Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporation
held on Thursday 19th October 2017 at 9.00am
in the Boardroom at KPMG
One Snowhill
Snowhill Queensway
Birmingham
B4 6GH

Present:	**Apologies:**
Steve Hollis (Chair)	Keith Horton (KH)
Michele Larmour (ML)	
Veronica Docherty (VD)	
Andrew Cleaves (Principal)	
Simon Thompson (ST)	
Hilary Smyth-Allen (HSA)	
Dan Zastawny (DZ)	
Amardeep Gill (AG)	
Joel Blake (JB)	
Deborah Edmonds (DE)	
Jane Smith (JS) (Staff Governor)	
Sonia Crook-Lake (SCL) (Staff Governor)	
In Attendance:	
Louise Jones (LJ)	
Liam Nevin – (LN)	
Simon Cosson (SC)	
Elaine Bonner (for item 2 only)	

Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Keith Horton

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

Item 1 – Property Disposals

This item is recorded in a confidential minute.

Item 2 – A Level Review

LJ introduced the report and explained the context of the decision that the Corporation were being asked to make, including the rationalisation of "A" Levels at Matthew Boulton College and following the recent A and AS results the consolidation of provision at Stourbridge and Sutton Colleges.

SH requested that LJ guide the Corporation through the Executive's preferred option and set out the basis for that recommendation. LJ explained that recommendation 3 was, on balance, the preferred option, which entailed removing "A" level provision from the College. There had been some improvement in "A" level outcomes but it was not sufficient. In addition there was considerable competition with other "A" level providers in the City, many of whom were better at delivery than the College. The further consideration was that the College needed to also prepare for the introduction of "T" levels, and this type of vocational provision was similar to Apprenticeships and was an area of growth where the College could replicate and develop existing high quality provision.

AG questioned whether the College was underperforming in all "A" levels and LJ advised that performance in some areas was adequate but these tended to be in programmes with smaller cohorts.

JS questioned whether the College was assessing its performance against its expectations for 2016-17 and how the Corporation could be assured that if it moved into new areas of delivery it would not replicate poor quality in new programmes. LJ advised that the subject matters confirmed for "T" levels were those where the College were performing more strongly. However, she acknowledged that irrespective of the decision, the College had to address the continuing poor quality of teaching delivery on "A" levels, and this would involve addressing those teaching staff who had not sufficiently improved their quality. The objective for 16-17 was that the College achieved the national rate in its outcomes and this had not been realised. There had been "intensive care" reviews of "A" level provision approximately fortnightly for the last two years, with improvement and development programmes, but intervention strategies arising from these had not been effective enough.

JS stated that the College was not sufficiently focussed on "A" level delivery and LJ stated that if the Corporation did decide to retain provision it would be necessary to bring together all of the provision. VD stated that it was not clear why the College would want to mirror sixth form provision and she was also concerned that insufficient was known about "T" levels to determine a business decision as this would require an assessment of the extent of recruitment risk on these new programmes.

AG stated that it was clear that a transition was being proposed but at present he could not see what this looked like, and what the College's exposure would be if, for example, "T" levels did not go ahead or there was a policy change at national government level. The College needed to assess the risk of disengagement from existing provision for something that was uncertain.

LJ stated that whilst the detail of "T" levels was still in development, there was now a national Industrial Strategy and that "T" levels would be part of this, requiring 900 hours of delivery a year with 50 days of work placements. The government had announced funding for Colleges to develop capacity to begin work placements on this scale from 2019 and the College would need to respond to these challenges.

AG asked LJ to summarise what the transition arrangements would look like under option 3, and LJ advised that there would be a three year process; this year would see a full cohort, there would be one year group next year, and year three would entail commencement of "T" level delivery.

ML stated that it was clear that even with increased investment there had been limited improvements and disengagement may be the right answer, but before taking such a decision the Corporation should more fully consider a business case to assess income risk. The Corporation needed to be clear that sufficient was known about "T" levels such that the College could confidently assess its income prospects and its ability to be a regional leader in this field. It was important to carefully assess the evidence base.

