He informed members that he had attended this meeting as an observer as part of the review and went on to outline how he intended to conduct the review which would include a questionnaire and individual meetings with members.

He confirmed the review would be looking at the Boards compliance with the Code.

Members queried when the report would be received. The VPFACA confirmed it was intended to be brought to the February 2021 meeting of the Board.

a) Members noted the content of the report

B/20/029

Review of Risk

Risks were identified in their covering papers.

**25 February 2021
BOARD OF MANAGEMENT**

The Principal informed members that the College was conducting a thorough review of the strategic risk register to ensure it remained fit for purpose and confirmed that this would be brought to the February 2021 meeting of the Board.

B/20/030 AOCB

The Principal noted that there were a number of issues which had been delayed such as the awarding of fellowships, celebrating the winners of graduation prizes and the DPCOO's retirement celebration and it was hoped to address all of these at a dinner in May 2021.

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Zoom (commencing at 4.30pm)

Present: Davie Flynn (Chair)
Lorna Dougall
Kat Graham
Jennifer Hogarth
Aleksandrs Petrovskis, Forth Valley Student Association Vice President (FVSAVP)

Apologies: Naila Akram

In Attendance: Ken Thomson, Principal
David Allison, Vice Principal Infrastructure and Communications (VPIC)
Kenny MacInnes, Vice Principal Learning and Student Experience (VPLSE)
Stephen Jarvie, Corporate Governance and Planning Officer (CGPO)
Helen Young, Head of Learning and Quality (HLQ) for item L/20/014 only

L/20/011 Declarations of Interest

None.

L/20/012 Minute of Meeting of 8 October 2020

The minute was accepted as an accurate record of the meeting.

L/20/013 Matters Arising

None

L/20/014 Digital Skills (Verbal)

The Head of Learning and Quality (HLQ) gave members a verbal update on the work of the Digital Skills Academy. She noted that the team had been 'launched' in January 2021 with the release of a dedicated SharePoint page containing a range of resources.

She discussed the recently published "Learning and Digital Skills Academy Ambition Document 2021-2025" and shared a link to the document with members. She confirmed that the intention was to bring this document to the Board along with further detail on the 10 ambitions to 2025.

She outlined the development of a digital skills self-assessment tool for staff which has been prototyped and is currently being tested with a range of groups across the College. She confirmed that completion of this tool would also tie into staff's CPD record with the College.

She informed members that 5 digital skills mentors had been deployed, with 2 of these assigned to assist our commercial staff to increase the number of offerings online.

The HLQ updated members on the recent digital skills development event held in conjunction with South East Regional College (SERC) Northern Ireland, with a range of activities over the 2 days of activity and with over 100 staff participating in workshops.

She noted that all the workshops were recorded so that this training would be available to other staff members.

The Principal confirmed to members that there would be a presentation made to the upcoming Board meeting by the HLQ on Digital Skills and that this would complement a presentation by the VPLSE on the College's next generation curriculum ambitions.

Members agreed that a high level overview of the College's digital skills ambitions, with an outline of how the College intends to reach its targets would be useful.

Members noted that, when this activity began, it was pre-Covid and that the current requirements for digital learning would change again once normal activity resumed.

The HLQ confirmed that they were aware that the current support needs from staff would change as the College moved forward and that the support offered would need to reflect this. She outlined a digital skills baseline tool which would allow the team to contextualise support to an individual staff members' needs.

Members welcomed the progress made by the digital skills team and offered, if the HLQ wanted too, that members could act as sponsors for the team with the Board of Management.

The Principal welcomed the offer and noted that there was an overall project plan for the digital skills activity and that key, strategic milestones within this would be used to report back to the Committee on progress.

- a) Members noted the content of the update

L/20/015

Outcome Agreement Self-Evaluation 2019-20

The VPIC presented members with the Outcome Agreement (OA) self-evaluation report for 2019-20 and thanked members who had submitted comment ahead of the meeting.

He highlighted that this report had already been submitted to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) with the caveat that it still had to come to the Committee for approval.

He explained that the guidance for this report was not issued until mid-December 2020 and that was why the Committee meeting was not in alignment with the submission date requested by SFC.

He provided members with an overview of the report contents.

Members noted that while the OA contained a range of targets, the College conducts a lot of activity out with these target measures that provides real value to students and queried whether there was an opportunity to capture this work in the narrative sections of the reports.

The VPIC noted that the instructions for this report from SFC was to be concise as SFC views this as an emergency report owing to Covid. He did note the value in the suggestion and confirmed that this would be included once the College moved back to a more normal OA report process.

The Principal agreed that this activity should be included and noted that the College was actively engaged with SFC on the future of OA reports and that this recommendation would be included in those discussions.

- a) Members approved the content of the report

L/20/016

Interim Outcome Agreement 2020-21

The VPIC presented the interim OA for 2020-21 and noted that he was seeking the Committee's endorsement to submit this to the Board of Management. He noted that the normal OA process had been put on hold owing to Covid and that this was an interim report, based on a new framework, which is more focussed at the request of SFC.

Members welcomed the change in structure of the document as it is an opportunity to have a more vibrant and accessible document highlighting the good work of the College.

Members highlighted that data arising from the wider impact of Covid was highlighting groups such as women who were experiencing greater disadvantage and queried whether these emerging trends were being identified and responded to by the College sector. The VPIC agreed that this was an important aspect to look at and confirmed that these trends could be used to inform the 21/22 OA for the College.

Members queried, given the level of work for the College, whether SFC ever engage in a dialogue on the detail, particularly around new College incentives?

The VPIC confirmed that there was engagement with SFC through our relationship with the SFC OA manager, and with the development of a revised OA framework that this would provide even more opportunity for this engagement.

Members queried the use of 2018/19 data as the baseline for the report. The VPIC confirmed to members that this was an SFC instruction, based on this data being the last pre-Covid year.

- a) Members endorsed the Interim Outcome Agreement 2020-21 for submission to the Board of Management

L/20/017 Student Association Report

The FVSAVP presented the latest update report on the activities of the Forth Valley Student Association (FVSA).

He highlighted activity with departmental class reps, progress with the Student Mental Health Partnership agreement and the Blue Monday initiative which had the FVSA team share their own personal recipes for happiness.

He noted the regular “Koffee with Ken” meetings and that these were good opportunities for the FVSA executive team to meet with the Principal and VPLSE.

He provided an overview of a recent meeting with the Chair of the Board of Management and the College Fundraising Manager looking at potential areas for development for the FVSA.

He also informed members that the FVSA website was now live.

He confirmed to members that FVSA had received additional funding from SFC in relation to additional student support activity. He highlighted that the timelines for this were quite tight and activity needed to start by April 2021 at the latest to be able to use the funding.

Members welcomed the overview provided of the report and queried, in relation to FVSA Commercialisation, whether there were any indicative timelines for this activity.

The FVSAVP noted that, owing to Covid, it was difficult to have an exact timeline and he also outlined other considerations such as charitable status that may impact on this. He did highlight some activity that could commence sooner, such as FVSA approved advertising on their new website.

The Chair thanked the FVSAVP for the report and noted that the Committee and members were keen to support the FVSA and that, should they need assistance out with the normal cycle of meetings, this could be passed to them via the Principal.

a) Members noted the content of the report

2020/21 in-year PI Prediction Tracker Update

The VPLSE provided members with an update on PI Prediction Tracker (PIPT) activity since the last meeting.

He noted that 2019/20 had shown an overall 1% improvement on previous year's figures and attributed this to the manner in which the College adapted to delivery under Covid restrictions.

L/20/018

He reported that the August to November 2020 period had been reviewed via PIPT and commended the teams involved for having such detailed discussions in a virtual manner. He noted that normally there would have been an initial meeting in August 2020 to begin looking at the period but, given teams were performing enhanced inductions to ensure all College users were aware of the Covid processes in place in the campuses, it was decided to cancel this initial meeting and hold it in November instead.

He reported that, as of the latest round of PIPT meetings, the College remained on track against the predicted position for this time of year with FE on target and HE 2% above target for 2020/21.

He highlighted to members the ongoing challenges of Covid, particularly in relation to engagement with individual students.

The Chair welcomed the report and commended the data driven approach to both decision making and early intervention where required and as early as possible.

Members welcomed the level of detail in the data and queried how this linked into quality aspects.

The VPLSE confirmed that the Education Scotland "How Good Is Our College" quality system had been mapped to the College self-evaluation tool which will complement PIPT activity. The Head of Learning and Quality and Head of Equalities, Inclusion and Learning Services now also attend these meetings to ensure that the focus on quality and the student experience is maintained.

Jennifer Hogarth, as the teaching staff member, discussed her experiences with the process from a department perspective, noting that getting the right information to the right people in a timely manner is very useful to teaching teams.

The FVSAVP noted that this process should be publicised more to students within the College as they would be interested in how the College makes these types of decisions regarding their courses.

The Principal agreed with this point and noted this could form part of class rep training. He informed the Committee he would take this forward with FVSA as part of wider discussion on what information students would want to see from the College.

a) Members noted the content of the report

Student Activity Report

The VPIC presented an update on student activity levels within the College. He reported that, while overall credits were on target or even slightly ahead of target at this time owing to an increase in full time enrolments and an 85% increase in flexible distance learning, there had been decreased in elements of part time provision,

commercial training and evening classes. He outlined the main reasons for these, noting it primarily had to do with the impact of Covid.

The Principal informed members of some additional funding for the sector aimed at providing opportunities for young people and to enable transition training. As Forth Valley was projecting that it would meet its target, the College would be permitted to move Credits between funds to maximise its impact on learners of all ages.

The VPIC also noted that members had requested that the information in the report be presented in a dashboard format. He informed that, in conjunction with the Chair, 2 formats had been developed for member's consideration.

After discussion, members agreed that version 1 of the dashboard was their preferred format.

- a) Members noted the content of the report
- b) Members noted that the dashboard should be appended to the minute of the Committee submitted to the Board of Management and that this would be a standing item going forward.

L/20/020 Future Agenda Items

The VPIC presented a report on future agenda items, noting that this may change slightly depending on when the SFC release the latest OA guidance. He asked members for any additional items.

The Principal noted that the Springback project was commencing and that it would be useful for relevant sections of this to be reported to the appropriate Committee's to allow for more in depth discussion before the full project is reported to the main Board of Management in June 2021.

- a) Members agreed to the inclusion of the Springback report to Committees and noted the content of the report

L/20/021 Review of Risk

No new risks were identified and members noted that, as time progressed, there would likely be more evidence which could be used to review and update the Covid specific risk register.

L/20/022 Any Other Competent Business

None

Student Activity Dashboard (Version 1)

No	Measure	Target	Tracking
		2020-21	2020-21
1a)	The volume of Credits delivered		
	Credits Delivered: Core	84,201	84,392
	ESF	1,686	1,686
	Additional Credits	1,200	1,200
	Total Credits	87,087	87,278
1b)	Proportion of Credits delivered to learners in the most deprived 10% postcode areas	11%	11%
1c)	Proportion of Credits delivered to learners from different protected characteristic groups		
	Gender -		
	Proportion of Credits delivered to males	53%	50%
	Proportion of Credits delivered to females	47%	49%
	Proportion of Credits delivered to Other learners	0%	0%
	Ethnicity -		
	Proportion of Credits delivered to students where ethnicity is Black or an Ethnic Minority	3%	3%
	Disability -		
	Proportion of Credits delivered to students who are disabled	17%	13%
	Age -		
	Proportion of Credits delivered to learners aged under 16	7%	6%
	Proportion of Credits delivered to learners aged 16-19	43%	35%
	Proportion of Credits delivered to learners aged 20-24	22%	20%
	Proportion of Credits delivered to learners aged 25 and over	28%	40%
	Care Experience -		
	Proportion of Credits delivered to Care Experienced Learners	4%	4%
2a)	Number of senior phase age pupils studying vocational qualification delivered by the College	495	689
2b)	Proportion of Credits delivered to senior phase age pupils studying vocational qualifications delivered by colleges	1.8%	3.6%
2c)	Proportion of Credits delivered to learners at S3 and above as part of 'school-college' provision	8%	8%

Student Activity Dashboard (Version 1)

No	Measure	Target	Tracking
		2020-21	2020-21
3)	Volume and proportion of Credits delivered to learners enrolled on STEM courses Proportion of Credits delivered to learners enrolled on STEM courses	36%	38%
4a)	Proportion of enrolled students successfully achieving a recognised qualification: The percentage of FT FE enrolled students achieving a recognised qualification The percentage of FT HE enrolled students achieving a recognised qualification	69% 70%	87% - 89% 85% - 95%
4b)	Proportion of enrolled MD10 students successfully achieving a recognised qualification: The percentage of MD10 FT FE enrolled students achieving a recognised qualification The percentage of MD10 FT HE enrolled students achieving a recognised qualification	64% 63%	82% - 96% 86% - 94%
4d)	Proportion of full-time enrolled Care Experienced students successfully achieving a recognised qualification The percentage of CE FT FE enrolled students achieving a recognised qualification The percentage of CE FT HE enrolled students achieving a recognised qualification	58% 40%	63% - 87% 78% - 93%
4e)	Proportion of full-time FE enrolled students aged 16-19 successfully achieving a recognised qualification	65%	79% - 94%

1. Purpose

To present to the Board of Management the twenty ninth Principal's report on key and strategic activity undertaken since the Board meeting in December 2020.

2. Recommendation

The Board should note and comment on the activity undertaken by the Principal since 3 December 2020.

