**CORPORATION OF SIR GEORGE MONOUX COLLEGE**

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

**held on 22 June 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: Maurine Lewin  The meeting was quorate. |
| **2** | **Declarations of Interest**  None. |
| **3** | **Draft Minutes of the Previous Meeting (Ordinary Business): 2 February 2021**  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 February 2021**  *Minute 11:* those members who were affected had received an email from the Clerk to the Corporation in the terms minuted. |
| **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**  A report prepared by the Vice-Principal: Student Services and Recruitment, together with an attendant schematic and a 2020-21 internal audit report on student recruitment (giving significant assurance) was received and considered.  It was reported that: |

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|  | **.** | the College is slightly below the equivalent point in the level of applications by comparison with the previous year, but is slightly above the level of offers; |
|  | **.** | a marginal increase, by comparison with the previous year, in the number of applications (+6%) and offers (+1%) is anticipated following initiatives launched in June; |
|  | **.** | the target of 1,820 College enrolments is expected to be met; |
|  | **.** | most internal graduation decisions had been made, and a graduation percentage for Level 3 Yr 1 and A level Yr.1 (a measure of internal progression) of 89% is expected to be achieved, constituting an improvement on the previous year; *and* |
|  | **.** | as discussed at an earlier meeting, there had been lower in-year retention at Level 2, whose cohort underwent a more acute set of challenges as a result of Centre-Assessed Grades and loss of learning habits during the first lockdown – because similar challenges are anticipated in 2021-22, a plan has been developed that includes bespoke, and structured, Talent Lab activities for Level 2 students, greater skills building during induction and earlier targeting for support intervention. |

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|  | An update on various marketing activities was noted.  It was commented that a measure of uncertainty attends the projected enrolment numbers owing to a lower than normal rate of face-to-face interviews. However, the opportunity, given the absence of external examinations, to enrol students early (103 to date, representing 10-15% of total enrolments) had afforded a measure of compensatory assurance, though the level of “walk-ins” remains speculative.  It was also observed that the College is the only local provider making firm early offers of places on specific courses to students.  It was also commented that, in the absence of externally assessed grades, the use of diagnostic tests is valuable in ensuring that students are directed to the courses best suited to their abilities and potential.  It was noted that the Quality & Performance Committee had kept Level 2 retention under review. It was noted that particular difficulties had attended the entry cohort owing to the cancellation of external examinations and the incidence of school shutdowns in 2020, necessitating deployment of the full resources of improved teaching to keep the number of retained students to a maximum in the circumstances. Similar considerations are expected to attend the 2021 entry for analogous reasons.  It was further reported that during a previous audit of Marketing, a recommendation had been made that a value for money assessment of advertising expenditure be brought for consideration to the External Relations Committee. The impact of advertising can be challenging to measure, because applications, offers and enrolments may be influenced by a number of factors including reputation, school liaison, and the quality of advice given in secondary schools. Marketing campaigns also indirectly contribute to general brand awareness in the community, rather than direct website visits. However, two of the highest expenditures on advertising in the marketing team had been analysed in terms of direct response rates, giving a measure of assurance that marketing expenditure represents value for money.  In response to a question from the Committee Chair as to what elements of the pandemic experience might be retained in future years, attention was focused on the value of early enrolments (where these are possible) and greater use of online interaction with students (as a preferred option to telephone contact).  The internal audit report on student recruitment and retention, which had given significant assurances for the activities reviewed, was received and noted.  In connection with the Report, it was proposed that students be asked in the next main iteration of the Student Survey to indicate what had made them choose the College as the place to study.  The adeptness, flexibility and creativity of the communications and marketing team were recognised for commendation by the Committee. |
| **7** | **Work Experience, with Special Reference to the Effects of the Public Health Emergency**  A report summarising work experienced in the 2020-21 academic year. prepared by the Vice-Principal: Student Services and Recruitment, was received and considered.  The definitions of Work Experience Placements (WEXPlacements), Industry Placements, Work Experience Projects (WEXProjects), and Talks & Workshops were noted, and the College’s expectations for the year in each regard.  With regard to WEXPlacements, it was reported that, owing to the incidence of a second national lockdown in January 2021, in addition to a necessary concentration on WEXProjects and Talks/Workshops, the College had responded with two initiatives to ensure that students were not overly disadvantaged, namely: |

