



education
training
collective

FE Corporation Minutes

Meeting held on Thursday 7th May 2020 at 5.30pm via Zoom

Governors: Sam Beel, Stuart Blackett, Subhash Chaudhary, Phil Cook (Chief Executive and Group Principal), Louise Davies, Russ McCallion, Rob Mitchell, Richard Poundford, James Ruddock (Staff Governor and Group Student Recruitment Manager), Kirk Siderman-Wolter, Dot Smith, Mark White (Chair), Norma Wilburn (Safeguarding Link Governor) and Gary Wright.

Officials: Phil Blewitt (MD NETA), Liz Boynton (Group Director of Quality), Jason Faulkner (College Principal, RCC), Lesley Graham (College Principal, SRC), Phil Hastie (Group Executive Director Planning and Infrastructure), Erika Marshall (Group Director of Marketing), Mark Moore (Group Head of Student Services), Mandy Morris (Group Vice Principal Curriculum and Development), Gary Potts (Group Director of Business Engagement), Ben Robinson (College Principal, Bede), Fiona Sharp (Group Executive Director Finance), Kay Taylor (Group Director of HR), Sarah Thompson (Clerk to the Corporation) and Sam Young (Governance Support Officer).

Apologies: Ethan Harper and Aman Toor

The Chair started the meeting at 5.30 pm. He drew governors' attention to the poster produced by Skills Academy students thanking the NHS that would be circulated in the next Governors' Digest; the College Principal SRC thanked the Marketing Team for their support in its design and production and confirmed that she would pass on the Board's thanks to staff and learners. The Chair highlighted that he and Prince's Trust staff, shortlisted for the Further Education Team of the Year Award, had met with the Pearson National Teaching Awards panel remotely that afternoon.

20/18 Agenda Item 1 – COVID-19 Update

The Chief Executive highlighted the group's operational response to COVID-19 and that, having concluded Business Planning (BP) Round 2 meetings that day, two significant strategic discussions had been initiated. The first centred on ensuring that new cultural and operational learning in the effective use of technologies was not lost both in terms of improving teaching and training and in terms of the Strategic Goal to be a Great Place to Work. The second was around finance and, in particular, modifications to business planning to ensure budget holders rapidly achieve the cost/income ratios set at BP2, given the shorter than normal lead time to BP3.

Governors **noted** the update.

20/19 Agenda Item 2 – Quality Update

The Group Director of Quality had outlined external changes and internal actions with respect to the impact of COVID-19 on Group quality measures and outcomes in her previously circulated report; more detailed reports would be considered at the Standards Improvement Committee the following week. She noted that they represented a positive position. Teams analytics had shown a sharp rise in online delivery and levels of engagement continued to be evaluated; the Teaching and Training Development Manager was leading on identifying good practice and areas for development in terms of future delivery.

Governors **noted** the update.

Liz Boynton left the meeting; Stuart Blackett joined.

20/20 Agenda Item 3 – Safeguarding and Prevent Update

The Group Head of Student Services commended the Student Services team for their work in adapting their practices in order to keep vulnerable learners safe since the suspension of face to face learning; both Stockton-on-Tees and Redcar and Cleveland local authorities had recognised the detailed and timely information received from staff through contact logs. The team continued to have regular and, in some cases, daily contact with learners on welfare caseloads and had maintained this over the Easter break.

The Group Head of Student Services confirmed that, in response to the e-safety presentation notes passed on by the Corporation Chair from the recent Association of Colleges' (AoC) Regional Governance Conference, the Student Services team would shortly be circulating an information sheet to parents on keeping young people safe online. The Safeguarding Link governor added that she had been regularly updated on the work that had been done with vulnerable learners during lockdown and could reassure governors that the Student Services team had taken a proactive and thorough approach to safeguarding.

The Chief Executive noted that Etc.'s work with vulnerable learners would shortly be included in a Department for Education (DfE) best practice guide. The Group Vice Principal Curriculum and Development thanked the Group Head of Student Services and his team for their work maintaining 100% contact with vulnerable learners despite the pressures of adapting to working from home.

Governors **noted** the update.

Mark Moore left and Russ McCallion joined the meeting.

20/21 Agenda Item 4 –Staffing Update

The Group Director of HR highlighted the changes to HR systems to account for the differing nature of absences, such as self-isolation, in order to accurately capture

attendance data; since her update had been circulated, the staff absence rate due to sickness had reduced further. A short staff survey would be circulated at the beginning of May to gain a better understanding of staff's experience of working from home. Health and Wellbeing, a key theme of the Great Place to Work strategy, remained a priority, with resources accessible online and mindfulness sessions delivered remotely. HR had also been providing support for budget holders and staff in relation to the Job Retention Scheme (JRS).

Governors agreed that similar steps had been taken in their own organisations to support staff. In response to a governor's questions, the Chief Executive believed that his regular personal emails to all staff had been well received; the College Principal SRC agreed that they reflected Etc.'s tone of voice. In response to a governor's suggestion that a video message could add value, the Group Director of Marketing explained that, due to geographical and technical issues, it had not been possible to do video messages but this would be kept under review.

Governors **noted** the update.