3. Key Highlights

3.1 I am working very closely with the College Principals Group (CPG) and Scottish Government as we plan our way through Covid-19, however there is a real concern over the perceived lack of equity between schools and colleges and concern for the pupil on a school college partnership (SCP) programme. I recently wrote a paper for the Curriculum Assessment Board, for which I'm a member, on the SCP and have been commissioned to write a follow up report as a full review and analysis of the SCP. However, I believe we now have the group in the place they need to be. Most recently CPG have been meeting weekly with SG and whilst our Directorate are working hard for the sector it does all come down to the public health clinicians – which is absolutely correct. As a consequence we have a number of scenarios for the return to face to face teaching. We were particularly disappointed at not being mentioned by the FM at the announcement on schools returning but have been told more clarity will be in her announcement on the 23rd. In order to help the position Scotland's colleges have said they will:

- Restrict activity on campus to no more than 5 to 7% of normal student numbers for that day and must be able to evidence priority need for practical face to face.
- Work with curricular teams to offer unconditional places to NC students who have progressed well up to now. Issue with ongoing bursary payment and working with those who do not intend to progress. In the main most students still with the colleges will be looking to progress
- Start scenario planning for deferred students for post Easter and to consider, with involvement of unions, the additional hours approach for twilight, evening and weekend. Potential for summer work for those needing to complete.
- Within the scenarios, look at specific start dates for 21/22 for programmes where there is a need for additional activity for deferred students.
- Look at spreading the load of delivery into year 2 and 3 of an MA programme – with agreement from Sector Skills Councils.
- Through the Digital Academy, look to provide, say, 25% of all theory on an on-line support basis with tutorial input in college and utilising the digital pedagogy training for staff. This will free up space capacity.
- Foundation Apprenticeship Engineering and Science is a priority group for completion of practical this year.

- 3.2 I mentioned the development of the Springback Project in the December Principals Report. The SpringBack Project will mirror our successful Resumption model for planning the next stage in the College's recovery from Covid-19. This group will involve focus groups for staff and students and ensure a positive and seamless transition from blended learning to a new approach to learning and how we work as a consequence of feedback from all parties. I am pleased to say progress has been very good and on Tuesday LMT should approve the final Project Initiation Document. The three focus groups, People, Health and Wellbeing and Community (PHWC), Infrastructure and Curriculum will then meet. These focus groups will be led by a member of SMT – I have the PHWC, and the group will report its findings to the SpringBack Advisory Committee. The focus groups will follow three clear themes, intelligence gathering, operational readiness and strategic planning and will meet three to four times over the next couple of months. The groups will initiate and review staff and student feedback and will provide advice to the Advisory Committee and then onto LMT for action post Easter. I think this will be a ground breaking opportunity for the college for years to come. Like with the Resumption Group, I am keen to have Board involvement and your suggestions would be welcomed.
- 3.3 In addition to the planned SpringBack Project which will provide short, medium and long term advice for the College going forward, we have recognised the pressures on all our staff and since January we have been running our pilot Time4U and Weekly Recharge projects. These two projects, a fore runner to Springback, has been well received whilst staff who continue to work from home in the current lockdown. Time4U is a two slot between midday and 2.00pm where we have no meetings and have encouraged staff to use it for their own time, particularly to get away from their desks. The Weekly recharge was a half day off, usually on a Friday, recognising the work pressures everyone is working under. The two projects were pilots to the February break and we are now surveying all staff and managers to see whether we should continue through to the Easter break.
- 3.4 A joint Board of Management Meeting was held between the SERC and FVC members on 21st January. An overview of the successful partnership to date was presented to the members and some key questions were posed in relation to how the boards can work together to support the partnership going forward. Feedback and suggestions were collated during the meeting and are presently with SERC, who are working through the information to identify their priority areas before passing back to FVC for comment and next steps.
- 3.5 Many thanks to Kat Graham for the introduction to Napier University and their Freelance Academy. Jacqui MacArthur, Director of Curriculum for Business and Community is our new lead in this area. The Bright Red Triangle is Napier University's hub for Innovation and Enterprise practice. One of the offerings from this centre is the Freelance Academy. The Freelance Academy offers the opportunity to explore self-employment as a career option and what you would need to know to work for yourself. The Freelance Academy is for anybody considering a freelance career after study. The Directors of Curriculum of FVC have met with Victoria Bradley (Bright Red Triangle) and Georgina Jamieson (Napier University) to look at taking this initiative forward with FVC students. Napier University have kindly invited 5 students from Forth Valley College to take part in a course starting on the 5th March – 2nd April. The course will be online, using various different formats of delivery including guided self-learning, video modules and guest speakers. The course lends itself to the Creative Industries

sector and the department of Creative Industries, Hospitality and Tourism (CHT) is currently leading on the offering with their student groups. We are also currently working together to look at how we can make this opportunity a sustainable option with support from Napier University and Forth Valley Colleges Fundraising manager. Thereafter the delivery team and staff from FVC will look to roll out a franchised version of the Forth Valley Freelance Academy in early 2022.

- 3.6 The EIS FELA formally announced their ballot to go forward for strike action during a meeting where management had proposed letters of assurance to all staff to underpin the previous message from the Principal that no further lecturing post would be at risk from being replaced by the Instructor Assessor role. Unfortunately it is quite clear the EIS FELA grievance is with the role and no amount of discussion seems to be changing that direction of thought. Consequently we now have a failure to agree and will await the outcome of the ballot. Kenny MacInnes, who now leads on the EIS FELA negotiations will update the Board later in the meeting.
- 3.7 Unfortunately we had to cancel the February residential for the Board and will hope to have something up and running for August. Meanwhile we are continuing with the Strategic Plan 2021 – 2026 development. We are in the process of undertaking a review with our senior managers taking into account a raft of external publications including the Commission for the College of the Future, Education 4.0, Community Planning Partnership plans, Digital Strategy, City Deal plans, Falkirk Investment Zone to name a few, and our own corporate strategies. We will also interrogate the respective political manifestos as the Holyrood elections approach. As part of the intelligence dissemination we will be presenting two areas for each Board meeting through to April; today you will see Kenny MacInnes on the NxGen Project and Helen Young on the Digital Academy. This will allow Board members to have a full understanding of the line of sight for the college and to question and provide direction. Today's presentations will complement Jen Tempany's piece on Strategic Partnership last October. Going forward I would like to hold a focus group with Board members in May to produce draft final objectives. The draft report will then go to Board in June.
- 3.8 Delighted to say the vaccination hubs are now in place in the Falkirk, Stirling and Alloa Campuses. Thanks to SFC for a £25k grant in support.

4 Networking

- 4.1 Networking over the last couple of months has been heavily involved with Covid -19 planning and has involved meetings with SFC, College Principals Group, SQA, SDS covering areas such as student funding, digital poverty, foundation apprenticeships, return to face to face learning and most recently, deferred students.
- 4.2 With the cancellation of qualifications, my role on the Board of SQA continues to be busy particularly in my role as Chair of the Qualifications Committee. Most recently we have approved the Alternative Model for Certification which is being released to schools and colleges to ensure appropriate quality assurance. Delighted to say, Caryn Jack (a previous FVC Board Member) is now on the Qualifications Committee and now chairs the Standards sub group following my review of the Qualification Committee membership.

- 4.3 Over the past few months Marketing and Communication have made four videos with myself. The most recent went out on Efocu last week. I hope the Board have been able to see these communications to show we continue to engage with all our staff and to ensure we keep them up to date with any news we have, to keep positive and optimistic. The most recent Efocu majored on the Time4U and Weekly Recharge surveys.

5. Presentations

- 5.1 Just the one presentation between Board meetings and that was a virtual launch of the joint SERC conference and the Building Digital Connection for Support Staff. This was a two day event which mixed digital learning, sharing of best practise and health and wellbeing initiatives.

6. Key Meetings

I undertook the following key meetings in the period 3 December 2020 to 19 February 2021:

- 6.1 Ross Martin and I continue to meet weekly including one meeting with the perspective SNP candidate for Falkirk East, Michelle Thomson. On the political front I have met again with Alyn Smith MP.

- 6.2 In addition to regular meetings I have also met with David Archibald on Board Evaluation, Diane Greenlees, Director at SDS on Foundation Apprenticeships and again on becoming a partner with my School College Partnership Review.
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

- 6.3 The Principals from the Four College Consortium continue to meet and to oversee the exciting project for upskilling and retraining through the Transition Training Fund and Young Persons Guarantee. In time we have real scope for co-creating further work.

7. Colleges Scotland (CS)

- 7.1 Colleges Scotland CPG went to fortnightly meetings from the start of September and we continue to have strong representation with Scottish Government and SFC. Most recently we have been meeting regularly with Linda Pooley, Deputy Director, Colleges, SFC and Young Workforce on Scottish Government's response to Covid-19, the ongoing local authority tiering and the impact on Colleges. Finally, I have attended two virtual meeting of the Funding and Finance Group and two meetings with SFC senior management.

- 7.2 I am leading on a Commissioned paper from the Curriculum Assessment Board (a group containing 35 educational organisations including SG, early years through to Colleges and Universities, teaching unions, parent representatives, CDN and co-chaired by the CEO of Education Scotland, Gail Gorman, and the Director of Learning, Graeme Logue) on School College Partnerships. The research, undertaken by CDN, will cover all 13 college regions and 35 local authorities and, using data from SDS and SFC, will provide a comprehensive picture of Scottish senior phase education in the schools.

8. Community Planning Partnership

8.1 There has been three meetings of the Falkirk Community Partnership where emphasis continues to be on partner action to Covid-19 as well as the Falkirk Plan which will feed into our Strategic planning thinking. There has also been one meeting of the Stirling CPP.

9. Financial Implications

None

10. Equalities

Assessment in Place? – Yes No

If No, please explain why – This paper is an overview report only, there are no changes to College policy or practice involved.

11. Risk

Please indicate on the matrix below the risk score. Risk is scored against Impact and Likelihood as Very Low through to Very High.

	Likelihood	Impact
Very High		
High		
Medium		
Low		
Very Low	X	X

Please describe any risks associated with this paper and associated mitigating actions –

None

Risk Owner – Ken Thomson

Action Owner – Ken Thomson

12. Other Implications –

Please indicate whether there are implications for the areas below.

Communications – Yes No

Health and Safety – Yes No

Paper Author – Ken Thomson

SMT Owner – Ken Thomson

1. Purpose

To provide members with an update on the recent activities of the Forth Valley Student Association (FVSA)

2. Recommendation

That members note the content of the report.

3. Key Considerations

Since the last Board of Management on the December 3rd 2020 FVSA have conducted several activities.

Departmental Class Reps

The Departmental Class Rep meetings took place in December which was in the form of an informal version of the student council. Here class reps from different departments gathered to give feedback on their CM, Listening to Learners and their course. This showed us how some issue students were having were relevant across all departments. Some issues the students were having also got quickly chased up and resolved.

Student Mental Health Partnership Agreement

The student Vice President alongside the Student Activities and Volunteers Coordinator are in frequent meetings with the SMHA team. Working on expanding the SMHA agreement and discussion on events/activities the SMHA team can run to further student mental health wellbeing. Some of these events are

- Creating a survey for students (which is in the process of review), the Student Activities and Volunteers Coordinator sits on the working group for the survey.
- Time to Talk, this is a national campaign about encouraging people to speak out about their mental health, a blog post to promote it has gone to students.

Blue Monday

Each member of the FVSA team created a recipe for happiness which was just a short list of ingredients with things that make us happy. This was then posted on our social media for blue Monday to advertise out to students.

See appendix 1 for the recipes.

Koffee with Ken

Chance for elected exec officer to meet with Ken and Kenny to discuss their plans for the rest of the year and for Ken and Kenny to see where they can help. The execs found this to be very helpful and positive change has already come from this meeting. The change was in the form of sunflower lanyards being ordered for the college, due to a survey being conducted by the Disabled Students Officer and the support of Kenny.

Student Awards

With nominations opening in March we have started planning the handing out of awards and how it would all be announced. We have planned for a short video being released with the Student President and Student Vice President announcing winners per award category.

Here are the award categories

- Student Leadership Award
- Executive Member of the Year
- Club/Society of the year - reworded
- Collaboration Award
- Equality & Diversity Champion
- Most engaged Class Rep

FVSA Commercialisation

The Student Association met with Ross Martin and Pauline Barnaby to discuss a plan to allow the SA to bring in money to be less reliant on the College and the ALF fund. This will require a lot of work. We will be working on a business plan. Some of the areas discussed were

- FVSA Shop
- FVSA student hangout space that could be hired out
- FVSA delivering accredited qualifications
- Charity Status
- Sponsorship
- Advertising

Making the Most of our Association

The Student president (Andrew) and the Activities and Volunteers coordinator (Elena) hosted a talk for CDN and Jisc to discuss the benefits of a Student Association for Students and how best staff and lecturers to work with us. There is a recording available here
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gM1dGRRZLyl>

FVSA Website

The Student Association is now LIVE at www.fvsa.co.uk! We have made a home for all our information in a better format than previously. This is open to students to peruse to find what they want as well as interact with events and clubs and societies. See Appendix 2 for examples

Refreshers

The Student Association have been running the annual refreshers event online. This year with the savings made from not being on campus, the Student Association had as its first headline act the comedian Marc Jennings to give a lift to the student's spirits. On top of this we have had the following workshops

- Keeping yourself safe with Police Scotland
- Energy & money saving advice from Citizens advice bureau
- Registering to vote from the Electoral commission
- Clubs and Societies at FVC from the Activities and Volunteer Coordinator
- Learning support information from FVC Equalities and inclusion team
- Box of Knowledge Library information from the FVC LRC team
- Volunteering in Falkirk from CVS Falkirk
- Plus a few more from both internal and external parties.

LGBT+ History month

The Student Association are working with David Gentles and Monica Medina to bring a digital LGBT+ history month for FVC. We have put together a list of resources that are being expanded on throughout the month which is available here <https://www.fvsa.co.uk/what-s-on/lgbt-history-month>

SFC & NUS income

The Student Association will be receiving 20k from SFC to be spent on areas discussed in the guidance. The guidance can be found here

http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/announcements_sfcan012021/Funding_for_College_and_University_Students_Associations_2020-21.pdf

4. Financial Implications

Please detail the financial implications of this item – there are no financial implications

5. Equalities

Assessment in Place? – No

If No, please explain why – Not applicable

6. Risk

Please indicate on the matrix below the risk score. Risk is scored against Impact and Likelihood as Very Low through to Very High.

	Likelihood	Impact
Very High		
High		
Medium		
Low		
Very Low	x	x

Please describe any risks associated with this paper and associated mitigating actions – None

7. Other Implications –

Please indicate whether there are implications for the areas below.

