**CORPORATION OF SIR GEORGE MONOUX COLLEGE**

**Minutes of the Meeting of the External Relations Committee**

**held on 2 February 2021**

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| **Present** | Stewart Maclean (Chair), Tom Foakes, Farhana Juhera, David Vasse, Sara Whittaker. |
| **In Attendance** | James Gould (Vice-Principal: Student Services and Recruitment), Robert Smith (Clerk to the Corporation). |

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| **1** | **Apologies for Absence & Quoracy**  Apologies were received from the following members of the Corporation: Talia Chirouf, Maurine Lewin. |
| **2** | **Declarations of Interest**  None. |
| **3** | **Draft Minutes of the Previous Meeting (Ordinary Business): 2 December 2020**  It was noted that the draft minutes had been approved by the Chair of the Committee for circulation.  The minutes were approved as a correct record of the business transacted, and *prima facie* evidence of the proceedings to which they relate. |
| **4** | **Matters Arising from the Draft Minutes (Ordinary Business): 2 December 2020**  None. |
| **5** | **Risk Management Report**  It was noted that the Board level risk falling within the remit of the Committee is considered under Agendum 6 below.  No other risks needing to be drawn to the attention of the Audit Committee were identified in the course of the meeting. |
| **6** | **Communications and Marketing, with Special Reference to Student Recruitment 2021-22 in the Context of the Public Health Emergency**  A report prepared by the Vice-Principal: Student Services and Recruitment, together with an attendant schematic, was received and considered.  It was noted that: |

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|  | **.** | the pace of applications and offers had continued to pick up since the December 2020 meeting, with both applications and offers tracking above the projected level and on a comparable basis with previous academic years; |
|  | **.** | given the minimal level of school liaison activity and restrictions on open days owing to the public health emergency, the increase in applications attests to the success of the Apply Online campaign featuring an application form which is easier to complete, the new online prospectus and a series of virtual events; |
|  | **.** | offers remain the key metric to monitor, with their number having accelerated such that the offer rate (67%), representing a significant improvement since the December meeting, is well above the conversion rates of the telephone interviews conducted last summer, and in line with conversion from face-to-face interviews in previous years; |
|  | **.** | the incentive scheme operated during December had been taken up by around 15% of the 220 offer holders who, in order to receive their incentive, completed a short survey about their experience, the outcome of which, whilst not intended to be statistically significant, reported all bar one as either ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ with the interview experience, with the same number reporting they would recommend the college to a friend; |
|  | **.** | the improved application-to-offer conversion rate by comparison with the previous year had continued during January, largely owing, it is believed, to a change in the scheduling of telephone interviews, Year 11 students being more likely to be at home and to have an appetite for securing a sixth form place in these uncertain times; *and* |
|  | **.** | a small backlog for scheduled interviews, whilst not too large to be problematic for the student experience, demonstrates that there is sufficient demand to fulfil the target for offers in February (during January 135 interviews had been scheduled each week, which is expected to rise to 200 per week in February). |

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|  | In relation to specific initiatives, it was noted that: |

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|  | **.** | a new college promotion video and web prospectus had been soft-launched on the website before the end of the Autumn Term; *and* |
|  | **.** | prospective students are being “kept warm” with interactive sessions, updates per pathway area and competitions - as part of this, ‘My Monoux’ had been launched (a digital “keep warm” platform for those holding offers). |