HSA stated that the Executive had been clear that option 1 was not viable and that the Corporation had heard an earlier presentation from the College's Director of Strategy which suggested that technical education and co-ordinated pathways were much more prominent in national policy and therefore as areas for the College's focus. In addition, there were two issues for the Corporation; how it planned to respond to the demands of "T" levels, and what decision to take in relation to the future of "A" levels. The latter decision was one that the Corporation had to take regardless of its policy on the former.

ST noted that a business would cease provision of "A" levels in the circumstances described in the previous conversation. VD stated that she would be uncomfortable with taking such a decision based on the report submitted. The Executive should consult with staff and be mindful of the impact of the recent redundancy programme. In addition there was insufficient evidence in relation to T levels to gauge the College's income prospects, and the Corporation needed to see a competitor analysis to assess whether other local providers were likely to be taking similar decisions.

DE stated that whatever decision the Corporation took it was clear that there was a cohort of staff that would need to change. LJ agreed and stated that it was not open to the College to simply transfer underperforming staff onto other courses because that was not a fair outcome for students.

VD questioned why these performance issues had not been addressed before as there had been three years of intervention strategies. AG stated that everyone had to be given the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to improve, but if that did not result in the necessary improvements, it was corrosive to continue without addressing the issue.

HSA stated that accepting poor performance would undermine the College's whole improvement strategy.

JS stated that the question was whether the College had done all that it could to improve performance and was it now the right time to say enough is enough.

SCL asked why if the Executive felt that they could address underperformance in "A" levels in the short term it could not do so in the long term.

LJ stated that the College could invest in short terms specialist delivery but a longer term resolution to the quality issues required a complete change to the management and delivery arrangements, and the creation of a 6th form centre type model.

The Principal advised that "T" levels would be introduced nationally and therefore the resolution for the College required the College both to respond to this and decide what to do in respect of the future of "A" levels

ML asked if there were other risks to be considered and LJ advised that the College had already advertised it's "A" level offer for next year and therefore there was some reputational risk, but this could be mitigated if it moved swiftly to deal with those prospective students who had applied. Consideration also needed to be given to the Ofsted risk if the College did not take decisive action to address acknowledged poor performance.

VD stated that she understood that plan hitherto had been to continue with A levels and gradually introduce T levels, but that the new recommendation appeared to only have developed very recently following a consultants visit on the 3rd October, and that there had been no staff consultation. LJ reminded the Corporation that in June of this year the FE Commissioner had recommended an immediate review of the initial A level decision in relation to Matthew Boulton and a further holistic review of the future of A level provision. This had begun in July and at this point the Executive felt that there was adequate evidence to put the matter to the Corporation.

The Principal summarised that there had been a vigorous debate but it was clear that there was not presently a unanimous view on the preferred option and that the Executive needed to take some further steps. He summarised these as a full financial impact assessment of the different options complete with a risk assessment, and consultation with staff, unions and other stakeholders. This would mean that the College would receive more applications for the advertised A level programmes, but addressing that was part of the challenge that the Corporation had set for the Executive.

SH stated that the Corporation appreciated the openness of the debate and that it was important that there was frank discussion about possible barriers to achieving good quality "A" level provision. It was clear that the Executive had lost confidence in the ability of a cohort of teachers and the Corporation could not tolerate the continuation of that situation. It would be necessary for the Executive to advise on how it would deal with that by way of interim measures, how it would fix the quality issues on a sustainable basis, what the cost would be, and what would replace the potential income loss if "A" levels were not wholly or partly retained.

It was agreed that the Corporation would hold a special meeting in late November to address this matter further.

Accordingly it was

RESOLVED

- **That a further report be presented to the Corporation setting out a detailed business case and risk assessment against the three options, along with the outcome of staff, union and other stakeholder consultation**

Date of Next Meeting: Thursday 14 December 2017

Signed..

Chairman

Date 14/12/17 ....