Communications – Yes

Health and Safety – No

Please provide a summary of these implications – FVSA extensively promote events, clubs and opportunities to be involved in the work of the association.

Paper Author – Aleksandrs Petrovskis, Andrew Smirthwaite SMT Owner – Kenny MacInnes

Appendix 1 Blue Monday Recipes for Happiness



fvsa
Forth Valley Student Association

Recipe for a Happy Andrew

Ingredients required

- 1 Gaming PC
- 1 Great Work Team
- A Class of Friends
- A Comfy Bed
- 100 snacks

Instructions

- Make sure your Andrew doesn't get to overloaded with information in the morning.
- Give your Andrew plenty of snacks and water.
- During working days make sure the people around Andrew are kind.
- After work make sure your Andrew gets plenty of time to eat and play games.
- On the weekends make sure Andrew has chance to play D&D and chat to friends.
- At night make sure Andrew gets a comfy bed to sleep in which is not too hot.
- **NEVER LET THE SNACKS RUN OUT!**

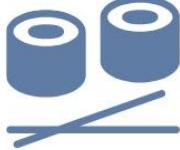
Recipe for a Happy Alex

Ingredients required

- 225g of Sushi
- 200g of Self-care (Working out, eating good, meditating)
- 150g of Human interaction
- 100g of Petting my cat and telling him he's a good boy
- 80g of Limiting news consumption

Instructions

- 1. Eat the Sushi, move onto next step.
- 2. Blend up the self-care with human interaction into a slurry, put on a baking tray and bake into a cookie
- 3. Pet the cat and ignore the news cycle because it's the same thing regurgitated over and over



fvsa
Forth Valley Student Association

Recipe for a Happy Elena

Ingredients required

- 100g of Blues/Rock/Pop Music
- 285g of Exercise (gym/weights/walks)
- 200g of Cooking/Baking
- 175g of Crafty Activities (painting, knitting, crocheting)
- 580g of Time spent with human partner and cat

Instructions

1. Contents may settle - so shake and wiggle before use.
2. Do not feed past 8pm and ensure she is watered regularly.
3. Cat and Elena may cry for food even when fed - so have snacks handy.
4. She is sociable and can get along with other humans but thrives around animals.
5. Keep away from llamas or she will join their herd.

fvsa
Forth Valley Student Association

Recipe for a Happy Angela

Ingredients required

- 2 pints of Structure (wash/dressed)
- 1.5 pints of Walks with the family
- A pinch of Joe Wicks Workouts - sprinkle sparingly
- 100g of Family Dinners -No social media/tv!
- Garnish to taste - Family games

Instructions

1. Stir until smooth.
2. Add a dash of gin or wine.
3. Serve in a short glass and enjoy!

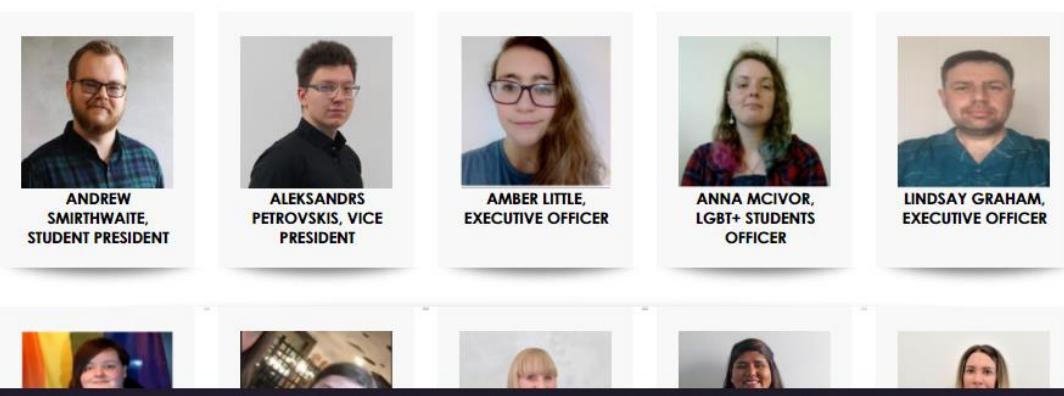
25 February 2021
BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

Appendix 2 Website Screenshots



The screenshot shows the homepage of the FVSA website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links: STUDENT VOICE, CLUBS & SOCIETIES, WHAT'S ON, SUPPORT & ADVICE, and ABOUT & CONTACT. There is also a search icon and a sign-in button. The main banner features a photo of a man speaking into a microphone, identified as Scottish Comedian MARC JENNINGS. The banner text includes "RE-FRESHERS' FAIR WEEK" (1-5 Feb 2021), "Scottish Comedian MARC JENNINGS", "Thursday 4th Feb @ 8pm", "FREE EVENT", and "*BOOK NOW". A note at the bottom states "*EXCLUSIVE TO FVC STUDENTS AND STAFF".

YOU STUDENT ASSOCIATION





0 Sign in

Home + WHAT'S ON + LGBTQ+ History Month +

LGBTQ+ HISTORY
MONTH

- Media Resources - What to Watch, Read and Listen...
- FVSA LGBT+ Support Network

/// LGBTQ+ History Month



LGBT+ History Month is upon us and FVSA are excited to celebrate and recognise the important people and events that have helped advance the LGBT+ movement!

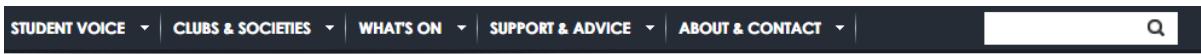
We will be marking the work of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and non-binary people within the history of LGBT+ rights and related civil rights movements.

Throughout the month we will post about available events hosted by the College and also provide access to resources if you wish to learn more about the history and current struggles of the LGBT+ community. [Click here to see our current lists...](#)

Watch this space!

UNCOA

25 February 2021
BOARD OF MANAGEMENT



Sign in



[Home](#) +

ALEKSANDRS PETROVSKIS, VICE PRESIDENT

- Aleksandrs Manifesto
([download link](#))
- All Elected Officers

/// Aleksandrs Petrovskis, Vice President

Office term: July 2020 - June 2021

Course of study: HND: Technical Support

Pronouns: He/Him

A bit about me:

Hailing all the way from the mythical lands of Latvia, I came to Scotland around 2009/10 when I was 8 years old. I have lived here ever since, and I do like Scotland quiet a lot more.

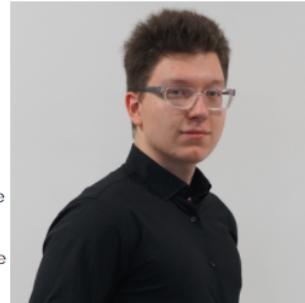
Despite being a computing student I am a pretty physically active person. Though my focus is much more on strength sports such as powerlifting/weightlifting, I am more than happy to do all sorts of physical exercise because I quite enjoy it.

I didn't enjoy high school that much, but college has been great so far, I've done both my NC and HNC at the college. Since I am taking a sabbatical year(or two) I am yet to do my HND, but I am sure I would do just fine while finding it enjoyable.

Fun fact!

I know 4 different languages:

- Russian and English at a native level
- Latvian and Japanese at basic fluency (Studying Japanese with a tutor so this will improve in the years to come)



DOWNLOAD A COPY OF



UNCO

1. Purpose

To inform members of the Scottish Government draft Budget 21/22 that was announced on 28 January 2021 and the implications this has for the SFC indicative funding allocations for Academic Year (AY) 2021/22.

2. Recommendation

That members note the current position regarding the College's core funding based on the Scottish Government's draft budget announcement.

3. Background

The Scottish Government announced its draft budget for the Financial Year (FY) 21/22 on 28 January 2021. This budget includes £1,238 million confirmed Covid 19 Barnett consequentials and an estimate of £500 million further Covid 19 Barnett consequentials

At this time the figures are indicative only and will not be finalised until the UK budget is announced on 3 March 2021.

4. FE Sector position

A summary of the Scottish Government budget for SFC in relation to Colleges is noted below.

	20/21 £m	21/22 £m	Movement £m	Movement %
Revenue - Grant-in- Aid				
College Operational Expenditure	830.0	865.7	35.7	4.3%
College Operational Income	-190.0	-190.0	0.0	0.0%
Net College Resource	640.0	675.7	35.7	5.6%
Capital				
College Capital Expenditure	37.4	33.7	-3.7	-9.9%
College Capital Receipts	-1.7	0.0	1.7	-100.0%
Net College Capital	35.7	33.7	-2.0	-5.6%
Other				
College NPD Expenditure	29.3	29.3	0	0.0%
College Depreciation costs	26.8	27.5	0.7	2.6%

Revenue

While it appears that the revenue funding has been increased by £35.7m it is important to note a few key points:

- Scottish Government and Scottish Funding Council work on financial years (April to March) whereas Colleges work on academic years (August to July). The exact amount of funding available to the sector is therefore unknown at this moment in time as SFC have to do reconciliations between FY and AY allocations.

- The 20/21 Figures are based on the draft 20/21 budget and does not include additional monies allocated in year
- Scottish Government and Scottish Funding Council consider Student Support Funding as "College Operational Expenditure". This is not operational expenditure within College accounts as Colleges merely act as an agent for SG. It is money in and money out to Students and there is no scope for delivering efficiencies within this funding. Any increase in Student Support Funding will have no impact on the College operational budgets.
- The public sector pay policy is set at 1% for all those earning below £80k.
- There is a commitment to continue to fund the Flexible Workforce Development Fund.
- There is a commitment to continue to fund the Young Person's Guarantee - £10m.
- Of the £68m Covid 19 consequentials allocated to the Education and Skills portfolio £23.4 has been allocated to Colleges; Foundation Apprenticeships £14m*, Mental Health £5m, and Digital £4.4m.

*The model for funding Foundation Apprenticeships is changing for 21/22. This is currently being funded by SDS, however for 21/22 a hybrid funding model is being put in place whereby new starts for 21/22 will be funded by SFC. The implications of this are still being worked through with SDS and SFC.

Capital

The sector Capital allocation has been reduced by £2m. There appears to be an increase of £7.8m when you factor in the reduction of Falkirk funding and the allocation of £3m for Fife College. Analysis of how this funding will be allocated by SFC is needed to see what the potential impact of this has on FVC.

5. Forth Valley College position

Until SFC announce the actual allocations, it is difficult to gauge the overall impact of the College's budget for 21/22. SFC aim to take a paper to its Council on 3 March 2021 and if approved allocations will be announced thereafter before purdah comes into effective. Final allocations will be announced after the election on 6 May 2021.

6. Additional funding for AY 20/21

Although not yet announced SFC has indicated that an additional £13m of sustainability funding is being made available to the College sector prior to 31 March 2021. This will be allocated on a % basis of overall GiA funding. On this basis FVC expects to receive around £625k of additional funding for 20/21.

7. Financial Implications

The potential financial implications have been noted in section 5.

8. Equalities

Not applicable given the nature of this report.

9. Risk

Please indicate on the matrix below the risk score. Risk is scored against Impact and Likelihood as Very Low through to Very High.

	Likelihood	Impact
Very High		
High		
Medium	X	X
Low		
Very Low		

Until SFC announce initial allocations it is difficult to assess risk. However one apparent risk is the move of Foundation Apprenticeships from SDS to SFC funding. Discussions are ongoing with SFC & SDS to ensure there is no financial impact.

Risk Owner – Alison Stewart

Action Owner – Alison Stewart

10. Other Implications –

Communications –No

Health and Safety –No

Paper Author – Alison Stewart

SMT Owner – Alison Stewart

25 February 2021

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

1. Purpose

For the Board of Management to discuss and approve the College's Interim Outcome Agreement report for Session 2020-21.

2. Recommendation

That members discuss the content of the report, and approve the Interim Outcome Agreement.

3. Background

SFC have requested that a shorter and more focused Interim Outcome Agreement report be submitted by all colleges for Session 2020-21. The Interim Outcome Agreement has been discussed at the Learning and Student Experience committee, with members recommending its approval by the Board.

4. Key Considerations

Through their Interim Outcome Agreement guidance for AY 2020-21, SFC asked colleges to submit a more focused Interim Outcome Agreement report for Session 2020-21. The guidance provided a new Outcome and Impact Framework, which is included as Appendix 2, which has been used to write the Interim Outcome Agreement.

The report was submitted to SFC on January 29th, however the report requires Board sign-off. SFC recognise that Board sign-off will happen beyond submission of the initial report, and that there may be changes to the initial report as a consequence. This timing is a result of the late issuing of Outcome Agreement guidance.

The new framework is significantly different from previous versions, and shows a direction of travel, with some of the "clutter" removed from our Outcome Agreement, particularly where information is available elsewhere. There have been contributions from a range of College staff to this document including Sarah Higgins, Lisa Evitt, Jacqui McArthur, Kenny MacInnes, Anna Vogt, Pauline Donaldson and Miles Lagan, with information taken from numerous papers that have been presented to the Leadership Management Team. The interim Outcome Agreement has also been discussed and approved before submission to the Learning & Student Experience Committee by LMT.

In relation to target setting, the Outcome Agreement guidance directs colleges not to set targets, however we are to use Session 2018-19 College performance as our baseline, and to maintain activity levels where appropriate and possible, as we continue to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic. These baselines are set out in Appendix 1.

5. Financial Implications

Please detail the financial implications of this item – No financial implications.

25 February 2021

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

6. Equalities

Assessment in Place? – Yes No

If No, please explain why – N/A

Please summarise any positive/negative impacts (noting mitigating actions) – Please see attached EQIA

7. Risk

Please indicate on the matrix below the risk score. Risk is scored against Impact and Likelihood as Very Low through to Very High.

	Likelihood	Impact
Very High		
High		
Medium	X	X
Low		
Very Low		

Please describe any risks associated with this paper and associated mitigating actions – Within our interim Outcome Agreement the impact of Covid-19 is referenced, and it's recognised by SFC that Session 2020-21 is an emergency year as Colleges react to the ongoing impact to students and staff from the pandemic.

Risk Owner – LMT

Action Owner – LMT

8. Other Implications –

Please indicate whether there are implications for the areas below.