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|  | It was also noted that the College is currently considering what impact the revised GCSE process this year may have on enrolment. The current consultation proposes that results will be released from mid-July. This presents an opportunity for Year 11’s to have a measure of security concerning their College place at an earlier date than in a normal year. The College is developing models to deal with a variety of dates for the release of examination results, including arrangements for staffing.  The Vice-Principal: Student Services and Recruitment observed that the College has developed a reputational strength for online learning and maintaining positive contacts with students, both of which may assist recruitment.  The Principal drew attention to the risk in terms of enrolment numbers of lower internal progression resulting from the effects of Centre-Assessed Grades on the quality of students entering the College in 2020, and of the College’s own equivalent processes in determining progression between the first and second years of vocational programmes. He expressed concern that the level of student engagement may also be adversely affected by the further national lockdown, leading to poorer overall performance among students due to progress within the College in the current year.  It was stated that the estimates in this regard should be quantifiable by late March, but that at present an estimate of 50 fewer students would be a reasonable expectation. The outcome is not, however, anticipated to reduce overall enrolment numbers below the target of 1,820.  The Chair of the Committee asked if students might be able to repeat years. It was noted that funding had been made available by the Government for this purpose, but that repeat years are not without educational disadvantages (e.g. maintaining engagement over those parts of the syllabus which the student has already studied in a face-to-face context).  It was agreed that a second year without formal examinations is likely to exacerbate the problem in the future, though assessment processes are expected to be more rigorous in 2021 than in 2020.  It was noted that applications are projected to be received more evenly over the 2020-21 year than in 2019-20, with offers showing a similar pattern.  It was reported that the College is benefitting from having studied how a range of higher education institutions are dealing with student recruitment during the public health emergency.  It was acknowledged that a risk attends the reduction in face-to-face recruitment by comparison with years when students visit the College and meet their prospective teachers. |

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| **7** | **Work Experience, with Special Reference to the Effects on this Activity of the Public Health Emergency**  A report prepared by the Vice-Principal: Student Services and Recruitment was received and considered.  It was reported that the College had received confirmation that it is not expected to meet its target for Industry Placements in the 2020-21 year, but is required to engage in capacity building in advance of the 2021-22 year.  If some limited face-to-face opportunities become possible later in this academic year, it is intended that they be prioritised to accommodate groups for whom work experience would significantly aid progression (for example students aiming to pursue Nursing or Physiotherapy). However, this would need to be arranged on an *ad hoc* basis in response to individual opportunities, rather than by a ‘block-booking’ system for whole classes.  Even if public health restrictions are not imposed during the next academic year, the low number of placements in 2020-21 will continue to have an impact on achieving the 80% KPI target in 2021-22, because progressing students will not have completed a work experience placement and the College will therefore be starting the year from a lower base position.  In the light of the factors rehearsed above, it was further reported that: |

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|  | **.** | Work Experience Projects are being delivered at a rate comparable with previous academic years (with an expectation that the 80% target will be achieved), giving opportunities for students to gain an understanding of the workplace as part of their curriculum; |
|  | **.** | under the Employability Passport scheme. each week a group of students are targeted who either missed their work experience placement last year as a result of the pandemic or who were due to take it up this academic year - the Passport consists of a daily online activity linked to employability skills, and a YouTube Live assembly with a group of employers linked to their pathway which, whilst not a substitute for a work experience placement, does address key skills students are expected to develop on a placement, such as communication, emotional intelligence, networking and presentations; *and* |
|  | **.** | the College’s annual Careers and HE Fair (25-26 February) and Progression Passport (4-5 March) will include a range of online talks from employers and alumni, in addition to students reflecting on their ambitions and options after leaving the College. |

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|  | Members discussed the impact of T levels on work placements against a background of the pandemic during which the College’s ability to nurture and develop continuing relationships with employers is necessarily restricted. It was felt to be a particular risk were the present vocational qualifications to be abruptly withdrawn. Government plans and the dates of their implementation are not yet known, though a rolling transition is currently anticipated. It was noted that college representative bodies (Association of Colleges and Sixth Form College Association) had made representations on behalf of the sector.  It was also noted that the College is successfully maintaining its “employability” programme. Members agreed that these activities should also be emphasised to potential students of the College in recruitment materials. |

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| **8** | **Key Performance Indicators 2020-21**  A schedule recording progress towards 2020-21 targets falling within the Committee’s remit was received and considered.  It was noted *inter alia* that the number of students expected to be recruited in September 2021 is 1,820, which would achieve the agreed target. The Committee accordingly advises the Resources Committee that it may use this figure as a basis for assessing the College’s projected financial performance in the 2021-22 year.  The final outcome (2020) for students progressing to Russell Group universities (9%) was noted to have been lower than for the previous year. It was thought that the reasons for the reduction include the effects of centre-assessed grades (more particularly, the Government’s *volte face* on how they were to be calculated), and the attitudes taken by a particular university to some BTEC qualifications.  It was noted that, from a 70% level of respondents, a gratifying high proportion of students stated that they felt safe at the College. It is thought that this relates to a positive view of the College’s measures for keeping students safe from the pandemic whilst on site. |

