

Priestley College

Minutes of the Priestley College Governing Body Meeting
held at 4.30pm on Thursday, 9 July 2015
in the Conference Room (P1.16)

PRESENT:	Mr R Haslam	Chair
	Mr D Cathie	Student Governor
	Mr J A Farquharson	
	Mr M W Grant	Principal
	Mr A Osborne	
	Mrs B Scott-Herron	
	Mr G Hill	
	Mrs K Hope	Staff Governor
	Mr J Monaghan	
	Mr M D Salmon	Staff Governor
	Ms K Simcock	
	Mrs D Stead	
	Mr P McMellon	Clerk to the Governing Body
Also in attendance:	Mr G Contos	Vice Principal (Curriculum & Standards)
	Mrs J McCann	Vice Principal (Resources)
	Mr D McGuire	Director of Finance
	Mr I Edge	Student Services (Items 1-6)
	Mr B Jackson-Spruce	College Council (2015/16)

Prior to the meeting, the Governors met informally with students who had been recently elected to serve on the 2015/16 College Council.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Mr A Cannell, Mr B Craven, Mr P Dyke, Mrs C Owen and Mrs S Yates.

The Chair welcomed Mr Ben Jackson-Spruce to the meeting.

The Chair also thanked Mr Ben Craven and Mr Duncan Cathie for their contributions to the governance of the College and for their effective promotion of the 'student voice'. The Chair added his congratulations to Mr Cathie on his appointment to a 'Student Ambassador Internship' at the College.

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14 May 2015 were accepted as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

4. MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

5. TEACHING, LEARNING & ASSESSMENT – OFSTED DATA DASHBOARD

Mr G Contos (Vice Principal – Curriculum & Standards) gave a presentation on the updated Ofsted Data Dashboard. He reminded Governors that much of the data was still ‘experimental’ and that other useful data (eg., numbers of students in cohorts) was lacking.

Mr Contos drew attention to the sections of the Dashboard in which the College did not come out particularly well (ie., amber and red ratings). He outlined the explanation behind each such data set and he advised on how the matters were being tackled. Mrs D Stead confirmed that this had also been dealt with in some detail at the recent Curriculum & Standards Committee meeting (see Item 19 (ii) below).

The Governing Body reflected once again on the Dashboard’s failure to provide a fair reflection of the College’s particular strength in ‘mixed’ (A levels and vocational) courses. The general public (including prospective students and their parents) could be discouraged from enrolling by this unfair portrayal of the College. Furthermore, equivalent data for schools sixth forms was not readily available.

The Chair asked Mr Contos to suggest how Ofsted might interpret and make use of the College’s data. Mr Contos was confident that Ofsted would know to take into account the College’s ‘special offer’ (ie., the ‘mixed’ provision). The Principal confirmed that it was assumed that Ofsted would consider much wider (and more detailed) key data sets when monitoring the College’s performance.

In general, Governors concurred with Mr Contos’s suggestion that, when properly interpreted, the data confirmed that the College’s performance remained very good.

6. ‘MATRIX’ QUALITY AWARD

Mr I Edge (Student Services) reported on the College’s attainment of ‘Matrix’ award status, reflective of the College’s commitment to the provision of impressive ‘information, advice and guidance’ for students.

The Governing Body noted the series of very positive observations in the full Assessment report.

The Chair asked Mr Edge to indicate how the ‘areas for improvement’ might be addressed, and Mr Edge advised on how more effective use of feedback from service users might be handled in the future.

Mr Edge and his colleagues were congratulated on this success.

7. CHAIR’S REPORT

(i) AoC NW Regional Governance Meeting (19 May 2015)

This (and other) AoC event had tended to focus more on General FE matters/colleges (as opposed to Sixth Form College interests), but it had provided an opportunity to visit Ashton Sixth Form College.

(ii) SFCA NW Meeting (20 May 2015)

The visit to the sixth form college in Barrow-in-Furness had been interesting and the meeting had centred on the SFCA’s quest for an updated mandate in its representation of the sixth form colleges sector.

The Principal confirmed that he would cover the SFCA position in more detail in his report (Item 8 below).