Communications – Yes No

Health and Safety – Yes No

Please provide a summary of these implications –

Paper Author – David Allison

SMT Owner – David Allison

GOVERNING A COLLEGE USING VIRTUAL MEETINGS

REPORTED EXPERIENCE, DISCUSSION,
AND ADVICE FOR EFFECTIVE VIRTUAL
GOVERNING COLLEGE MEETINGS

November 2020



This report was prepared by:

- **Dr Ron Hill, Professor of Education, University of Stirling**
on behalf of touchconsulting ltd.
- **Dr Colin Forrest, of Leeds Trinity University,**
supported questionnaire production and analysis for
touchconsulting ltd.

CONTENTS

FOREWORD	2
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
INTRODUCTION	3
1. GOVERNING COLLEGES BEFORE COVID 19	4
1.1 Purpose and nature of governing colleges	4
1.2 Board Members and colleges – interactions	4
1.3 Agenda formation and papers	5
1.4 Meeting arrangements	5
1.5 Covid 19	5
2. LOCKDOWN FROM MARCH 2020	6
2.1 Studying the period March to July 2020	6
2.2 Questionnaire and responses	6
2.3 Interpreting the questionnaire data	6
2.4 The story of changing from face to face meetings to online governing – two ‘conversations’ with governance professionals	27
2.5 Other experience of using online methods to support college governing	31
2.6 National similarities and differences	31
3 THEMES, DISCUSSION AND LITERATURE	33
3.1 Participation and Diversity	33
3.2 Widening governor recruitment: a study	33
3.3 Green IT: the benefits of governing without driving?	34
3.4 Wider Perspectives on Electronic Initiatives in Corporate Governance	35
3.5 Online isn’t the same as Face to Face: Testing the effectiveness of college governing	35
4 ‘BEST PRACTICE’ FOR VIRTUAL MEETINGS	37
5 RECOMMENDATIONS	40
6 CONCLUDING COMMENTS	42
REFERENCES	43

FOREWORD

This is a timely and very welcome project, examining the experiences of colleges in Scotland and England in using virtual meetings for boards and governors.

The report demonstrates how inventive and pragmatic college governing bodies have been in adapting during the pandemic, whilst staying focussed on the essentials of their roles. It gives great assurance that colleges are still being led effectively, despite all the challenges of these times.

The report provides insight into the experiences of colleges, of chairs and of governing body members, and should be useful reading for governance professionals, college leaders and others interested in governance. We are delighted to be able to present this work to support continuous improvement.

Sharing of experiences, of approaches, of what works well and what doesn't work so well are all part of the process of getting things right. Doing that across Scotland and England adds to the richness of the learning, something we are keen to continue in the future. The partnership between our organisations and networks is an ever more impactful and productive one.

The recommendations included offer a great checklist for boards, given how likely it is that the current restrictions will be with us for some time to come. In fact, we expect many of the changes and adaptations made to last into the long term, because far from being all negative, the report shows that there are benefits in a degree of virtual meetings alongside face to face. This mirrors the experience in colleges that a blended offer of some online and some face to face teaching might prove to be the best combination for many students.

We would like to congratulate all of those involved in college governance for their tenacity and flexibility to make things work since the pandemic began. We know that you will continue to show that governance in colleges is in safe hands, providing the assurances and the accountability to funders and the community that our institutions are overwhelmingly well managed and moving forward.



David Hughes
Chief Executive
Association of Colleges



Jim Metcalfe
Chief Executive
CDN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report considers the governing of colleges during a time of lockdown arising from the Covid pandemic, and seeks to provide advice for future use of virtual governing meetings. The report utilises 311 responses to a questionnaire distributed to college governors, governance professionals and principals in July 2020 across England and Scotland. The report also draws upon the experience of wider examples of online meetings. The significant achievement of moving very quickly from face to face governing meetings to online meetings, to achieve the responsibilities of college governing bodies, is recognised.

The report acknowledges that online governing has been implemented as a necessity under the lockdown circumstances and it is appreciated that online governing meetings of, for example, 15 governors plus senior staff and a governance professional, do not necessarily easily convert from former face to face meetings. Recommendations are provided with the intention to maximise the success of online virtual college governing board meetings. Examples of recommendations include appreciating the potential of the selected technology, making sure all meeting participants can use the technology, and shaping the governing event to get the best from the virtual meeting arrangements.

INTRODUCTION

This report considers the governing of colleges during a time of lockdown arising from the Covid pandemic, and seeks to provide advice for future use of virtual meetings.

The report utilises 311 responses to a questionnaire distributed to college governors¹, governance professionals and principals in July 2020, looking at the period April – July 2020. The report also draws upon the shared experience of wider examples of online governing activities.

The contents of the report include the following sections:

- Governing colleges before Covid 19 ie prior to March 2020
- Lockdown from March 2020 (including questionnaire responses from colleges in England and Scotland)
- Themes, discussion and literature
- ‘Best practice’ for virtual meetings
- Action list – recommendations
- Concluding comments

This report was commissioned by College Development Network (CDN) and the Association of Colleges (AoC).

Grateful thanks are extended to the 311 respondents to the questionnaire.

¹ The term ‘board members’ will be used throughout the report.

1. GOVERNING COLLEGES BEFORE COVID 19

1.1 Purpose and nature of governing colleges

Colleges provide a variety of primarily vocationally-focused courses which can range from entry level to post-graduate status. Colleges are located within and connect with a variety of communities and often act as a hub for employment and employer engagement.

From the Association of Colleges website:

“The general further education colleges in England provide high-quality technical and professional education and training for young people, adults and employers. They prepare students with valuable skills for the workplace, helping to develop their career opportunities and strengthen the local, regional and national economy.”

From the Colleges Scotland website:

“Colleges have a critical role in supporting individuals and businesses in Scotland, enhancing citizenship, and providing leadership in the communities and regional economies in which we are situated. The college sector will be pivotal in: 1. Developing our people and partnerships 2. Supporting a successful economy 3. Helping communities thrive.”

Each college (Scotland) and further education corporation (England) has a governing body. The governing body is composed (typically 15 in total) of mainly external people with a passion for vocational learners and learning, workforce and economic development, and community coherence. Many college governing bodies meet in full approximately four times per year and, according to circumstances, maybe as frequently as once per month at times in the college year. In addition, college governing bodies usually establish committees to assist with their responsibilities. Thus, a board member may also participate in some of the following eg an Audit Committee, a Search Committee, a Curriculum and Quality Committee, a Finance and Resources Committee.

1.2 Board Members and colleges – interactions

Before Covid 19, board members would attend colleges regularly for formal meetings mentioned in 1.1 and also for more informal occasions such as student achievement celebrations, graduation ceremonies, ‘learning walks’, departmental visits, employer breakfast briefings, college strategic development events, board member/chair reviews, and so on. Some board members, especially office holders such as the chair of the governing body, may be attending college as often as once per week. Part of this board member engagement with the college was to help board members gain a sense of the working life of the college, and also for college students and staff to become familiar with board members.

1.3 Agenda formation and papers

The formal business of the college governing body is largely dictated by the responsibilities the governing body holds for the financial health of the college as an institution, and for the quality and range of the educational provision offered by the college. The governing body will want to ensure the college is complying with public funding regulations and operating within the relevant employment, health and safety, equality, and safeguarding legal and procedures frameworks. Crucially, the governing body should ensure compliance with its own governing documents and the relevant code it has signed up to. Also, the governors will need to plan for the future and set objectives for college management to work towards. The governing board agenda and papers supporting this nature of business can be lengthy and demanding for board members and college senior staff. The overall process of governing is guided, advised and shaped by a governance professional on behalf of the college governing board.

1.4 Meeting arrangements

Typically, a college governing board would meet in a board room at a table sufficient for all board members and relevant senior staff plus the governance professional.

The meeting agenda and papers are either posted to board members or are provided via an online governing support system to reduce paper and postage. Board members would sit around the board table, reading and referring to paper copies of reports or using an electronic device to access the agenda and papers. Many meeting rooms also utilise an electronic screen for presentations and governor papers. Typically, college board meetings would last between 2 – 3 hours. Committee meetings were more likely to be 1.5 hours – 2 hours in length.

1.5 Covid 19

The governing of colleges was proceeding as usual when the significant change in social and working conditions was imposed by national governments within the UK in late March 2020. Colleges were moving into a period which had not featured on most strategic risk registers, there were no well-established mitigating actions, but there was also a need for governing colleges to rise to the occasion – suspending governing arrangements because face to face governing board meetings were no longer possible.

2. LOCKDOWN FROM MARCH 2020

2.1 Studying the period March to July 2020

How college governing bodies responded to this new and very worrying situation for students, staff, board members and college stakeholders is the subject of this report.

The report draws upon a variety of sources of evidence to look at what happened next.

- A questionnaire was circulated to colleges in England and Scotland from 9 July 2020 following more than three months of lockdown conditions
- Many respondents provided personal comments to enrich their responses to the questionnaire
- Two governance professionals have provided a ‘conversation’ which tells the story of their response to the sudden changing from face to face governing board meetings to the necessity of online governing with virtual meetings.

In the light of the emerging picture of governing practice, the report will also consider how best to assist the continued effective working of college governing bodies under conditions of a socially and economically threatening Covid 19 pandemic.

2.2 Questionnaire and responses

The response to the questionnaire was as follows:

- 71 responses were received from colleges and regional boards in Scotland
- 240 responses were received from colleges in England

In total, 311 responses were received by 31 July 2020. The breakdown of respondents is shown in Table 1 & Table 2.

Table 1: Breakdown of questionnaire responses: Scotland

Category	Response
Chairs	6
Board Members (excluding Chairs)	43
Governance Professional	20
Principal/Chief Executive	2
TOTAL	71

Table 2: Breakdown of questionnaire responses: England

Category	Response
Chairs	37
Board Members (excluding Chairs)	153
Governance Professional	25
Principal/Chief Executive	25
TOTAL	240

2.3 Interpreting the questionnaire data

This section is further divided into four sections, to achieve a picture from each of the key players in the governing of colleges – board members (with a distinct section on chairs), governance professionals, and principals (reflecting the fact that the principal is the senior college leader and also usually a board member).

2.3.1. The Chair's perspective

i. Pre-Covid experience

The purpose of this section of the questionnaire was to explore the degree of confidence chairs considered they had pre-Covid lockdown conditions. This starting point is important as it gives an insight into the degree of change that chairs would have to make in coming to terms with onlineng college governing practices. Of all the roles associated with college governing, the chair is obviously the most visible to fellow board members.

Table 3: Familiarity with online meeting software pre-Covid (England/Scotland)

	England (%)	Scotland (%)
Skype	54	83
Zoom	26	33
Microsoft Teams	34	33
Google Hangouts/ Google Meet	6	0
GoToMeeting	17	33
None	26	17

Table 4: Experience with use of virtual meeting software at work (England/Scotland)

	England %	Scotland %
Usually very good	34	3
Patchy, sometimes better than others	43	50
Usually frustrating	3	0
Disappointing	3	0
Never used	17	17

Table 5: Experience with use of virtual meeting software for social purposes (England/Scotland)

	England %	Scotland %
Usually very good	40	50
Patchy, sometimes better than others	31	33
Usually frustrating	0	0
Disappointing	6	0
Never used	23	17

In summary, this pattern from chairs as respondents shows a wide range of prior-Covid virtual meeting experience. It is worth noting that the virtual meeting system with which most respondents were familiar was Skype. Whilst this general familiarity was obviously useful, it will be seen later in this report that Skype was not the system adopted by most colleges for virtual meetings. It is noteworthy that 26% of respondents declared they had no prior experience of virtual meeting systems.

ii. Perception of the online meeting experience of other players in governing colleges

These questions were intended to explore the impression of the preparedness of the governance professional and principal, as seen from the chair's perspective, for online meetings.

Table 6: Perception by chairs of college governing bodies of online meeting confidence in principals and governance professionals [England/Scotland]

	England %		Scotland %	
	GPs	Principal	GPs	Principal
Already confident using online methods	25	61	33	83
Gained increasing confidence	72	39	67	17
Marginalised, resulting from the online methods	0	0	0	0
Other (please specify)	278	0	0	0

The picture from respondents presented in Table 6 clearly shows the perception by chairs in the apparent confidence in online methods by principals, with much less perceived confidence shown by governance professionals. On this basis, many governance professionals had a much bigger task to address, in order to convert face to face governing meetings to online meetings. The data on increasing confidence (by July 2020) suggests that perhaps some governance professionals were still coming to terms with the new way of working.

iii. During lockdown

This section reports the experiences of virtual meetings by chairs during lockdown (April to July 2020).

Table 7: Virtual meetings during lockdown

	England %	Scotland %
Virtual meeting system for board meetings only	14	0
Virtual meeting system for board and committee meetings	97	100
Virtual meeting system for chair/principal/governance professional	80	83
Virtual meeting system for chairs' briefing	43	50
Virtual meeting system for 'external' presenters to virtual meeting e.g. auditors, technical advisers, consultants	49	50
Virtual meeting of chairs' committee	40	50
Not at all	0	0
Other	14	17

NB: More than one option could be chosen so responses come to more than 100%

Table 8: Systems used for governing meetings

	England %	Scotland %
Skype	3	50
Zoom	46	50
Microsoft Teams	86	83
Google Hangouts/ Google Meet	6	0
GoToMeeting	0	33
Starleaf	0	0
Adobe Connect	0	0
Big Blue Button	3	0
Not at all	0	0
Other	3	33

N.B. more than one option could be chosen so responses come to more than 100%;

Table 9: Perception of the effectiveness of virtual meetings

	England %	Scotland %
Effective	74	83
Partially effective	26	17
Ineffective	0	0

Table 10: Number of virtual governing meetings attended

No of meetings	England %	Scotland %
1	3	0
2	0	0
3	6	0
4	12	33
5	12	0
6	9	17
7	3	0
8	12	17
9	3	0
10	3	0
11 or more	36	33

In summary, respondents report that virtual meetings had been used for governing board and other meetings – both formal and informal. Microsoft Teams is reported to be the most common software used; a detail repeated in responses by board members, governance professionals and principals. Most respondents believed the online meetings were effective, although it is important to note that a significant proportion of respondents believe the virtual meetings to be only ‘partially effective’. Some of the reasons given for ‘partial effectiveness’ included ‘the need for two screens so that online papers could be viewed alongside the meeting attendees’ and ‘couldn’t see all the participants’.

iv. Reflecting on the experience

These questions were intended to look back over the period of governing the college since lockdown ie April to July 2020, to consider the overall experience.

