



# Minutes of the Search Committee

(Via Video Conference)

**Date: 28 September 2021**

- Present:** Nav Chohan (Principal)  
Jo Beaumont (Chair)  
John Egan  
David Butcher  
Kerry Robinson  
Paul Webley (External Co-option)
- In attendance:** J Stott (Clerk)  
Ron Hill from Stone King
- Meeting commenced:** 17.30
- Meeting closed:** 18:45
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**23/21 Disclosure of financial and/or personal interest**

There was no disclosure of financial or personal interest.

**24/21 To agree the agenda and order of business as circulated**

The agenda and order of business were agreed.

**25/21 To approve the minutes of the meetings held on 2 June 2021**

The minutes were approved as a true record.

**26/21 Matters arising**

There were no matters arising.

**27/21 Governance Review:**

**i) To receive a presentation of the Governance Review Report**

Ron Hill was invited to present his report. He began by highlighting that recommendation 4.5 would be deleted from the final version as it is no longer relevant.

The overall view is set out on page 3 in the executive summary. Many highly effective practices have been identified, but attention was drawn to the fundamental issue about the notion of a Strategic Plan which the Code of Good Governance states colleges must have which should be formally approved by the Board. Additionally, it is recommended the College look closely at the expectation of having an Operational Plan derived from the Strategic Plan and

how that is reported which will give a real sense of purpose and focus to the Board.

R Hill suggested the College could be more critical generally at how it looks at the Code of Good Governance and what its expectations are. Targets could be stretched with a journey towards even greater compliance. The Code is there to help be really good at governing the College and test its own performance as a Board and this has been identified as the main area of concern for development.

## **ii) To consider the report, findings and recommendations**

R Hill invited members to comment on his report. Discussions took place and members voiced their thoughts as set out in the bullet points as follows.

- The ideas presented are useful and it would be helpful to understand a Strategic Plan and how it feeds into the committee. There is some comfort in being able to measure yourself. However, we would not want to lose those senior management reports which bring in new and creative ideas for us to think about. R Hill agreed that he would encourage creativity and imagination from SMT and Governors which is crucial, but to have that within a context of accountability and focus and a governance conversation around the ideas.
- We are sometimes too close to the discussion on strategy and a clear Strategic Plan and Operating Plan would focus minds on the issues and give time for creative discussion. R Hill added that the College has many of the ingredients for the plan which have been recognised within his report such as strategic drivers and KPIs. However, it needs to come together which will make a difference for the Board giving a sharper focus on what it is trying to achieve. It is not just about things being successful but looking at the reality of trying to deliver a plan.
- The Principal stated that he does not agree with the concept of strategic plans, but that we do have an annual Operating Plan which, if anything is too detailed a plan which is influenced by the drivers. R Hill replied saying that, in trying to recognise the strengths, it comes back to the expectations of the Code which makes it very specific about the need to agree a Strategic Plan. When reviewing your activities against the Code you also need to approve a Strategic Plan.
- I support the recommendations and that what we do needs to come together more but to recognise that we do have an Operational Plan. The elements are mostly there but they just need bringing together in a better way.

The Chair added that we have a lot of information and that maybe the key area to think about is whether to rationalise some of that or think about producing one document. There are different ways of presenting the information. The Clerk stated that, in the past, we have been through the Code of Good Governance doing a lot of mapping against the evidence but perhaps the latest review was not as robust as it could have been. The key area to reflect on is for the Code of Good Governance being a developmental tool for us.

R Hill urged the college to look back at the Code and go beyond it, as it will be helpful in resetting where you want to be as a Board. By going down the route of a Strategic Plan you will also be able to reduce the amount of paperwork and you

can perhaps think of stretch targets in your Operating Plan. Your reporting format is variable, for example, recommendations ought to be more clear about what decisions are expected. At 1.3, you may benefit from a succession plan for all chairs as a useful means for developing vice chairs and moving people through into positions of responsibility.

- We receive a lot of information at committees and it might be useful to see that refined down into something more specific such as an executive summary. We delegate a lot down to committee level who receive all the detail, but others may miss out on some of that. A Strategic Plan approach could help focus committee work as well as that of the Board.