(iii) AoC Webinar on new Code of Governance

For participants at Priestley College (Chair and Clerk), this event had been very disappointing (ie., no webinar took place) as a result of technical problems at the AoC end. Other colleges had been similarly affected.

The Clerk had subsequently reviewed recordings of the webinar and now results were awaited on the extent to which colleges were adopting the new Code. The Chair commented on reported

developments and considerations across the sixth form colleges sector which seemed to indicate that full adoption of the new Code was by no means universal.

(iv) National Leaders of Governance

The Chair confirmed that the final stage of his NLG induction had been successfully completed and that he now awaited his deployment as an NLG specialist.

(v) AoC NW Regional Governance Meeting (2 July 2015)

The meeting at Warrington Collegiate had provided guidance on the new Ofsted Handbook and on the scope for collaboration between colleges and other educational providers.

The Chair and Mr J Monaghan (who had also represented the College at this meeting) reported on messages from Ofsted and on reported trends and options for collaboration.

On this latter point, the Governing Body considered some of the realities and practicalities of mergers, 'federations' etc.

(vi) Discussions with other local providers

An informal meeting with representatives (senior managers and governors) of some local schools had taken place on 23 June 2015. This was in line with the strategic directions given by the College's Governing Body at the February 2015 Annual Seminar. The Chair confirmed that the Principal had also been present and that he would cover this further in his report (Item 8 below). However, protection of the 'Priestley brand' remained the prime consideration. The experiences of other colleges would also be tapped as matters progressed.

(vii) Official opening of new Performing Arts facilities

Former student Oliver Ormson (now appearing in West End musical 'The Book of Mormon') had enthralled current students in the formal opening ceremony on 24 June. The occasion had also confirmed how the new facilities were already being used (and appreciated) by students and staff.

(viii) Inter-colleges Peer Reviewing

As the next stage of the governance peer reviewing exercise (Priestley, Birkenhead and Sir John Dean sixth form colleges), the Chair had observed governing body meetings at Birkenhead College (6 July 2015) and Sir John Dean College (8 July 2015). He reported on a number of the features of each meeting and these were discussed, with the scope for further development at Priestley College considered.

(ix) Lesson Visits

The Chair asked Mr J A Farquharson to comment on his recent 'lesson visit'. Mr Farquharson reported on a very informative and impressive experience in the Biology department at a lesson on "ATP Respiration". Student engagement and lecturer attention to individual A-level Biology students (differentiation) were very evident.

The Chair reminded all Governors that periodic 'lesson visits' by individual Governors were important and would be facilitated by College Management on request.

(x) Electronic Meetings Documentation

The Chair reported on savings attributable to the 100% use of electronic meetings documentation by four Governors. He thanked the individual Governors for this contribution. He also confirmed that 'electronic only' provision to all Governors of an increasing number of documents was also helping to cut costs without impairing effectiveness.

All Governors confirmed their preparedness to make progress on this basis, recognising that, as/when paper copies were preferred, such requests would always be met by the Clerk.

(xi) College Website

The Chair reminded Governors to contact the Clerk so as to ensure that individual ‘pen pictures’ on the Governance folder of the College website remained accurate.

8. PRINCIPAL’S REPORT

The Principal presented his report, which had been circulated with the meeting agenda.

He drew attention to the following:

(i) College Improvement Plan

The updated version (as examined in detail at the recent Curriculum & Standards Committee meeting) had been distributed with the agenda. Under ‘Outcomes for Learners’, the Principal reported on developments relating to student retention and specifically to efforts designed to reduce the 1% gap (c/w previous year).

The position regarding student attendance in the current year was noted and the changes planned for 2015/16 were endorsed.

Mr G Contos drew attention to the development of more evaluative types of statement throughout the document.

(ii) Student Achievements

The string of impressive individual achievements, including those of IB student Harry McDonald and Art & Design student Zac Wrightson, was noted. The Governing Body also congratulated College staff on the 100% GCSE Maths examination attendance attainment.

(iii) Finance and Staffing (and Student Recruitment)

The challenge to maintain strong finances was intensifying (as the reports from F&GP Committee and the Budget and Financial Plan items below confirm in more detail) and the tight controls over expenditure were routinely enforced. The need to identify scope for further savings (on staff and non-staff costs) was a priority and various initiatives were being examined or actively pursued. The financial health of sixth form colleges across the sector was known to be deteriorating, and the need to explore all strategic options was unavoidable (see (iv) below). In this context, new student recruitment was crucially important, as was retention/progression of current Year 1 students. The Principal reported on various initiatives designed to maintain student numbers in the face of competition and heavily reduced funding.