Table 11: Reflections on confidence using online governing

	England %	Scotland %
No difference	13	0
Yes, because, the experience was good from the start and it has maintained that standard	41	0
Yes, because everyone is gaining confidence in the meeting system	72	67
Participants are gaining experience of online meetings for meetings and socially	19	33
The governance professional is providing more guidance on online meeting protocol	13	0
Increased confidence at hosting an online meeting	25	33
I now prepare for the online meetings in a different way	13	17
The meetings achieve a higher attendance rate	31	17
IT support is available during the meetings	0	0

NB: More than one choice was possible

Table 12: Reflections on the governing meeting agenda

	England %	Scotland %
The agenda is the same, just handled online	75	33
The agenda has focused on the essential items only (including Covid-19)	25	67
The agenda is dominated by Covid-19 only	0	0

Table 13: The overall viewpoint on the use of virtual governing meetings

	England %	Scotland %
The use of virtual meetings has been a constructive and positive development to support governing	97	83
The use of virtual meetings has been a distraction and may have muddled the governing priorities	3	0
No opinion	0	17

v. Looking to the future i.e. from July 2020 onwards

Table 14: Identifying the enjoyments from online governing

	England %	Scotland %
Better governor /board member attendance	65	50
More convenient to join the meeting from home	77	100
Better focus to meetings	58	67
Shorter meetings	29	17
A sense of equality within the online meeting system	13	17
More relaxed away from the formalities of the boardroom	13	17
Other (please specify)	23	0

NB: More than one option choice was possible

Table 15: The perceived limitations of online governing

	England %	Scotland %
None, I'd like to return to all the previous ways of working	9	0
None, but I support online methods in principle	27	17
I'd like to have all formal meetings online	9	17
I'd like committees to be online, with board meetings returning to face-to-face	33	33
I'd like strategic development events to be online in future	9	0
Other (please specify)	52	33

> SELECTED COMMENTS FROM CHAIRS

I find the biggest problem is chairing a meeting with over 20 attendees. You need two screens and managing the agenda, taking note of what is being said relevant to the papers and managing people who wish to contribute is very challenging. In addition, I find that the personal interaction is missing from online meetings. [Q38/1/1]

I think difficult discussions are much harder to handle online than face-to-face and what we've been doing is emergency remote governing. [Q38/12/10part]

An effective and robust board needs its members to have confidence in each other and this can only be done in person – albeit with virtual playing a part. An ineffective board Is unlikely to be made better by being virtual and is likely to confuse managing process with ensuring effective outcomes. [Q38/12/5part]

Online meetings are a great tool, but there is still something missing when you are not in the same room as your fellow attendees. Physical meetings are still important. [Q38/12/7]

2.3.2. The Board Members' perspective

i. Pre-Covid Experience

The majority of the respondents to the questionnaire were board members who were neither chairs nor principals. This section shows the starting point for respondents in relation to experience with online virtual meetings.

Table 16: Familiarity with online meeting software pre-Covid (England/Scotland)

	England %	Scotland %
None	25	10
Skype	58	85
Zoom	27	25
Microsoft Teams	33	43
Google Hangouts/ Google Meet	8	8
GoToMeeting	12	10
Starleaf	1	3
Adobe Connect	4	5
Big Blue Button	2	0
Other	15	20

Table 17: Experience with use of virtual meeting software at work (England/Scotland)

	England %	Scotland %
Usually very good	23	43
Patchy, sometimes better than others	49	30
Usually frustrating	4	13
Disappointing	1	0
Never used	23	15

Table 18: Experience with the use of virtual meeting software for social purposes

	England %	Scotland %
Usually very good	23	38
Patchy, sometimes better than others	39	35
Usually frustrating	7	3
Disappointing	1	0
Never used	30	25

It can be appreciated from the responses presented that there was a range of previous experience with online meetings with significant percentages of board members from England and Scotland respectively who declared that they had had no previous experience of virtual meeting software. Where there was experience, the majority declared experience with Skype.

ii. Perception of online meeting experience of other players in governing colleges

Having declared their own baseline, board members were asked to share their perception of the online meeting experience of the principal and the governance professional – both key players in the governing processes for colleges. The overall perception was of the greater confidence in online meetings by the principal, and less so by the governance professional prior to lockdown conditions.

Table 19: Perception by board members of online meeting confidence in principals and governance professionals [England/Scotland]

	England %		Scotland %	
	GP	Principal	GP	Principal
Already confident using online methods	42	61	38	60
Gained increasing confidence	51	35	54	38
Marginalised, resulting from the online methods	3	1	3	3
Other (please specify)	4	3	5	0

iii. During Lockdown

The following responses show that face to face formal governing meetings changed into virtual formal meetings during lockdown – for both board and committee meetings. Examples were also provided of other ways in which virtual meetings replaced traditional face to face arrangements. The majority of respondents reported the use of Microsoft Teams. Perceptions of governing effectiveness from both English and Scottish respondents was approximately 75%. On the one hand, this score indicates considerable room for improvement, but given the starting position at the beginning of lockdown and the additional pressures of governing a college at the time of a pandemic, reaching 75% effectiveness using virtual meetings in three months could be considered a significant success.

Table 20: Virtual meetings during lockdown

	England %	Scotland %
Virtual meeting system for board meetings only	16	20
Virtual meeting system for board and committee meetings	93	100
Virtual meeting system for chair/principal/governance professional	34	38
Virtual meeting system for chair's briefing	16	50
Virtual meeting system for 'external' presenters to virtual meeting e.g. auditors, technical advisers, consultants	29	40
Virtual meeting of chairs' committee	23	35
Not at all	0	0
Other (please specify)	9	13

Table 21: Perception of effectiveness of meetings

	England %	Scotland %
Effective	78	75
Partially effective	22	23
Ineffective	1	3

For respondents from Scotland, reasons for 'partially effective' or 'ineffective' were given as

- technical issues (89%),
- could only hear the voices (44%),
- needed two screens (to see the online papers) (44%),
- couldn't get access to the meeting (44%)
- couldn't see all the participants (33%),
- didn't know how to use the system (22%),
- people were talking over one another (11%)
- could only see people, no sound (11%).

For respondents from England, reasons for 'partially effective' or 'ineffective' reasons for partial effectiveness were given as

- needed two screens, so I could see my online papers as well (62%)
- couldn't see all the participants (59%)
- technical issues, such as frozen screen, broadband variability (55%)
- people were talking over one another (31%)
- could only hear the voices, no pictures (14%)
- couldn't get access to the meeting (14%)
- novelty of using the system overwhelmed the meeting (10%)

Table 22: Number of meetings attended

Number of Meetings	England %	Scotland %
1	5	0
2	12	5
3	13	26
4	14	23
5	16	15
6	12	3
7	4	8
8	6	10
9	1	0
10	1	0
11 or more	14	10
none	1	0

In summary, whilst there has been considerable progress in the use of online governing practices and the system has enabled college governance to keep going, there's also room for improvement in the use of virtual meetings. The reasons for 'partial effectiveness' or 'ineffective' and the magnitude of response from board members shows that improvement in the virtual meeting experience is required, accepting that virtual meetings cannot match the nature of face to face meetings.

This report will provide guidance on how to improve virtual governing meetings in sections 4 & 5.

iv. Reflecting on the experience

The following tables illustrate a range of reflections by board members on their online governing experience to July 2020. Board members reported gaining confidence over a relatively short period of time as familiarity developed with the selected virtual meeting system. It is probable that many board members were gaining confidence with online meeting practices generally during this time. It is significant that attendance rates at governing meetings in both England and Scotland are believed to have improved, thus suggesting convenience for board members overcame reluctance to attend virtual meetings despite a preference for face to face arrangements.

Table 23: Reflections on confidence using online governing

	England %	Scotland %
No improvement	9	10
Yes, because the experience was good from the start and it has maintained that standard	30	23
Yes, because everyone is gaining confidence in the meeting system	71	77
Participants are gaining experience of online meetings for meetings and socially	36	46
The governance professional is providing more guidance on online meeting protocol	14	10
Increased confidence at hosting an online meeting	12	21
I now prepare for the online meetings in a different way	27	31
The meetings achieve a higher attendance rate	24	13
IT support is available during the meetings	7	5

Table 24: Reflections on the governing meeting agenda

	England %	Scotland %
The agenda is the same, just handled online	82	75
The agenda has focused on the essential items only (including Covid-19)	18	25
The agenda is dominated by Covid-19 only	0	0

Table 25: The overall viewpoint on the usefulness of virtual governing meetings

	England %	Scotland %
The use of virtual meetings has been a constructive and positive development to support governing	88	87
The use of virtual meetings has been a distraction and may have muddled the governing priorities	1	8
No opinion	11	5

In summary, there is a close alignment between board members from colleges in England with board members from colleges in Scotland about the use of virtual meetings 'as a constructive and positive development to support governing'. Thankfully for colleges, responses suggest this new virtual meeting methodology is believed to have supported colleges at a time of pandemic rather than creating any further difficulties eg by paralysing governing decision making.

v. Looking to the future

Looking to the future should include consideration of the aspects of online governing that have been enjoyed, and also those aspects which caused concern. The reported enjoyments of convenience, better focus to meetings and improved governance attendance are obviously worthy benefits, but these have to be balanced against the caution expressed by respondents about what is missing in the use of online college governing notably personal contact with students and staff, possible reduction in the quality of debate and discussion, and the necessity to ensure all participants in the meeting are able to take part with confidence.

Table 26: Identifying the enjoyments from online governing

	England %	Scotland %
Better governor/board member attendance	29	31
More convenient to join the meeting from home	82	77
Better focus to meetings	28	41
Shorter meetings	29	31
A sense of equality within the online meeting system	9	18
More relaxed away from the formalities of the boardroom	17	21
Other (please specify)	14	10



EXAMPLES OF GOVERNOR COMMENTS

As volunteers, most of us gain a great deal of pleasure from personal contact with students and staff in the college setting. This would be denied to us if all meetings were remote. But technology has proved invaluable during lockdown [Q38/14/6]

Whilst online meetings may be necessary in some circumstances, they will never allow the full interaction of a face to face meeting. Online meetings usually produce a fragmented discussion due to the inability of all participants to interact at the same time for various reasons such as connection problems etc. [Q38/14/2]

If you want to win an argument, contrary to the recommendation, it is very difficult to muster support at an online meeting. [Q38/14/4]

In my view ‘virtual’ meetings have been very effective in enabling governance to continue, but there will always be a place for ‘actual’ meetings where team building and bonding are important. [Q38/42/13]

All attendees have a better opportunity to contribute. Able to hear participants more clearly during their delivery. I feel that I am contributing more at virtual meeting. Board meetings are a must for face to face. This has been a learning curve especially as I am visually impaired. Those who prepare the meetings for us participants deserve great credit. Not easy getting everyone linked in. [Q38/42/16]

We needed to recognise that some people were incredibly comfortable with the technology and others not – it made an appreciable difference. [Q38/42/23]

It is noticeable that there are fewer governors joining in discussions because being on-line allows them to be more passive, more anonymous than when in a room surrounded by everyone else. [Q38/42/37]

In summary, board members have responded to the necessity to govern colleges using virtual meetings. The period from April to July 2020 was clearly one of trying to make the new meeting arrangements work. The consensus is that virtual governing meetings have worked and indeed have afforded a number of benefits, such as increased board member attendance. However, there have been difficulties experienced by some board members which will need to be addressed.

The comments supplied by board members remind that virtual meetings are, of course, of a different nature to face to face meetings, especially for large groups such as full governing board meetings. The concerns about the impact of online governing meetings need to be recognised and considered by board members, the governance professional and college senior staff. Advice on ways to improve virtual governing meetings is provided in Sections 4 & 5 of this report.

2.3.3. The Governance Professionals' perspective

i. Pre-Covid experience

Alongside the views of board members (including chairs of governing boards) is the perspective from the governance professional – the post-holder with responsibility to facilitate the processes of governing, including both formal and informal meetings. Section 3 refers to the accounts from two college governance professionals (one from England, one from Scotland) which elaborate on the lived experience of the postholders during this time of sudden change in working practice in 2020.

Table 27: Familiarity with online meeting systems

	England (%)	Scotland (%)
Skype	28	20
Zoom	55	60
Microsoft Teams	20	10
Google Hangouts/Google Meet	25	35
GoToMeeting	14	0
None	6	25

Table 28: Experience of using virtual meeting systems for work purposes

	England %	Scotland %
Usually very good	22	30
Patchy, sometimes better than others	38	45
Usually frustrating	8	10
Disappointing	1	0
Never used	32	15

Table 29: Experience of using virtual meeting systems for social purposes

	England %	Scotland %
Usually very good	33	25
Patchy, sometimes better than others	25	35
Usually frustrating	3	5
Disappointing	0	0
Never used	39	35

In summary, responses from governance professionals makes clear that whilst many had prior expertise and experience with online meeting technology, a third had no experience of using online meeting arrangements for work – which is to be assumed to be college governance. Where there was experience, the most familiar system was Skype.

There are three matters to highlight here:

- A significant number of governance professionals were not familiar with online meeting systems from personal experience
- In any case, there is a distinction between being familiar with online meetings systems and using such systems for formal meetings
- Finally, it would seem that for those who were familiar with an online system, it was Skype which (as this report explains) was not the system of choice for many colleges as Microsoft Teams was more popular (presumably for its wider functionality).

ii. Perceptions of the online meeting experience of other players in governing colleges

The following table shows that governance professionals considered that relatively low percentages of board members were already confident with online meeting practices prior to Covid 19 lockdown (10% Scotland; 21% England). When this is coupled with the prior experience of the governance professionals, it shows the potential for marginalisation of both board members and governance professionals. Added to this should be the perception of the experience of principals which, although higher, was not fully expert or ready for online governing. The nature of the problem for governing colleges of converting from face to face meetings to online meetings is shown clearly by this picture.