The Principal asked R Hill if, when thinking about the Strategic Plan, it is about encompassing all activities of the College or just about the main challenges. R Hill confirmed it is about all aspects of a college's work and partnerships based on an assessment of needs to reflect the interests and views of students, employers and the community and he read out a clip from the Code. Looking at some of the outstanding colleges in England, they have ways of presenting the Strategic Plan without going through huge amounts of detail.

**ACTION:** The Chair said it would be really helpful if R Hill could share examples of a Business Report and of different ways of presenting the Strategic Plan which he agreed.

On accountability, the Chair said we may need to reappraise where we are. Over recent years, we have taken on the importance of governors getting closer to understanding the students educational activity but this was recently curtailed due to Covid. However, we have been strong in sharing that insight in the past. R Hill added that, in 12 months' time, if things get back to more normal, he would suggest a training programme to see that all governors have had some form of engagement with learners and aspects of the curriculum. Where that happens, the type of conversation at board level is much more informed. As priority, the more you can know about learners, learning and curriculum, this can really help in thinking about the future.

- In the last year, I have had the opportunity to work with learners and view some classes but not all members have the time. I can report back on how it went, but am not sure how we capture what we do. R Hill suggested having informal events where perceptions can be shared which may not fall into a formal board meeting. It would be useful to think of a governor space more widely than the official meetings as a way of developing collective knowledge.

The Chair added that we did introduce training records and have training days in place as a more informal space so we have some elements of good practice there. R Hill agreed we have lots of good practice - it is about getting the most out of it. A suggestion at the end of meetings is to ask the question - what decisions have we made today that impacts learners and staff. Most decisions will have an impact but it is about how to express the answer and to embed this in the process of governing to maintain the focus on students and staff.

On recommendation 4 on the student voice, R Hill said the first element is for the Board to approve all the ways by which the student voice is represented, eg,

Student Governors, Union Reps, Course Reps, focus groups etc, and to look at how recruitment is undertaken. There are many ways a voice can be heard but how do you hear those messages and how are you listening and responding to them? At 4.3 the Chair asked if it is about the standardisation of reporting and R Hill confirmed yes, about building in the teaching and learning implications as a standard item. The Principal confirmed we have a student voice framework which is not always expressed very clearly, and less so for staff and stakeholders. He asked if R Hill has any models he can share.

**ACTION:** R Hill confirmed he was happy to share some models for a listening board to the student voice.

At recommendation 5 on diversity of the board, R Hill said it is about finding ways to understand it and then how to achieve it. The key is in recognising what communities you are connected to and how best you can match those communities with representation on the Board. It requires an analysis of the community profile and focus on various techniques by working through agents, networks etc. It can be a long term plan, but something you are actively working towards. The Chair confirmed we have had recruitment drives about this over the years and membership has been more diverse at various times - there is an ebb and flow. We could track this though and see the direction of how we got where we are. R Hill set out the example of another college that wanted to improve diversity and they set up a community committee from around 20 co-opted people and gave them a role on different issues on how the college engaged with the community. They discovered some real stars from that who progressed on to full Board members. Their intention was to bring people in who would not normally think of taking that direction. Stakeholder engagement is key.

- It was noted that the Code suggests 8 years as the normal length of service on the Board, but that this has not been included as a recommendation. R Hill confirmed this is the norm, but that exceptions can be made and he has understood why the College has made those exceptions. Refreshment of board members is very important, but so is the risk of loss of expertise so it is a balance.

The Principal requested that reference be made in the report to the existence of an Operating Plan.

**ACTION:** The Principal to send R Hill a copy of the Operating Plan before updating his report to reflect this and to circulate the final version to the Board.

After a discussion it was agreed that members would be asked to accept the report on 12 October and for that to be recorded formally in the minutes of the Corporation meeting in December.

The Chair thanked R Hill for his report, insights and commitment to the sharing of resources.

**28/21**

**Date of next meeting**

5 October 2021.