

**Minutes of the meeting of the South Bank Colleges Board
held at 4.00pm on Wednesday, 20 November 2024
in Board room, Clapham campus, Gateway College**

Present

Ruth Farwell (Chair)
Sue Dare (Vice Chair) - online
Steve Balmont
Nigel Duckers
Issa Issa
Thesia Kouloungou
Mee Ling Ng
David Phoenix

Apologies

Nyla-Rae Graham

In attendance

Sam Curtis
Chris Knell
Monica Marongiu
Fiona Morey
Jacqueline Mutibwa
Wayne Wright
Henry Robson, SU Vice President

1. Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed the trustees to the meeting. The Chair also welcomed Henry Robson, SU Vice President who was attending the meeting in the absence of Nyla-Rae Graham the SU President. The above apologies were noted.

The Board had just had an engagement activity with students and staff (link governors with senior leadership team initiative). The Board also had a closed meeting with the independent trustees of the Board (separate minutes).

2. Declaration of Interests

Mee Ling Ng declared an interest in agenda item 16 on the update on recruitment of trustees and would not participate in the discussion.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting

The Board approved the minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2024 as an accurate record and their publication, as redacted.

4. Matters arising

The Board noted the update on matters arising from the previous meetings and that most actions were on the agenda of the meeting or had been completed. The outstanding actions would be actioned following the meeting.

A high-level directors accountability chart (distinction between the responsibility of LSBU Board and SBC Board) along with SBC's regulatory framework and the role of the company secretary and governance professional would be presented to the Board at its next meeting in March 2025. The action from the Accounting Officer's report would be redacted.

The Curriculum Plan for Phase 2 Scheme

The Board noted the curriculum plan for the Phase 2 scheme which would support not building Block D. The plan had been further reviewed by the project working group prior to submission to the DfE for approval.

5. Update from the Students' Union Vice President

The Students' Union (SU) Vice President gave a report on the recent activities undertaken by the SU and upcoming activities. The 2024/25 academic year Freshers events were successful; well attended with positive feedback from students.

Anti-bullying awareness week was held during 11-15 November 2024 with events to raise awareness against bullying and to promote a safe and supportive environment for all students.

Student Voice, the Course Representative meetings were held on 12 & 13 November 2024. The meetings were well attended, and student feedback was positive. There were issues raised about heating at Clapham Campus, toilets needed deep cleaning to improve hygiene standards, and the presentation of canteen menus needed to be improved. There was also a meeting with the Curriculum Heads for students to give feedback on their course and raise any concerns.

Upcoming events included Personal Safety month (November), First Aid training and initiatives to market SU and enhance its visibility across the two campuses.

The Chair thanked Henry Robson for the comprehensive report. She noted that the students' concerns in the report were similar to those raised at the student engagement activity held before the meeting. SU would work with the College's Executive to address the matters. Issa Issa would have a discussion outside the meeting with the SU about student welfare matters and on the knife campaign.

6. Executive Principal's Report (SAR 2023/24, Safeguarding matters, HR KPIs, LSBTC, LGC reports)

The Board noted the key matters since its last meeting in September 2024.

- 2023/24 final achievement data. Overall achievement was 87.1% an improvement (2.2%) compared to the previous year and above both the national and provider group average. 16-19yrs was 84.3% and Adults was 88.1%. The three-year improving trend and the significant reduction in the achievement gaps by ethnicity and gender in 2023/24 was noted. Creative and Digital programmes

had performed significantly below national average. The overall retention rate was 94.6% an improvement compared to the previous years and above both the national and provider group.

- 2023/24 apprenticeships achievement. Performance was still low at 31% below national average of 55% and 45% target agreed with the DfE and there was a risk to the provision. The provision was currently being reviewed by the Further Education Commission (20 & 21 November 2024) and a verbal report would be provided at the meeting under agenda item 7. The outcome report would be shared with trustees as soon as it was available. 2024/25 performance showed improvements in retention, employer engagement and predicted achievement was positive.
- 2023/24 attendance performance. The overall attendance was 80% against a target of 90%. Year to date attendance was 83.3%, an improvement across all subjects due to the interventions put in place last year though there was still more work that needed to be done.
- 2024/25 recruitment update post 42 days. 16-19 year olds (ESFA) current figures were positive and above budget target and funding allocation and was expected to be higher with in-year recruitment. On adult recruitment, there was a risk that the budget target may not be achieved, and work was underway to increase the offer of the courses. Growth on T levels, Level 4 and apprenticeship was still low.
- an update on the further integration of the SBC HR team into the LSBU group HR team following their change of location. The work being undertaken on curriculum planning, staff utilisation, staff structure review including agency staff and initiatives on staff recruitment and retention was noted. Staff recruitment remained a significant challenge in terms of course offer, quality, staff costs and meeting local needs. There was also work being done on developing the group HR team's culture, identity and values.
- an update on Safeguarding and Prevent matters for term 1 2024/25 and the initiatives and activities that had been undertaken to promote and support safeguarding and welfare at SBC. Year to date there were 73 safeguarding disclosures, 44 low level concerns and no prevent cases. The two serious incidents at Nine Elms and Clapham and the actions taken to address the matter including the students bag searches were noted.