Table 30: Perceptions of online experience of college governing players by governance professionals

	England %		Scotland %	
	Govs	Principal	Govs	Principal
Already confident using online methods	39	49	10	67
Gained increasing confidence	59	49	67	33
Marginalised, resulting from the online methods	0	1	5	0
Other (please specify)	2	2	19	0

iii. During lockdown

Table 31: Use of virtual meeting systems since lockdown

	England %	Scotland %
Virtual meeting system for board meetings only	7	5
Virtual meeting system for board and committee meetings	98	95
Virtual meeting system for chair/principal/governance professional	70	80
Virtual meeting system for chair's briefing	37	50
Virtual meeting system for 'external' presenters to virtual meeting e.g. auditors, technical advisers, consultants	64	60
Virtual meeting of chairs' committee	28	50
Not at all	1	0
Other (please specify)	8	5

Table 32: Perceptions of the effectiveness of governing meetings

	England %	Scotland %
Effective	86	60
Partially effective	13	40
Ineffective	1	0

'Partially effective' was selected by governance professionals from Scotland for the following reasons

- Needed two screens for sight of online papers as well (75%)
- Technical issues eg frozen screen, broadband variability (62%)
- Couldn't see all the participants (37%)
- People were talking over one another (25%)
- Didn't know how to use the system (25%)
- Couldn't get access to the system (25%)

'Partially effective' or 'ineffective' was selected by governance professionals from England for the following reasons:

- Couldn't see all the participants (73%)
- Technical issues eg frozen screen, broadband variability (55%)
- Needed two screens, so I could see my online papers as well (55%)
- People were talking over one another (36%)
- Novelty of using the system overwhelmed the meeting (9%)
- Could only see people, no sound (9%)

Table 33: Number of virtual meetings

Number of meetings	England %	Scotland %
1	2	11
2	4	5
3	7	21
4	5	0
5	8	11
6	6	11
7	4	11
8	12	0
9	2	0
10	7	5
11 or more	40	26
none	2	0

Table 34: Frequency of formal governing meetings

	England %	Scotland %
No change	36	42
slightly increased	45	42
significantly increased	14	11
slightly decreased	4	5
significantly decreased	1	0

In summary, this set of responses relating to 'during lockdown' show the considerable extent to which virtual meetings were introduced and used for governing processes during the three-month period April to July 2020 (approximately 12 working weeks). Many governance professionals reported involvement in 11 or more meetings – that could be one per week. This would be a higher frequency of meetings for many governance professionals, largely attributable to Covid response and Covid planning.

iv. Reflecting on the experience

Looking back over the period under review ie April to July 2020, governance professionals believed that the experience of virtual meetings was improving with increased familiarity with the system, and with increased familiarity with other similar systems. A higher attendance rate of governor participating in online meetings was recognised together with increased confidence of hosting (chairing) an online meeting. This picture is encouraging but doesn't necessarily add up to effective governing. The difference in impression of online governing being a 'constructive and positive development' [79% (Scotland) versus 95% (England)] further reminds of caution in keeping impressions about the success of online meetings (more process focused) distinct from effective governing (more deliberative and challenging).

Table 35: Reflections on confidence using online governing

	England %	Scotland %
No improvement	2	0
Yes, because the experience was good from the start and it has maintained that standard	39	11
Yes, because everyone is gaining confidence in the meeting system	73	83
Participants are gaining experience of online meetings for meetings and socially	47	33
The governance professional is providing more guidance on online meeting protocol	11	6
Increased confidence at hosting an online meeting	33	22
I now prepare for the online meetings in a different way	22	17
The meetings achieve a higher attendance rate	45	33
IT support is available during the meetings	6	0

Table 36: Reflections on the governing meeting agenda

	England %	Scotland %
The agenda is the same, just handled online	76	42
The agenda has focused on the essential items only (including Covid-19)	23	53
The agenda is dominated by Covid-19 only	1	5

Table 37: The overall viewpoint

	England %	Scotland %
The use of virtual meetings has been a constructive and positive development to support governing	95	79
The use of virtual meetings has been a distraction and may have muddled the governing priorities	1	0
No opinion	4	21

v. Looking to the future**Table 38: Identifying the enjoyment of online governing**

	England %	Scotland %
Better governor /board member attendance	63	58
More convenient to join the meeting from home	77	74
Better focus to meetings	48	26
Shorter meetings	22	26
A sense of equality within the online meeting system	16	0
More relaxed away from the formalities of the boardroom	10	16
Other (please specify)	14	11



SELECTED COMMENTS FROM GOVERNANCE PROFESSIONALS

I think attendance has improved because many people are working from home, and also, because without the need to travel meetings are, overall, less time-consuming. [Q38/34/18]

Because virtual governance has been driven by circumstance, I do think that training on platforms' functionality has not been undertaken at the same pace and feel somewhat behind in being able to support members effectively. [Q38/34/28]

We have adapted brilliantly and I would favour continuing with virtual arrangements to support increased attendance and contributions.
[Q38/34/1]

Short-term use of virtual meetings is fine but I would worry about the long-term impact of this on the effectiveness of governance/governor engagement with the college. [Q38/34/8].

vi. Summary

The sum of the governance professionals' responses seems to reflect justifiable caution. College governing has adapted from face to face to online meetings out of necessity, rather than a belief that 'online' is better than or is an equivalent alternative to 'face to face'. Many governance professionals started from a personally low expertise base on online meetings to implement the required changes for online governing at a time of tension and uncertainty. It appears from the data provided that the implementation was successful to a greater or lesser degree. What is less certain is the extent to which governing has been effective using the new virtual meeting system. This will be a matter for each college governing board to identify in its next governance review.

2.3.4. The Principals' perspective

This section looks at the responses to the questionnaire from the senior leader of colleges – the principal². The principal is both accountable to the governing board and is also usually a member of the governing body as well. The principal and senior staff of the college are responsible for providing information to the governing body to enable decision making.

i. Pre-Covid Experience

Table 39: Familiarity with online meeting systems pre-Covid

	England (%)	Scotland (%)
Skype	73	100
Zoom	41	0
Microsoft Teams	55	100
Google Hangouts/ Google Meet	18	50
GoToMeeting	32	50
None	5	0

Table 40: Use of virtual meeting systems for work

	England %	Scotland %
Usually very good	18	50
Patchy, sometimes better than others	59	50
Usually frustrating	18	0
Disappointing	0	0
Never used	5	0

Table 41: Use of virtual meeting systems for social purposes

	England %	Scotland %
Usually very good	27	0
Patchy, sometimes better than others	36	50
Usually frustrating	9	0
Disappointing	0	0
Never used	27	50

Of the four categories of chairs, board members, governance professionals, and principals, principals would appear to be the most familiar with online meeting systems prior to lockdown. However, this is only a relative advantage. The responses indicate that there was a considerable degree of learning to use new systems required by the move to online working methods.

ii. Perception of online meeting experience of other players in governing colleges

Table 42: Perception of online readiness by board members and the governance professional

	England %	Scotland %		
	Board Members	GP	Board Members	GP
Already confident using online methods	14	23	0	50
Gained increasing confidence	82	73	100	50
Marginalised, resulting from the online methods	5	5	0	0
Other (please specify)	0	0	0	0

This pattern of response suggests that principals believed that most board members and the governance professional were not already expert or confident in the use of online meeting methods.

² There were 25 principal respondents from England and 2 from Scotland.

iii. During lockdown

Table 43: Use of virtual meeting systems

	England %	Scotland %
Virtual meeting system for board meetings only	14	50
Virtual meeting system for board and committee meetings	95	100
Virtual meeting system for chair/principal/governance professional	77	50
Virtual meeting system for chair's briefing	41	0
Virtual meeting system for 'external' presenters to virtual meeting e.g. auditors, technical advisers, consultants	68	50
Virtual meeting of chairs' committee	41	0
Not at all	0	0
Other (please specify)	5	0

Table 44: Effectiveness of online governing meetings

	England %	Scotland %
Effective	86	50
Partially effective	14	50
Ineffective	0	0

Principals from England provided the following reasons for 'partially effective':

- Technical issues eg frozen screen, broadband variability (100%)
- Couldn't see all the participants (67%)
- People talking over one another (33%)

Principals from Scotland provided the following reasons for 'partially effective' as;

- Technical issues eg frozen screen, broadband variability
- Needed two screens, so I could see my online papers as well

Table 45: Experience of online meetings

No of meetings	England %	Scotland %
1	0	0
2	5	50
3	5	0
4	0	0
5	0	0
6	38	0
7	5	0
8	10	50
9	0	0
10	5	0
11 or more	33	0
none	0	0

Table 46: Agenda formation

	England %	Scotland %
The agenda is the same, just handled online	81	50
The agenda has focused on the essential items only (including Covid-19)	19	50
The agenda is dominated by Covid-19 only	0	0

Principals report the increasing confidence demonstrated by board members with use on online meeting arrangements and indicate that, for many, the governing agenda remained the same. Many principals were required to attend additional governing meetings during the period due to Covid-related matters.

It is of note that governing agendas were adjusted to 'essential items only' more in Scotland than England from the responses received.

iv. Reflecting on the experience

The response from principals suggests a considerable degree of support for the use of virtual meetings to maintain the governing of colleges. College principals, who appear to have been more familiar with virtual meetings prior to the Covid pandemic restrictions, are encouraging for the continuance of virtual governing meetings if necessary. Table 51 shows the reported positive aspects of governing using online meetings.

Table 47 Virtual governing meeting frequency

	England %	Scotland %
No difference	41	0
slightly increased	41	50
significantly increased	14	50
slightly decreased	5	0
significantly decreased	0	0

In summary, respondents provide confirmation of the use of online meeting arrangements during the period April to July 2020. Examples are also provided of other types of online meeting associated with governing colleges such as the essential meetings of the chair, principal and governance professional.

The majority viewpoint from respondents was that online governing meetings were effective. However, reasons for partial effectiveness require recognition, particularly the technical issues encountered.

Table 48; The positive aspects of governing using online meetings

	England %	Scotland %
Better governor /board member attendance	62	0
More convenient to join the meeting from home	62	50
Better focus to meetings	43	0
Shorter meetings	52	0
A sense of equality within the online meeting system	24	0
More relaxed away from the formalities of the boardroom	19	0
Other (please specify)	5	50

v. Looking to the future

This section recognises that there may be benefits from retaining some of the better aspects of online governing meetings. Many users of online meetings would recognise that the bigger the meeting attendance, the harder it is to achieve the quality of meeting that a face to face meeting of board members achieves. Thus, there may be merit in the suggestion to consider committees of the governing board for future online meetings arising from the relative success of the smaller meeting setting.

Also, in the responses, there is recognition that whilst online meetings have sustained college governing, in the future a return to face to face meetings would be preferable.

For some respondents, there is support for a blend of face to face and online in future. This could work in one or two ways:

- Schedule a mix of meetings arrangements for the governance calendar, perhaps using online meetings for shorter agendas
- At face to face meetings, permit attendance via virtual meeting systems

Table 49: Future governing meeting arrangements

	England %	Scotland %
None, I'd like to return to all the previous ways of working	0	0
None, but I support online methods in principle	29	0
I'd like to have all formal meetings online	10	0
I'd like committees to be online, with board meetings returning to face to face	29	50
I'd like strategic development events to be online in future	5	0
Other (please specify)	38	50

SELECTED COMMENTS FROM PRINCIPALS

My preference is to return to physical meetings for all board and committee meetings once it's safe to do so. I'd also say that meetings need to be either physical or virtual, not a mix of attendance. We have had some occasions pre-coronavirus where one person was absent and dialled in, this was pretty disruptive and not successful. [Q38/2/1part]

Online meetings have changed one important aspect in that we have asked for questions about papers to be asked in advance – and then college staff have provided written answers on the morning of the meeting date (which usually start at 6.00pm). This does not stop in-meeting questions, but it has helped us speed up business considerably. Presuming a return to face to face in future, will probably continue with this system. [Q38/2/2]

2.4 The story of changing from face to face meetings to online governing – two ‘conversations’ with governance professionals

CONVERSATION A

BY MARIANNE PHILP, DIRECTOR OF GOVERNANCE & COMPLIANCE: FIFE COLLEGE

Thinking back to March 2020 and the lockdown conditions, what were your first thoughts about the governing of your college?

I think there was a bit of naivety initially in that we thought lockdown would only last around 3 months and that we would then go back to normal! Initial thoughts were that Board and Committee meetings could perhaps be cancelled assuming there were no urgent approvals required. However we quickly changed our views and considered it important to continue to progress normal business, albeit in a slightly different way.

How did you get ready for your first online college governing meeting?

What was it?

Fife College closed for lockdown on Friday 20 March 2020, with our first Board of Governors meeting scheduled for Wednesday 25 March 2020. We quickly agreed that it should go ahead rather than be cancelled, and that we would use Microsoft Teams. Fortunately, our Board members had previously been issued with College iPads to access papers electronically via the Staff Gateway and Teams

was already installed on these. We prepared guidance notes for Board members to help them log on for the meeting, and to advise on protocols for online meetings.

A few board members were very nervous about how the meeting would go (as was I!) and we had several one-to-one practice calls to test using Teams and build confidence with those members who wanted some additional reassurance and support.

How did the first board meeting go?

Surprisingly well! Almost all members managed to log on with no technical issues and engaged well with the discussions. Board members were very supportive of all that management were doing to support learners and staff and keep business progressing to plan. With hindsight, it was probably good that everyone was expected to log on at the start of lockdown and just get on with things. It gave us reassurance and confidence that governance could continue.

What have been the pleasant surprises about online governing?

Apart from the initial few weeks where board members were

juggling work emergencies and diaries were a bit unpredictable, attendance has overall improved at meetings.

There has been a conscious effort by Chairs to keep meetings to the allocated time and not let them overrun as members can become tired. This has resulted in meetings being more focussed and priorities addressed early on the agenda.

We have had no major issues with technology or the network, which means our confidence has grown significantly in having online meetings.