(iv) Future of Sixth Form Colleges

The Governing Body reflected at length upon the place of sixth form colleges in the national agenda (as referred to by the Chair under Item 7(vi) above and as now presented in details by the Principal). The Principal drew attention to the full rehearsal of the advantages and disadvantages of various options for individual colleges and for the sector, as provided in the SFCA letter to all colleges (James Kewin : June 2015). The SFCA clearly considered that closer alignment with the schools sector would serve sixth form colleges better than their traditional association with general FE colleges.

The SFCA’s advice, together with likely actions/expectations of the recently elected Government, was considered at length. The need for adjustment (so as to position sixth form colleges closer to the schools sector) did appear to have considerable merit since this line would also afford the best prospects for maintaining the features of Priestley College which had served the community so impressively well for many years. In this light, the Principal was also encouraged to proceed with his involvement in discussions with local schools.

The Principal reported in full on the nature of the discussions to date, confirming that he routinely kept the Chair involved as matters progressed. He recognised the need to maintain the College’s autonomy, but felt that this could be still achieved while closer links and structures with other providers are developed. The

risks in taking no such action were, in any event, very real and potentially very damaging to the 'Priestley brand'.

Mr J Monaghan endorsed the reported and proposed developments, but warned that each/every 'partner' would instinctively aim to protect/promote their own narrower interests. The Principal confirmed that he was alive to such considerations and that his own objective was the preservation and promotion of the Priestley brand of excellence, but in mutually beneficial ways.

In general, the Governing Body endorsed the Principal's actions to-date and confirmed that it would be appropriate to take further the exploration of strategic partnerships, provided these allowed the College to retain its identity and ethos.

(v) Links with University of Chester

The opportunities for close liaison with the University appeared to have much potential and the Principal was advised to pursue the suggested links.

Mr G Contos advised on developments which were already building on the links.

(vi) New Ofsted Framework

The Principal reported that the new Ofsted arrangements and practices had already been reported and discussed at Committee meetings, and that a full update on the changes (and the consequences for the College/Governors) would be provided at the beginning of the 2015/16 academic year.

Finally, the Principal thanked the Governing Body for its support throughout his first period in post.

9. STUDENT MEMBERS' REPORT

Mr D Cathie (Student Member) reported on the following:

- (i) Mutually productive discussions with student bus provider representatives
- (ii) Development of a new video (with College Council input) to promote the 'Student Voice'.
- (iii) College Council involvement in the general preparation for student induction in September 2015.
- (iv) Charity fund-raising activity – 'Wig Wednesday' – had produced over £200. The timing of the event was not great (clashing with student examinations) and this had been raised with the national organisers.
- (v) Student involvement in the Prevent initiative

Mr B Jackson-Spruce confirmed that, for the incoming College Council, systems to secure feedback from new students were being considered. Such feedback/information was most useful when/if obtained early in the academic year.

Mr A Osborne provided an 'end-of-year' assessment of his son's first year experience at the College. Mr Osborne reminded the Governing Body about the issues which his son/ parents had initially had to tackle (ie., initial transition brought a number of challenges), but that his son was now doing well at College and enjoying the experience.

Regarding the Prevent duties ((v) above), the Chair asked Ms K Simcock to comment on the national picture and on the College's actions. Ms Simcock urged the College to ensure that actions under Prevent remained proportionate. She advised on the likely response from the police (to involvement in Prevent promotion/preparation) and suggested that other agencies would be useful in assisting the College in responding to the national agenda. She endorsed the College's links with Mr Nigel Lund in this context.

The Principal reminded Governors that the legal duties stemming from Prevent took effect on 1 July 2015. He confirmed that further information/training for staff and Governors was scheduled for early in the 2015/16 academic year.