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|  | **.** | the “Employability Passport” – designed initially to replace WEXPlacements, it provides a preparatory module for students to complete prior to a placement, or will serve its original purpose in the event of further restrictions; *and* |
|  | **.** | scanning by the Careers and Employability Team for national and local opportunities for students to gain work experience online, which service will be retained in 2021-22, irrespective of whether on-site placements resume. |

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|  | Members noted the impact of the public health emergency on WEXPlacement data and the achievement of the relevant College target, and that it will have a lagged effect in 2021-22, even if national restrictions are not imposed. Notwithstanding the above, the College is reported to have systems and processes in place to deliver 400-600 placements in 2021-22 if the public health circumstances are favourable, and employer confidence returns.  It was reported that, owing to the public health emergency, the College had been unable to meet its target for Industry Placements. It was also reported that the College is prioritising groups for block bookings that are most likely to be in the vanguard of future T level delivery. A brokerage agency had been commissioned to aid the College’s efforts in this regard.  It was reported that approximately the same number of WEXProjects had been delivered as in the previous year, with the outcomes of the standardisation exercise attending this activity due for report to the Committee at its next meeting. However, the final outturn for the activity will fail to meet the relevant target for the following reasons, namely that: |

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|  | **.** | many engagements on the part of employers had taken the form of talks or workshops; *and* |
|  | **.** | some employers had been unable to continue their engagements for reasons deriving from the public health emergency. |

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|  | It was reported that there had been a centralised focus on talks and workshops, reflecting the prevailing adverse circumstances affecting other areas of work experience. Many had been delivered through an online platform either under Employability Passport arrangements or at the Careers & HE Fair. The College target for this area is expected to be met.  It was commented that, in the context of Ofsted’s criterion of “imminent credible plans” for a full resumption of work experience, the College’s arrangements had been highly creditable.  In terms of the fulfilment of such plans in 2021-22, it was acknowledged that much might depend on the extent to which home-working is preserved in the new environment. The difficult position of many smaller enterprises was also acknowledged. It was reported that there appears to be good employer appetite for work experience activities involving the College’s students, with some firms actively contacting the College in this regard.  It was noted that, because of the low level of activity in 2020-21, activity in 2021-22 would not be properly reflected in the data owing to the lagged effect from the prior year, and that it might take the College two years to get back on course.  It was noted that priority would be accorded to those students for whom work experience is essential to their prospects of gaining admission to university, or who are expected to go straight into employment.  It was reported that, if the public health emergency had not occurred, the College would have achieved between 60-65% of its students undertaking work experience in 2020-21, and that its underlying position is therefore relatively strong for this measure. |
| **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 Corporation that it may use this figure as a basis for assessing the College’s projected financial performance in the 2021-22 year.  The application-to-offer conversion rate is reported to be ahead of target as at June 2021.  Performance against other targets will be reported once relevant data have been collected and analysed after the year-end. |
| **9** | **External Corporate Hospitality**  No instances were reported. |
| **10** | **Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Checking of Governors**  Owing to the circumstances noted by the Clerk to the Corporation at the previous meeting, it was reported that, as had been predicted, four governor DBS checks had expired, with a further one due to expire in July.  None of the members affected had visited the College since the expiry of their clearances.  Now that more normal operations are being resumed, and it is possible for governors to safely come into the College for their supporting documentation to be verified on a face-to-face basis, the outstanding checks will be conducted as a matter of priority.  The committee noted that DBS checking of college governors is not a legal requirement, but reconfirmed its commitment, in normal times, to ensure the continuous DBS checking of all governors. |
| **11** | **Date and Time of Meetings 2021-22**  The following dates and times were approved:  ***Tuesday 9 November 2021 (5.30pm)***  ***Tuesday 15 February 2022 (5.30pm)***  ***Monday 6 June 2022 (5.30pm)***  In accordance with the decision of the Corporation at the meeting held on 11 May 2021, the format and location of meetings will be determined by each Committee Chair in consultation with members of the Committee, but such meetings will be either face-to-face at a location to be agreed (with the right of any member, including staff in attendance, to attend virtually without restriction), or will be entirely virtual. |
| **12** | **Any Other Competent Business**  None |

**List of Actions Arising from the Minutes**

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| *Minute No.* | *Person(s) Responsible* | *Action Required* |
| **11** | Clerk to the Corporation  & College HR Department | Resume arrangements for DBS clearance of governors. |