What have been the concerns? How have you tried to overcome any emerging problems?

Some of our newer board members have had to participate in induction online and have had very limited opportunities to meet new board members due to the timing of their appointments. Some have commented that it would be nice to meet their colleagues face to face as building relationships has been more difficult for them. We have accommodated one-to-one meetings or appointing Board mentors where individuals have

expressed an interest in this type of support and I think this is largely resolved.

A few board members initially were not confident in using their iPads and dialling in to meetings – however all technical and/or training issues have now been resolved and members are now confident about dialling in and participating fully.

Do you think online virtual meetings can be a sustainable method for governing a college?

Yes I think there are huge benefits for us in continuing online meetings, especially for shorter meetings. It helps keep discussion focussed and

attendance has improved and may help to increase the diversity of board members longer-term. I think there may be some merit in having face-to-face meetings – especially at Strategic Planning and Development days – to allow for networking, team building and informal discussion. However members should feel able to dial in to any meeting where they could not otherwise attend or if they would simply prefer to do this whatever the reason.

In the past, we have used email to accommodate emergency business where this has been a single, straightforward item. However again as an improvement I think having a short online virtual meeting would

be an excellent substitute for this as it allows members still to discuss the issue and share views.

What are your top three tips for successful virtual board meetings?

1. A well organised agenda, having the key items early in the meeting
2. Well prepared and set-out papers, minimising time at the meeting for explanation and increasing the time available for questions, discussion and decision-making
3. Setting protocols out clearly before the meeting, so members understand how they can engage and participate fully



CONVERSATION B

**BY ALISON SHILLITO, GOVERNANCE ADVISER & CLERK TO THE GOVERNING BODY:
THE SHEFFIELD COLLEGE**

Thinking back to March 2020 and the lockdown conditions, what were your first thoughts about the governing of your college?

My first thoughts were to prepare for a short period of whole or partial premises closure and/or governors or myself being unavailable due to illness or quarantine. I thought we might need to postpone or rearrange meetings, use alternative decision-making procedures (written resolutions Chair's Action) for urgent matters; have a buddy relationship with another clerk (in case I was indisposed) and possibly try some form of videoconferencing in the event that we couldn't convene a meeting in person. On the day we closed, I suddenly thought that this could be a long haul and packed my desk into a box (monitor, key board and mouse and some documents).

How did you get ready for your first online college governing meeting? What was it?

Our first online meeting was Finance, Employment and General Purposes Committee (FEGP) in April so we had time to prepare.

In the first week of lockdown, the new Governance and Projects Officer started work

with the Chair and a couple of enthusiastic governors on trying out different videoconferencing solutions: – Skype, Teams, Zoom and Google hangouts. The governors all used different equipment at home and based on the trial, they chose Zoom. It seemed to be preferred for ease of use and online experience. The College bought some licences for the Executive Office. There was a bit of uncertainty that it was too easy to use but the IT Team gave us advice on security settings. Zoom subsequently improved security settings.

The Governance and Projects Officer, the Chair and I put together a Zoom user guide for members. We circulated the guide and offered members a trial zoom session to test their home set-up. Some members did this, others surprised me saying they had been using zoom for ages and were quite proficient.

Also quickly after lockdown, I worked with the Chair on making changes to the Instrument and Articles for video or teleconference meetings, written resolutions and a short-term reduction in the quorum (which was never used).

In planning for FEGP, I amended the running order of the meeting to make it shorter than a face-to-

face meeting and built in a break at the 45/50 minute mark.

I set up a Google form for feedback and added the link to the agenda to make sure there was a route to collect and analyse feedback. I expected a lot of feedback but got very little.

How did the first board meeting go?

At the end of the meeting, members commented that it had gone much better than expected. Members said that timings and length of agenda needed to change for online meetings. In addition, members wanted to know that the things they put in the chat would be picked up in the minutes and/or actioned. This raises questions for those matters that were not actually discussed in the meeting. I found it difficult to take notes, share documents and keep an eye on the chat but the Chair of Governors and the Chief Executive in particular were very good at raising and summarising chat comments in the meeting.

What have been the pleasant surprises about online governing?

It has been a pleasant surprise that attendance has remained high. Governors have engaged and persevered with online governor meetings. Some

governors have been part of dismissal appeal panels conducted online, they have engaged in online training and networking events and logged into staff celebration and awards events. I envisaged that some governors would have technical problems with IT and web access but, thankfully, this has been quite rare. On all but one occasion, together, we were able to fix the issue and enable the member to join/re-join the meeting. For some members it has meant being able to participate in meetings or training that would not have been feasible in person.

What have been the concerns? How have you tried to overcome any emerging problems?

It is difficult for the Chair to pick up micro behaviours, particularly in full Governing Body when there are 25 people or more on the call. Equally, it is difficult for members to catch the Chair's eye. The chat function is good but, as above, it can create a grey area of board discussion.

Our paper packs are electronic PDFs so as well as viewing the Zoom, the chair and members are probably trying to move between multiple screens – board pack, Zoom gallery and chat. I am lucky; my last minute decision to take home my monitor means I have two screens. Many governors are working off a single screen, some

just a tablet. This raises an issue of how we equip our governors.

My internet connection has not always been very good (with three adults working from home). I dread the "your internet connection is unstable" message even though by the time it pops up my screen has probably already frozen. Normally, I can overcome this by switching the video function off and on again and closing down some windows.

I think members miss meeting with each other. Governing is a collective endeavour. Governors most frequently come to the college to attend meetings. The most engaged governors enjoy coming to college; they enjoy the informal start and finish of meetings when they catch-up with members of the Executive and talk about what is happening at college and in the sector. You lose this with virtual meetings and members do not always want to socialise via more screen time. Those members who like to do so tend to join the Zoom 15 minutes early to have that informal time but it is not easy to replicate the companionship that governors have.

Do you think online virtual meetings can be a sustainable method for governing a college?

Yes, I think we could make it sustainable and will retain some aspects online operation. We need to consider what aspects

of remote working should be developed and made routine for governing. I think it makes sense for governor induction, regional training, webinars and some networking meetings to be online. It can make task groups and committees easier to arrange. Using a mixed mode of governing (online and in person) poses a different set of issues but may be useful to enable working governors to attend more meetings that they can't attend in person. We may be able to attract different people who have not previously expressed interest.

If online meetings were to become the sole means of governing, I would be concerned that we would lose one of the attractions of being a college governor (fostering the feeling of belonging to a team, a common purpose and the College).

What are your top three tips for successful virtual board meetings?

1. Agenda break – plan a break and use it.
2. Arrange support – ideally, have someone else in the meeting who can share screen and do other technical things like admit people to the meeting, keep a check on who is there and log chat.
3. Get two screens (or three): advise members to try to arrange access to two screens if possible – one for their papers and one for the Zoom.

2.5 Other experience of using online methods to support college governing

In order to put the above picture into a wider context, respondents were asked to reflect on other experiences of using online methods to support governing. The following table shows the responses from chairs and board members.

This section is intended to show that online methods were already being used by many board members to support their contribution as governors. Approximately 75% of respondents from England and Scotland respectively informed that they had used online technology to support college governing ie attending webinars, undertaking specific training such as safeguarding awareness, board member induction, informal board member link-ups which might include mentoring and/or working groups.

Reflections on the use of such experiences are generally positive, described as 'good'. However, there is some room for improvement from the pattern of responses received.

Table 50: Range and experience of using online methods to support governing (beyond virtual meetings)

	England %	Scotland %
None	20	23
Yes, for induction training	16	20
Yes, for occasional webinars	57	45
Yes, for specific training e.g. safeguarding	49	20
Yes, for informal governor link-ups	25	23
Yes, Other (please specify)	9	18

Other examples included regular (weekly) meetings of committee and Board chairs with senior staff, interviews for governance professional (college secretary), an appeal committee, task and finish groups, forum for woman board members, performing nominated governor for safeguarding role.

2.6 National similarities and differences

The responses to the questionnaire show a considerable number of similarities between England and Scotland. This is not surprising as there are many similarities in the processes of governing colleges in England and Scotland.

The key differences, which may be part of the same issue, are in perceptions of governing effectiveness reported by chairs (83% Scotland; 74% England). This perceived difference in the effectiveness of online meetings could be connected to another difference – meeting agenda formation. 76% of governance professionals reported it stayed the same in Scotland, 42% of governance professionals reported the agenda stayed the same in England. Thus, if college governing boards in England received an adjusted agenda (greater or reduced), this may account for chairs feeling that meetings were not as effective as they could be. Depending on the extent to which agendas varied from the norm to focus on Covid-related priorities could account for a sense of concern about the effectiveness of online meetings.

A second and possibly additional interpretation for the difference might be that adjusted agendas reduced the opportunity for discussion and debate.

Table 51: Similarities and differences between response from England and Scotland

	ENGLAND	SCOTLAND
Similarities		
Change in use of Microsoft Teams by Governance Professionals	56% change in use of Microsoft Teams by governance professionals from before lockdown to during lockdown From 25% familiarity before lockdown to 81% usage during lockdown	55% change in use of Microsoft Teams by governance professionals from before lockdown to during lockdown From 35% familiarity before lockdown to 90% usage during lockdown
General experience of using technology to support governance (Governors)	Of those Governors who had other experience of using technology to support governing colleges the majority rated their experience as 'good' (60% – 76%)	Of those Governors who had other experience of using technology to support governing colleges the majority rated their experience as 'good' (50% – 80%)
Convenience of virtual meetings	Chairs and governors believed the most enjoyed aspect of virtual meetings to be 'more convenient to join the meeting from home.'	Chairs and governors believed the most enjoyed aspect of virtual meetings to be 'more convenient to join the meeting from home.'
Future governing meeting possibilities – Principals and Chief Executives	Principals and Chief Executives supported retaining committees to be online with boards returning to face to face meetings.	Principals and Chief Executives supported retaining committees to be online with boards returning to face to face meetings.
Future governing meeting possibilities – Governance professionals	Governance professionals supported retaining committees to be online with boards returning to face to face meetings.	Governance professionals supported retaining committees to be online with boards returning to face to face meetings.
Frequency of governing meetings during April – July 2020	36% of governance professionals informed that the frequency of governing meetings stayed the same, 45% reported that the frequency slightly increased.	42% of governance professionals informed that the frequency of governing meetings stayed the same, 42% informed that the frequency slightly increased.
Differences		
Perceptions of effectiveness	74% of chairs believed online meetings to be effective	83% of chairs believed online meetings to be effective
Prime reason for less than successful meetings	Of the reasons for ineffective or partially effective virtual meetings, 'needed two screens so I could see my papers' (62%) was the most significant concern	Of the reasons for ineffective or partially effective virtual meetings, technical issues eg broadband variability, frozen screen (89%) was the most significant concern
Impact on the formal governing meeting agendas	42% of governance professionals respondents informed that the meeting agenda had stayed the same.	76% of governance professionals respondents stated that the meeting agenda had stayed the same.

3 THEMES, DISCUSSION AND LITERATURE

3.1 Participation and Diversity

One of the reported benefits of online college governing has been the increase in governor attendance. Approximately 2/3 of governance professionals in England and Scotland stated that governor attendance had increased. Chairs, governors, governance professionals and principals recognised the increase on governor attendance.

At the same time, there were reports in comments added to the questionnaire where some governors felt marginalised by the move to online governing arrangements. This may have been technical and/or process reasons. There was concern expressed by one governor at the loss of the student governor from attendance at governing meetings during April to July 2020.

On the plus side and looking to the future where face to face meetings may be permitted again, some boards may seek to use new meeting arrangements which may include online meetings to extend the diversity of board membership. Whilst being an under-researched area, there may be potential college governors who are prepared to commit to the governor role if the role can, in part, be achieved online. Further consideration of a study by Dobson and Rose (2019) to extend governor membership of primary schools in England using technology is referred to in Section 3.3 below.

A further aspect of improving the diversity of governing board membership using the benefits of online meeting may address the concerns some potential governors may have about the 'culture of the board room'. For some, there is a perception of a more relaxed, socially equalised experience of participating in online meetings. If the college governing board

demonstrates a modernity and an openness by using online meeting arrangements, this could stimulate a wider interest in serving as a college governor.

Whilst most college governing boards have expenses policies, there may also be a perceived benefit from not needing to travel to the college on a frequent basis for governing board meetings if more online meetings become part of the method of college governing decision making.

In summary, from the reported evidence of improved attendance at online board meetings, there may be scope to improve the diversity of board membership by building on the online experience of governing to date. However, care would have to be taken to ensure potential board members are not discouraged as a result of online working methods. Online governing has the potential to work either way – improve board diversity, restrict board diversity. Suffice to say that on the reported evidence of the period April to July 2020, there is scope to benefit the governing of colleges.

3.2 Widening governor recruitment: a study

Another reported feature of the recent use of virtual meetings for governing colleges by respondents is improved attendance by board members. Of relevance is a recent paper by Dobson and Rose (2019) who looked at a small-scale project in England designed to improve school governor recruitment and participation using remote attendance. 'Remote attendance' in this context means that a governing board meeting would be a mix of those governors present and face to face, and some governors present by virtue of WebEx sound and vision technology.

The research study considered the experience of four schools in England where governors joined the governing board meetings using virtual meeting technology. The motivation to innovate in this way is given as:

“key stakeholders at all four schools wanted to appoint an IEB (independent, external, business-based governor) who would attend meetings remotely because they were struggling to fill governor vacancies. This was because the schools were located in rural and not particularly affluent areas with few skilled professionals wanting to take on a governor role’.

To a significant degree, the project was successful. A chair of a governing body is reported as stating: ‘we found ourselves with two very highly skilled governors who were able to ask quite pertinent and quite challenging questions’ (2016;5). Furthermore ‘all schools felt that their IEBs had raised the confidence of their GB’.

Dobson and Rose reported ‘the fact that IEBs did not have to attend governing body meetings in person meant they were much more likely to attend virtually ...’ (2019;6).