10. COLLEGE BUDGET AND FINANCIAL PLAN 2015-16

The Governing Body noted the recommendations following the Finance & General Purposes Committee's examination of the draft budget estimates and Financial Plan on 1 July 2015. It was noted that, in the report on that meeting, the key issues which the Committee had addressed were recorded. The assumptions which underpinned the figures had been tested by the Committee and were reassuringly credible.

Mr D McGuire then gave a broad presentation on the key factors on which the 2015/16 had been compiled.

Mr McGuire then outlined the factors and 'unknowns' which shaped the Financial Plan, and particularly the 2016/17 projections.

The Governing Body had noted that a significant deficit was indicated for 2016/17 (primarily as a direct consequence of assumptions relating to the end of funding protection). The Principal advised on the various strategies and actions which were already planned or in operation (to counter the projected deficit and reduction in Financial Health status), but it was agreed that, at this point, the Financial Plan should reflect the financial plight which funding reductions and other developments outside the College's control produced.

The Principal confirmed that regular reporting to F&GP Committee would ensure that appropriate monitoring of College Management's endeavours (to deliver the 2015/16 surplus and to tackle the 2016/17 projected deficit) was maintained.

The Chair reminded the Governing Body once again about the importance of student recruitment/retention in this context. The prospects of attaining recruitment targets were discussed and it was noted that some shortfall was now anticipated. However, recruitment efforts would continue across the summer.

The Chair suggested that prospects would be considerably worse were it not for the attention given to the development of a sound financial basis for the College over recent years. The contrasting position in other colleges was noted.

In general, and having noted the extent to which the Financial Plan sought to cater for the ongoing uncertainties stemming from public sector expenditure restraints/funding reductions, the Governing Body agreed with the Finance & General Purposes Committee's views and recommendations.

RESOLVED: That the 2015/16 Budget and the Financial Plan are approved

11. RISK MANAGEMENT : POLICY, CALENDAR AND ACTION PLAN FOR 2015/16

Mr J A Farquharson (Chair of Audit Committee) presented the Risk Management Policy, Calendar and Action Plan as recommended by the Audit Committee. He confirmed that the process and the documents had been reviewed and were deemed to be fit for purposes. He added that the Financial Statements and Regularity Auditor (Mr Mike Benson of Murray Smith) had indicated that his impressions of the College's risk management system continued to be very positive.

The Governing Body noted that the Internal and External auditors had, indeed, attended during the Audit Committee's scrutiny of the risk management documentation and had indicated their satisfaction with the format and contents of the documents.

RESOLVED: That the Risk Management Policy, Calendar and Action Plan for 2015/16 are approved.

12. FINANCIAL STATEMENTS & REGULARITY AUDIT SERVICE – AUDIT STRATEGY MEMORANDUM – 2014/15

Mr J A Farquharson (Chair of Audit Committee) outlined the considerations which the Audit Committee had taken into account at the recent meeting at which the Financial Statements & Regularity Auditor (Murray Smith) had presented the proposed annual plan (the Audit Strategy Memorandum) for the audit of the 2014/15 final accounts.

RESOLVED: That the Annual Plan proposed by the Financial Statements & Regularity Auditors for 2014/15 is approved.

13. INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE : APPOINTMENT FOR 2015/16

Mr J A Farquharson (Chair of Audit Committee) reported that the Audit Committee had appraised the performance of Baker Tilly in 2014/15 and had been very satisfied with their performance, particularly in terms of thoroughness, continuity of staff and appropriate working relations with College Management.

The increase in annual fee was noted.

RESOLVED: That Baker Tilly are appointed as Internal Auditors for 2015/16.

14. INTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL PLAN – 2015/16

Mr J A Farquharson (Chair of Audit Committee) confirmed that the Audit Committee had recommended that, in anticipation of the decision to re-appoint Baker Tilly as Internal Auditors, the Internal Audit Plan for 2015/16, having been examined at the Committee's recent meeting, should be approved.

RESOLVED: That the Internal Audit Annual Plan for 2015/16 is approved.

15. COLLEGE POLICIES REVIEWS

(i) Safeguarding Policy (and Child Protection)

Mrs D Stead (Chair of Curriculum & Standards Committee) presented the revised draft of the Policy. She drew attention particularly to the 'Prevent' references now included in the document.

RESOLVED : That the changes to the Safeguarding Policy (and Child Protection Procedures) are approved.