Self-Assessment Report (SAR) 2023/24

The Board discussed the draft SAR 2023/24. The document had been reviewed by an Ofsted inspector, the Chair of the Board and the Chair of the Quality and Improvement Committee at a validation meeting. The draft SAR had also been discussed in detail at the last Quality and Improvement Committee meeting on 28 October 2024. The overall effectiveness of the College continued to be self-assessed as 'Good', with most areas assessed as good. One area, apprentices was

assessed as requires improvement. The draft SAR needed to be updated with the data and information that was discussed at the board meeting.

The updated 2024/25 Quality Improvement Plan (QIP), which would address the areas for improvement identified in the SAR 2023/24, was being developed. The updated SAR and QIP would be circulated to trustees for approval as soon as possible.

Update on HR Matters

The Board received a report on SBC's performance against HR KPIs as at 31 October 2024. The key risks were staff turnover, sickness levels and recruitment and the actions that were being undertaken to address the matters were noted. The Bradford Factor, an absence KPI, would be included in future reports.

The Board noted the College's Level 3 and 4 graduation ceremony at the Royal Festival Hall in October 2024. The event included the College's first Honorary Fellowship which was awarded to Professor Jason Arday, the youngest Black professor at the University of Cambridge. The update reports on LSBTC and LGC were noted.

7. Further Education Commissioner (FEC) Visit (Confidential)

The Board received a verbal report which was confidential at this stage of the FEC visit.

8. Accounting Officer's Report

The Board discussed the key matters since its last meeting in September 2024.

Update on the IFM contract performance

There were some teething issues at the start of the contract, but it was generally progressing well with improvement across all services. The LSBU group team would continue to monitor Mitie's performance to ensure that it meets SBC's required KPIs. The IFM contract had been extended to SBA.

Cyber Security Incident at South Bank Colleges

The Accounting Officer informed the Board about a significant cyber incident that might have started on 16 November 2024. Students and learners had raised the matter and there were concerns about potential safeguarding issues. Cyber security specialists had been engaged to investigate and address the risk. The Board would be provided with an update as soon as possible and also kept updated on the matter.

2024/25 Staff Pay Award

The Association of Colleges (AoC) recommended a staff pay award of 2.5% if affordable by the college. A 2% staff uplift had been included in the 2024/25 budget

and the additional 0.5% (£115K) was affordable. The Board supported the AoC recommendation and approved the 2.5% pay award for all SBC staff (back dated to August 2024 and payment in December 2024/January 2025). The increase in the London Living Wage would also be implemented across the group.

9. Vice Principal Finance & Performance Report

The Board discussed the 2023/24 year-end financial position and 2024/25 budget performance.

The Board discussed:

- the draft 2023/24 year-end financial position had not been finalised due to the delayed RSM's external audit report because of the report from the ESFA funding audit was still awaited. SBC had been granted a one-month extension to its accounts submission deadline by its regulators OfS and ESFA.
- the draft 2023/24 year-end financial position showed a £575K adverse variance (and not £200K as reported in September) to the 2023/24 budget (£1.3m budgeted operating deficit). The year-end operational deficit was expected to be approx. £1.9m. The variance was due to an increase in total expenditure mainly related to staff costs some of which had been carried forward from the previous year. The weakness of the cut-off accounting procedures was noted. The actions to prevent reoccurrence of the year end issues experienced were also noted and had been considered by the Audit Committee at its meeting in November 2024. The Board was concerned about the draft 2023/24 year-end financial position as the agreed budget had not been achieved.
- the year to date position as at 31 October 2024 (period 3) which showed a £744K surplus against budget, the full year forecast showed that the budgeted break-even operating position before pensions would be achieved.
- the key risk to achieving the forecast was the funding for the student growth and the associated agency staff costs. The work being undertaken to mitigate the risk was noted. An explanatory note on the support staff would be provided in the report such as the Additional Learning Support (ALS).
- the cash flow position remained an area of concern which was mainly due to the capital programme as a result of the delayed land sale proceeds.