However, there were some significant lessons identified arising from this project

- (i) Expectations for the IEB and school need to be clear, especially would there be any circumstances when the IEB would attend school.
- (ii) Arrangements for governor induction and governor development in the light of (i) above.
- (iii) The reliability of technology as it was noted ‘all five IEBs and their schools experienced different degrees of problems with the technology designed to engage them in governing body meetings’. (op cit; 6)

Dobson and Rose report that ‘the barriers to engagement (as a school governor) experienced by IEBs meant, as a whole, the IEBs attending meetings remotely did not settle into their roles as quickly or as effectively as the other IEBs’ (op cit;7)

Two further matters of significance are reported on arising from this study. Firstly, the difficulty in building a relationship with a remote governor. A chair informed ‘... it’s quite difficult to get to know them (IEBs) because obviously you don’t see them before meetings and after’ (op cit;8). Secondly, where IEBs did settle into their roles more successfully, a key variable was the relative proximity between their home and the school. The ability to attend some meetings in person and undertaking school visits helped to achieve a productive working relationship between governor and school.

3.3 Green IT: the benefits of governing without driving?

Arnfalk et al (2016) reported on an aspect of the use of virtual meetings identified by some respondents to the questionnaire – the use of virtual meetings for environmental benefit.

The paper by Arnfalk et al looked at the consequences of using virtual meetings as working practice in 20 public agencies in Sweden and, importantly, the impact on travel, environment and climate by the use of virtual meetings. Looking at travel data per employee (the study looked at workers, rather than board members) over a four year period, findings suggested that CO₂ emission from travel per employee decreased by 10% where employees used virtual meetings rather than travel to a meeting ie a business trip.

However, Arnfalk’s paper reminds that any environmental gain from not travelling maybe be offset by whatever activities such travel time is replaced by. Thus, if travel to work is replaced by eg certain types of retail, the environmental gain maybe negated.

3.4 Wider Perspectives on Electronic Initiatives in Corporate Governance

Sharma et al (2018) report on the use of 'electronic initiatives in corporate governance' in India. The study looked at the opinions of shareholders and company secretaries to a range of electronic initiatives introduced by the Indian Ministry of Corporate Affairs including:

- Electronic delivery of documents
- Virtual shareholder meetings
- Virtual board meetings
- Electronic voting

Sharma et al note '... the initiatives are not hassle free and a lot of things need to be taken care of in order to have a smooth implementation of electronic initiatives' (2018;25).

Importantly, Sharma et al highlight the importance of a policy objective. Thus, eg what is the objective for the introduction of collaboration technologies? The response might include:

- Improving attendance of governors
- Improving diversity of governor composition
- Improving the effectiveness of governing board decision making
- Reducing carbon footprint

Establishing a policy intention at the outset permits a structured approach to the use of systems and a focused evaluation of performance.

Sharma et al look at the case for hybrid meetings versus remote-only meetings. Respondents to the CDN/AoC questionnaire showed some interest in a 'blended approach' in the future where blended for some was a hybrid of some governors present and some connecting to the meeting by technology, blended for others meant some face to face meetings, some remote meetings.

Sharma quotes Fontenot (2017) 'the choice of meeting (virtual only or hybrid) should be determined by the companies not only on the basis of law but also the circumstances of the company including its capabilities, resources, shareholders sentiments, and the availability of technology'. The lesson for colleges is one of care and reflection in selecting an approach to the governing practices and regularly monitoring and responding to opinion from college governors, college senior staff and the governance professional.

3.5 Online isn't the same as Face to Face: Testing the effectiveness of college governing

The following comment was supplied by a governance professional '*Short-term use of virtual meetings is fine but I would worry about the long-term impact of this on the effectiveness of governance/governor engagement with the college. [Q38/34/8]*'. At the heart of this comment are a number of facets that contribute to effective governance which will be explored below

- The comment recognises that moving the governing of colleges to virtual meetings resulted from necessity imposed by the Covid lockdown conditions. Thus, the new meeting arrangements hadn't resulted from a period of trial or experimentation, they were a necessary way forward... for the time-being.
- Another comment supplied with the questionnaire responses was '*I think difficult discussions are much harder to handle online than face-to-face and what we've been doing is emergency remote governing. [Q38/12/10part]*' highlights the slightly artificial nature of online meetings whereby there maybe a tendency to believe process is the same as effectiveness. The bigger the meeting, such as a board

meeting, it is probable that the less likely that a challenging, exploratory, testing, discussional meeting will take place because virtual meeting arrangements do not enable such experiences. In some cases, not all participatory faces can be seen thus preventing any sense of reaction to issues presented.

- Body language and collective mood in a face to face meeting do not transfer to an online meeting. This reality has to be recognised and, if possible, compensated for.
- Agendas that may last beyond two hours may suit face to face meetings which, in some cases, may be supported by refreshments and the collective energy of the meeting event. Simply

transferring such agendas online may become an uncomfortable experience to sit through. Again, this aspect of college governance has to be recognised and worked with to overcome problematic circumstances.

- A further point arising from quote at the start is the matter of board member engagement with the college. Since March 2020 it is probable that most, if not all, board members will not have entered a college building and will not have encountered students and staff. Remote governing can therefore lead to the distance between board members and that which they are governing becoming too great. Should online governing continue, ways to connect the college to board members will have to be created.

4 ‘BEST PRACTICE’ FOR VIRTUAL MEETINGS

a. An early study of the use of online meetings

This section draws upon early advice for online meetings and was published in 2000. There are observations and advice arising from this work which are still relevant today.

Mittleman et al (2000) described experience of facilitating about 100 meetings for the U.S. Navy and other related organisations. These meetings³ included planning, decision making, collaborative writing, training, and expert briefings. Mittleman provide eight lessons of relevance to the governing of colleges N.B. the ninth lesson considered issues arising from meetings across different time zones which may be relevant and is much easier to accommodate in 2020 than 2000.

The following table has been created from Mittleman et al’s text (pages 8-13) with added text from the report author for relevance and interpretation.

Table 52: Applying lessons learned from a study by Mittleman et al.

Some Lessons Learned by Mittleman et al	Suggested Practice to Address ‘Lesson Learned’
<p>1. It is harder to follow a meeting process from a distance. ‘Different place meeting participants have greater difficulty than same-place participants at following the process of the meeting’. ‘Different-place participants are more prone to distractions. It is tempting to try to read email, catch up on unrelated work, or engage in social activity while keeping an eye on the meeting’.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan the meeting in more detail than would typically be the case for same-place meetings. • Timing agenda items may assist with the meeting process. • Allow for 5-minute breaks every hour. • The chair’s ability to ensure collective focus is clearly under test and so the Chair’s hosting technique should be emphasised rather than assumed.
<p>2. People don’t get feedback when working over a distance This point recognises that communication through technology can be limiting and frustrating. Mittleman et al noted that meeting attendees ‘can become observers rather than participants’.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The chair needs to directly seek feedback from attendees on aspects of the agenda. • Process checks can help keep the group together eg Mary, do you agree with the general viewpoint or do you see it differently? • Encourage the use of the chat facility and to integrate the points raised into the meeting.

³ The meetings system used in this study was called GroupSystems GSS.

Some Lessons Learned by Mittleman et al	Suggested Practice to Address ‘Lesson Learned’
3. People forget or may not be sure who is at a distributed meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage the practice of using names of attendees when chairing. • Remind participants who is at the meeting – perhaps after a comfort break. • Perhaps photos and brief biographies could be circulated with the papers for the meeting.
4. It is harder to build a team over a distance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chairs should confirm the purpose of the meeting – an overview, with an emphasis on key items on the agenda and why. • Face to face meetings at some stage can help the development of a collective team trust and confidence. • Include, indeed encourage a period of the time together to be for informal chat; this could be achieved by using sub-divided arrangements for smaller group discussion which technology can facilitate via breakout rooms.
5. Network connections are unpredictable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some respondents to the AoC/CDN questionnaire referred to various technical difficulties. The advice would be to make sure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) all users are familiar with the system in use (ii) all users know what to do in the case of a problem e.g. a phone number for the governance professional (iii) open up the meeting 15 mins earlier to test sound/webcam/functions etc
6. It is harder to converge over a distance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Chair should emphasise the convergence process ie sum up views for and against to enable decisions or preferences to be clearly achieved. • The Chair should connect discussion to the report recommendation if available. Report writers should assist meeting participants by providing clear, sharply focused reports. • The Chair could use functions within the technology such as polls to engage, test opinions, check thinking etc.

b. Current advice and ‘good practice’ for virtual meetings

Building on that advice from 2000, much of which is still very relevant today, is the recent publication from ICSA, the Chartered Governance Institute (2020) titled ‘Good practice for virtual board and committee meetings’. This document is particularly valuable for the chair and the governance professional, but actors involved in college governing boards ie board members, senior staff, professional advisers, would benefit from being familiar with this timely document.

In summary, the advice includes (paraphrased):

- Select the communication technology with care, appreciating its functionality
- Make sure all attendees are confident about joining the meeting and how to use basic functions
- Virtual meetings need to be well-structured and recognise the constraints of technology
- Preparation is very important, especially for the chair and governance professional to ensure focus and clarity for the meeting
- The chair will need additional techniques to achieve an effective, inclusive meeting with clear outcomes
- Protocols for attendees should be developed and circulated in advance.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations for action are presented with the intention of improving the effectiveness of online governing meetings and associated activities. The lettering suggests where led responsibility for the recommendation might rest (✓) and also indicates other roles which can contribute to the recommendation (●).

Recommendation	Chair	Govs	Gov Prof	Prin
R1 Ensure that all governors and senior staff are able to participate in online governing with confidence. So, consult all governors and senior staff about their experience to date of using online meetings for board and committee meetings.	●	●	✓	
R2 Learn more about the facilities available within the online meetings operating system that is in use at your college. You may discover ways to use the system eg break-out rooms, increasing the number of faces on the screen, use of chat functions for summaries, use of polling, which could assist governing processes and/or improve the overall experience.			✓	
R3 Review the nature of the agenda and how it is presented.	●	✓		●
R4 Review reporting writing to ensure the purpose of the report is clear.	●		✓	✓
R5 Consider whether to increase the frequency of board or committee meetings so that the annual governance workplan can be achieved without long meetings with a large number of items.	●	✓		●
R6 Build in break time into the agenda – either at an appropriate place within the agenda or simply after 60 minutes.	✓	●	●	
R7 Become the active host of the meeting with the aim of keeping the meeting together eg process checks with all governors, regular summing up of discussions and viewpoints verbally and in the chat function, emphasising decision points and asking for evidence of consensus.	✓			
R8 Consider using breakout rooms so all have an opportunity to discuss items, engage actively in governing and build relationships.	✓	●	●	
R9 Discourage talking through reports or lengthy presentations by senior staff (which can also be problematic in face-to-face meetings). This practice takes up precious time and can be very demanding on concentration.	✓	✓	✓	✓

Recommendation	Chair	Govs	Gov Prof	Prin
R10 Develop a protocol for virtual meetings as an annex for Standing Orders.	●	●	✓	
R11 Consider how to use the chat facility to greatest benefit for the meeting. Does the chair also need to oversee the chat contribution, or is this a co-ordinating role for the vice chair... or governance professional?	●		✓	
R12 If online governing is required for some time in the future, consider ways to bring college life to governors (but not to use up time in board or committee meetings).			✓	●
R13 Regularly and frequently review the effectiveness of online governing meetings to ensure such meetings achieve outcomes rather than simply satisfy a process.	●	●	✓	
R14 A principal replying to the questionnaire referred to a trial of a method to assist online governing meetings – asking for board member questions about written reports <u>in advance</u> of meetings. College senior staff provide answers to questions on the morning of the governing board meeting. This approach could help the focus of meetings – worth a try...	●	●	●	✓
R15 For the use of virtual meetings more widely than formal meetings, it may be worth considering the advice by Cleary (2020) in ' <i>How to cope with Zoom fatigue</i> ' including remembering the value of a traditional phone call, avoid online meetings every day, remembering to agree a screen break time, carefully balance your use of work and personal online meetings.	●	●	✓	●

6 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This is a simple and, in many ways, an inspiring account of a significant change in a method of working to meet the responsibility of governing a college at a time of pandemic.

There wasn't an option to furlough or pause the governing of colleges. Institutions required continuing governance oversight to meet responsibilities to students, staff, stakeholders together with public and private funders.

So, from a relatively low base of prior experience, chairs, board members, governance professionals and chief executives/principals embarked upon governing using virtual meeting technology.

The biggest journey for changing working practices was typically for the governance professional and some board members.

From the two countries studied in this survey, the overall view was:

The response from the various categories reviewed showed 79% – 100% support for the statement: 'the use of virtual meetings has been a constructive and positive development to support governing'

[SCOTLAND]

The response from the various categories reviewed showed 88% – 97% support for the statement: 'The use of virtual meetings has been a constructive and positive development to support governing.'

[ENGLAND]

Given the variety of respondents from a range of settings across two countries within the UK, this is a reasonably consistent picture. Clearly all the players involved in governing a college including chairs,

board members, the governance professional, chief executive/principal and senior staff have, with effort and commitment, applied themselves to a new and necessary way of working (governing) for the best interests of their college students, staff and stakeholders.

The necessity to hold virtual meetings in the future remains uncertain at the time of writing in September 2020. However, two points of principle have emerged. Firstly, virtual meetings should not be seen as a simple substitute for face to face meetings. Whilst there are aspects of virtual meetings that many respondents have enjoyed, there is recognition that the nature of governing may have adjusted to suit the new medium. Questions of governance effectiveness using virtual meetings remain a concern in the longer term.

Secondly, based on this view that face to face governing meetings can be better at achieving a stronger governing performance, and at the same time recognising the usefulness of virtual meetings, there is a case for utilising 'blended methods' in the future – blended in one of two or both senses.

- (a) A mix of meeting formats – maybe committees using more virtual meetings, maybe a mix of virtual meetings and face to face to face meetings for the board.
- (b) Achieving presence at face to face meetings by a mix of face to face and virtual methods.

These are decisions that each board will take in the light of their recent experience.

It is hoped that the advice provided in this report can ensure that any continued use of virtual governance meetings will be as productive as possible for the students, staff and stakeholders of our colleges.

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