16. GOVERNING BODY MEMBERSHIP

(i) Re-appointment of Governor – Mrs B Scott-Herron

Mr J Monaghan (Chair of Governance & Search Committee) reported that, following consideration at the Committee meeting on 23 June 2015, the Governing Body is recommended to approve the re-appointment of Mrs B Scott-Herron.

The Governing Body reflected upon the considerations which the Committee had taken into account.

RESOLVED: That Mrs Beverley Scott-Herron is re-appointed as a Governor for the period 1 August 2015 to 31 July 2019.

(ii) Re-appointment of Governor – Mr A Cannell

Mr Monaghan (Chair of Governance & Search Committee) then reported that, following consideration at the Committee meeting on 23 June 2015, the Governing Body is recommended to approve the re-appointment of Mr A Cannell.

The Governing Body reflected upon the considerations which the Committee had taken into account.

RESOLVED: That Mr Andrew Cannell re-appointed as a Governor for the period 1 August 2015 to 31 July 2019.

(iii) Appointment of Student Members

RESOLVED : That Ms Holly Roach and Mr Ben Jackson-Spruce are appointed as Student Members for the period 1 August 2015 to 31 July 2016.

(iii) Re-appointment of Co-opted Members

The Governing Body readily concurred with the Governance & Search Committee's positive assessment of the contribution to governance made once again by the Co-opted Members in 2014/15.

The Chairs/members of the Committees (on which the Co-opted Members sat) affirmed the very positive contributions made by the colleagues in question.

RESOLVED: That Mr T Date, Dr M Hartill, Mr L Horrigan and Mr Y Shaikh are re-appointed as Co-opted Members for a further one year term of office (1 August 2015 – 31 July 2016).

(iv) Membership of Committees 2015/16

RESOLVED : That the following Committees Membership and Committee Chairs are approved for 2015/16:

COMMITTEE	MEMBERSHIP	NO OF MEMBERS REQUIRED
Finance and General Purposes	Andrew Cannell	
	<i>Tim Date</i>	4 minimum
	Reg Haslam	6 maximum
	George Hill	3 quorate
Remuneration and Human Resources	Mark Salmon	
	Principal	
	Reg Haslam	
	Philip Dyke	4 minimum
Audit	Alan Farquharson	6 maximum
	John Monaghan	3 quorate
	Principal	
	Di Stead	
Curriculum and Quality	Alan Farquharson	
	Philip Dyke	4 minimum
	Kath Hope	6 maximum
	Allan Osborne	3 quorate
Strategic Planning	Kelly Simcock	
	Di Stead	
	<i>Mike Hartill</i>	6 minimum
	<i>Liam Horrigan</i>	10 maximum
	Kath Hope	4 quorate
	Carole Owen	
	Bev Scott-Herron	
	<i>Yousuf Shaikh</i>	
	Kelly Simcock	
	Holly Roach	
Ben Jackson-Spruce		
Governance & Search	Reg Haslam	
	John Monaghan	5 minimum
	Carole Owen	7 maximum
	Di Stead	3 quorate
Full Governing Body	Sheila Yates	
	Principal	
	John Monaghan	
	Phil Dyke	5 minimum
	Alan Farquharson	6 maximum
	Reg Haslam	3 quorate
	Di Stead	
	Principal	
		Current – 18 members, 8 quorate

17. GOVERNANCE SELF-ASSESSMENT – ARRANGEMENTS

It was noted that arrangements for the production of the Governance self-assessment report (on 2014/15) had been discussed at the Governance & Search Committee on 23 June 2015. The use of individually completed questionnaires (as a key source of contributory data, including on individual training needs) was confirmed as appropriate. It was also noted by the Committee that use had been made of the ‘common questionnaire’ which a number of other colleges in the north-west had used be using. This had allowed some degree of peer benchmarking and comparison.

In agreeing to the application of the same questionnaire for the 2014/15 review, it was also agreed that co-ordination of the completion process should be attempted and that inclusion in the agenda for the October meeting of the Governing Body (ie., completion, with guidance to hand) would therefore be appropriate.

RESOLVED: That use of the ‘common questionnaire’ is approved.