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| **9** | **Student Support**  A presentation was given by the Vice-Principal: Student Services and Recruitment, in the course of which it was reported that: |

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|  | **.** | temporary safeguarding reporting procedures and guidance for staff are similar to those implemented during the previous online learning period; |
|  | **.** | an annual increase in safeguarding cases is likely to be reported compared to the previous year, with themes around increased domestic and mental health challenges, as well as social anxiety, during the second lockdown contributing to the anticipated rise – possibly also reflecting, in part, the growth in student numbers and of the College’s mentoring/counselling provision; |
|  | **.** | regular audits of safeguarding records have ensured a robust response, even during the online learning period, as well as supporting close working with local authorities and the Safer Schools Team; *and* |
|  | **.** | counselling is continuing online, including through the facility known as “Safe Space” |

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|  | In relation to the Calling Taskforce, it was reported that: |

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|  | **.** | 5,000 calls to students had been made since the start of January, with approximately 88% engaging with the service; |
|  | **.** | interventions directed at students not engaging will commence in the week beginning 8 February; |
|  | **.** | initial themes include challenges around motivation, good routines and well-being – although these should be mediated through the overall context of positive engagement by students in lessons, online enrichment activities and weekly calls; |
|  | **.** | in addition to well-being and engagement with lessons, a clearer focus is being placed on work completion (in particular, its impact on grades to be awarded at the end of the year); *and* |
|  | **.** | a further theme encourages students to incorporate good routines into their daily lives, for example beneficial sleeping routines. |

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|  | In relation to financial and technical support during lockdown, it was reported that: |

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|  | **.** | digital equipment is being loaned to students who otherwise have no access to it; |
|  | **.** | a recent delivery of 400 laptops will accelerate the equipment loan programme; |
|  | **.** | free College Meals funding is being paid directly into student accounts; *and* |
|  | **.** | student bursaries continue to be paid, though there is a reduced allocation compared to the previous year (as a result of funding being re-allocated away from large cities), and consideration is therefore being given to the optimal targeting of support in the next academic year. |

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|  | The Principal noted that, in general, first year students report favourably on the College’s arrangements to maintain contact, drawing a particular comparison with their experience at school during the first lockdown.  The Committee Chair asked if the College is doing enough to make potential future students aware of the measures it takes to maintain contact with learners, and the provision of counselling support.  In the latter regard, it was noted that the College, anticipating a rise in mental health challenges, had doubled its investment in counselling provision in the current year. However, counselling is an expensive service to fund, and efforts are being directed towards enabling other staff to assume some aspects of the role. It was also noted that additional “catch-up” funding can be carried forward to 2021-22, which might be applied in this context. |

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| **10** | **External Corporate Hospitality**  No instances were reported. |
| **11** | **Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Checking of Governors**  The Clerk to the Corporation reported that all DBS checks remain in date, but that three are due for renewal later this term, and two more in the following term.  He noted that governors are neither currently nor prospectively coming into the College. The College HR Department is working remotely, which makes it difficult to verify documentation attending the renewal process. DBS checking of college governors is not a legal requirement but, in normal times, an element of best practice.  The Clerk stated that he would communicate with governors affected by the decision setting out the reasons for the delay, and drawing attention to the limitations it places on College visits.    The DBS renewal process will be re-commenced as soon as it is both safe and prudent. |
| **12** | **Date and Time of Remaining Meeting 2020-21**  The following approved date and time was noted:  ***Tuesday 22 June 2021 (5.30pm)***  Please note that this is an **altered date**. The meeting will be held online. |
| **13** | **Any Other Competent Business**  None. |

**List of Actions Arising from the Minutes**

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| *Minute No.* | *Person(s) Responsible* | *Action Required* |
| **12** | Clerk to the Corporation | Correspond with governors whose DBS renewals fall due in the present and following terms about revised arrangements. |