The Board was concerned about the overspend on staffing costs and associated controls. The proposed Task & Finish group would scrutinise the financial performance in detail, consider the 2024/25 efficiency savings (via growth and cost saving) needed to bring the budget position back on track to the agreed budget position, analyse the budget risks especially the staffing costs and the mitigation plan to address them. The monthly management accounts would be circulated to trustees (outside formal meetings) for scrutiny in order to have a better understanding and monitoring of the financial situation.

The annual board development programme would include a session on FE funding and financial management.

10. 2024/25 Updated Financial Regulations

The Board discussed the updated financial regulations, which had been discussed in detail and recommended to the Board for approval by the Audit Committee on 5 November 2024.

The Board approved the proposed amendments to appendix A:

- section 3 on Authorisation of Contracts and Orders - to split budget holder approval into a £5k limit and a £20k limit based upon their seniority of their role and explicitly include the requirement to refer to the Vice Principal when an approval would exceed their budget allocation. All purchases between £20,000 and £250,00 require two approvers.
- section 4 on Leasing and Hire Purchase Commitments - all leasing and hire purchase approvals are undertaken by the Executive Principal, Vice Principal Finance and Performance or Board. All purchases require two approvers.

The Board approved the 2024/25 updated financial regulations.

11. 2023/24 External Governance Review Recommendations – Report from the SBC Board Task & Finish group

The Chair of the Task & Finish group presented the report on the review of Rockborn's external governance review recommendations.

On the recommendation to review arrangements to enhance the frequency and rigour of financial oversight, scrutiny and planning, including the potential development of a committee for this purpose (rec. 5), the Board agreed that trustees financial oversight needed to be enhanced and that a Task & Finish group as required would be established to consider financial situations that may arise.

The SBC's regulatory framework to clarify which DfE and other government regulation SBC is required to comply with (rec 8) would be updated and also reflect the LSBU group structure.

The Board approved the external governance review recommendations made by Rockborn following the review carried out by the SBC Board Task & Finish group.

The Board noted the post review actions that would be undertaken. The updated 2025 board effectiveness review action plan (which will include the current 2022 actions) would be presented to the Board at its meeting in March 2025.

12. LSBU Group Environmental Sustainability report

The report was not available at the meeting and would be considered at the next meeting in March 2025.

13. Anti Modern Slavery Statement

The Board noted that the LSBU Group must publish an annual statement setting out the steps taken to prevent modern slavery in their business and their supply chains,

a requirement under section 54 (Transparency in Supply Chains) of the Modern Slavery Act 2015.

The Board approved the group Modern Slavery Act Statement for the period August 2023 to July 2024 as endorsed by the SBC Audit Committee at its meeting on 5 November 2024 and that it is signed off by the Vice-Chancellor as a nominated Director for the group.

14. Updated Speak Up Policy

The Board approved the updated group speak up policy which had been reviewed and endorsed by the SBC Audit Committee at its meeting on 5 November 2024. There were no changes recommended.

15. Governance Update

The Board noted an update on SBC governance arrangements. The Board:

- approved the updated meeting cycle and annual calendar.
- approved the cover report template.
- noted the direction of travel on the amalgamating of SBA and SBC Audit Committees.

The updated meeting cycle would ensure that committee and working group minutes are made available to all trustees on a timely basis, to ensure transparency and regular information flow (external governance review recommendation 11).

16. Update on Recruitment of Trustees

The Board noted an update on the recruitment of trustees on the SBC Board. The Board:

- approved the six months extension to Mee Ling Ng's 2nd term of office to 31 July 2025 as a LSBU trustee on the SBC Board.
- noted the appointment of Nyla Rae Graham as the new student trustee from 7 October 2024.

17. Report from Committees

The Board noted the report from Committee meetings held since the last meeting in September 2024.

18. Any other business

There would be two additional meetings this calendar year to approve 2023/24 year-end approvals: Audit Committee on 3 December 2024 and Board meeting on 10 December 2024. The meetings will be online.

Date of next meeting
4.00 pm on Tuesday, 4 March 2025

Confirmed as a true record

(Chair)

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