18. DATES OF MEETINGS FOR 2015-16

The Governing Body considered the following schedule of meetings times/dates:

Wed	23 Sep	4.30	F&GP Committee
Thur	24 Sep	8.00	G&S Committee
		9.00	R&HR Committee
Thur	1 Oct	4.30	C&S Committee
Thur	8 Oct	4.30	Governing Body
Wed	25 Nov	10.00	Strategic Plan Committee
Thur	26 Nov	8.00	Gov & Search Committee
		9.00	R&HR Committee
		4.30	C&S Committee
Mon	30 Nov	4.30	Audit Committee
Wed	2 Dec	4.30	F&GP Committee
Thur	10 Dec	4.30	Governing Body
Wed	13 Jan	10.00	Strategic Plan Committee
Thur	4 Feb	8.00	Gov & Search Committee
		9.00	R&HR Committee
		4.30	C&S Committee
Fri	5 Feb		Annual Seminar
Wed	24 Feb	4.30	F&GP Committee
Thur	5 Mar	4.30	Governing Body
Mon	14 Mar	4.30	Audit Committee
Wed	27 Apr	10.00	Strategic Plan Committee
		4.30	F&GP Committee
Thur	28 Apr	8.00	Gov & Search Committee
		9.00	R&HR Committee
		4.30	C&S Committee
Thur	5 May	4.30	Governing Body
Mon	13 June	4.30	Audit Committee
Wed	22 June	10.00	Strategic Plan Committee
Thur	23 June	8.00	Gov & Search Committee
		9.00	R&HR Committee

		4.30	C&S Committee
Wed	29 June	4.30	F&GP Committee
Thur	7 July	4.30	Governing Body

The Chair asked all Governors to note the agreed dates and to make every effort to ensure their personal attendance at meetings and at the February 2016 Annual Seminar. He reminded Governors that each Committee was free to reschedule indicated times/dates if this facilitated attendance and was approved by the Committees themselves.

RESOLVED: That the Dates of Meetings schedule for 2015/16 (above) is approved.

19. REPORTS FROM COMMITTEE MEETINGS

(i) Audit Committee

The Chair's report, together with the full report of the Audit Committee meeting on 15 June 2015 was presented.

It was noted that a series of recommendations from the Committee had all been addressed earlier in the agenda.

RESOLVED: That the Report of the Audit Committee meeting on 15 June 2015 is accepted.

(ii) Curriculum & Standards Committee

Mrs D Stead presented her report together with the full report of the meeting of the Curriculum & Standards Committee on 18 June 2015. She confirmed that, in addition to the key issues reported and discussed under Item 15 (i) above, detailed attention had been given to the Ofsted Data Dashboard.

RESOLVED: That the Report of the Curriculum & Standards Committee meeting on 18 June 2015 is accepted.

(iv) Governance & Search Committee

Mr J Monaghan presented his report together with the full report of the meeting of the Governance & Search Committee on 23 June 2015.

The Committee's recommendation regarding appointments/re-appointments had already been considered, as had the Committee's deliberations on Governance Self Assessment arrangements.

RESOLVED: That the Report of the Governance & Search Committee meeting on 23 June 2015 and the recommendations therein are accepted.

(v) Remuneration & H.R. Committee

The Chair presented his report together with the full report of the meeting of the Remuneration & H.R. Committee on 23 June 2015.

The Governing Body noted and endorsed the Committee's treatment of the new scheme for decisions on teacher pay and performance.

RESOLVED: That the Report of the Remuneration & H.R. Committee meeting on 23 June 2015 is accepted, including confirmation of the facility for the delegation of decisions under the Staff Severance Policy.

(vi) Finance & General Purposes Committee

The report from Mr A Cannell and the Chair was received, together with and the full report of the meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee on 1 July 2015.

The comments on the management of the current year budget, and on the review of the Fee Policy, were noted. Other matters, including the College Budget for 2015/16 had already been reported and dealt with.

RESOLVED: That the Report of the Finance & General Committee meeting on 1 July 2015 is accepted and the decisions therein are endorsed.

20. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be at 4.30pm on Thursday 8 October 2015.

PMcMellon
10 July 2015

Length of Meeting: 2 hrs and 25 mins

Accepted as a true record and signed by the Chair

Signature

Date