20/22 Agenda Item 5 – Finance Update

The Group Executive Director Finance highlighted that the full Monthly Management Accounts (MMAs) for period 8, up to 31 March 2020, would be circulated to Finance and Employment Committee the following week for their meeting on 20 May. These would reflect that, following Performance Review 6 (PR6), budget holders had updated their departmental financial forecasts to the end of the year. This reforecasting had also improved the worst case forecast year-end balance. Business Planning Round 2 (BP2) had recently concluded and the Financial Planning Group would meet the following week. She added that the submission to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) in relation to the Restructuring Facility (RF) grant had been put back to 29 May 2020 and would be reported at the next FE Corporation meeting in July. Communication with both the ESFA and Barclays Bank was regular and supportive.

The Chair of Finance and Employment Committee was pleased to note that, through close attention to financial details, the Group was not in danger of a financial crisis or of breaking bank covenants. A governor asked if there was the potential to reduce the cost base by reassessing the need for office space, given the future potential for different working patterns. The Group Director of HR agreed that the Group was working to assess staff views on working from home and discussing new ways of working with budget holders in business planning.

[Redacted]

A governor asked if, coupled with the later RF grant submission date, there was any indication that there would be changes in the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). The Group Executive Director Finance confirmed that, though this had not yet been discussed,

there would need to be a dialogue about, for example, KPIs related to attendance rates and that the ESFA had been made aware of this.

In response to a governor's question, the Group Executive Director Finance confirmed that, as per supplier relief advice from the government, invoices were being paid earlier to protect suppliers' cashflows. And, in response to whether this had been reciprocated by our customers, the Group Executive Director Finance explained that debt levels were closely monitored, with no significant issues reported. Cashflow was monitored through the Finance and Employment Committee.

Governors **noted** the update.

20/23 Agenda Item 6 – Learner Recruitment Update

The Group Director of Marketing confirmed that, pre COVID-19, 2019-20 recruitment had been on track to meet the required target but, due to the inability to run the remaining Prince's Trust programmes for the year, there would be a small shortfall to the end of year target. In terms of future forecasts, access to Year 11 students had been reduced and, although applications were still being received and interviews being converted into applications, the impact of COVID-19 on future applications could not be reliably assessed. Despite disappointing engagement with the virtual Engineering campaign, Higher Education (HE) applications had increased since her report had been circulated and overall were only [redacted] down on the same point the previous year. There had been a strong marketing focus on community support and increased collaborative work between marketing and curriculum on virtual touchpoints for prospective and current students.

A governor offered the use of his corporate networks to help in engineering reach. From the report, a governor noted the possible impact on learners of unviable class sizes, and therefore course cancellations, and asked whether, as colleges serving communities, the group should consider smaller class sizes. The Chief Executive confirmed that there would be no single rule that would fit every curriculum area and that views on staffing and budgetary forecasts would be formulated at departmental level, with the focus on cost/income ratios rather than class sizes. He agreed that 2020-21 would be a challenge but, with possible reduced access to next year's Year 11s, the effects could continue into 2021-22 recruitment.

The Chair asked the Group Director of Marketing to pass on the Board's thanks to the Marketing Team for their social media coverage over the past weeks.

Governors **noted** the update.

20/24 Agenda Item 7 – High Needs Funding

The College Principal RCC, also Strategic Lead for High Needs, highlighted the complexity of High Needs funding as outlined in his previously circulated report. An increase in commissioned places for element 2 funding had been agreed with Stockton-on-Tees and

Redcar & Cleveland local authorities for 2020-21 and the group continued to provide support to an increased number of High Needs learners through element 3 funding. The College Principal RCC added that this enabled Etc. to improve outcomes for learners and demonstrated the strength of partnerships with the local authorities.

In response to a governor's question, the College Principal RCC confirmed that the response from the Pearson Award judges had been very favourable and, over the two hour meeting, both learners and Prince's Trust team members had been able to share their experiences and stories.

Governors **noted** the update on High Needs funding across Etc.

20/25 Agenda Item 8 – Recovery Planning COVID-19 Risk Management

The Group Executive Director Planning and Infrastructure introduced his previously circulated report and COVID-19 Risk Register 2020-21; this was being continually reviewed by the Senior Management Team (SMT), with oversight through the Audit Committee. He added that he was participating in the Association of Colleges' (AoC's) re-opening colleges working group which had provided valuable support.

In response to a governor's question, the Group Executive Director Planning and Infrastructure confirmed that all group sites had been kept operational by the Estates team.

Governors **noted** the update.

20/26 Agenda Item 9 – CEEAM Update

The College Principal RCC highlighted that the Industrial Training Facility, in partnership with Total Solutions, had been launched successfully on 6th March, though COVID-19 had inevitably affected the ability to maximise the opportunities from the positive publicity generated. The Educating Engineers online Q&A event would take place on 12th May with the aim of communicating the engineering offer to learners and employers. The official launch of the Centre for Energy, Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing (CEEAM) had not been confirmed due to the delay in works. The College Principal RCC outlined early plans for a new development in partnership with members of the Teesside University College Partnership; governors would be kept informed of progress.

The College Principal RCC invited governors to visit Kirkleatham Walled Garden on 29th May; the Clerk agreed to circulate further information. A governor suggested that, as Preston Park had a large walled garden, Mark Freeman at Stockton Borough Council Heritage Services might be a useful contact.

Governors **noted** the update.

20/27 Agenda Item 10 – Corporation minutes and Actions

10.1 To agree the minutes of a meeting held on 27 February 2020

Minutes of the meeting held on 27 February 2020 were formally **approved** as an accurate record of the meeting.

10.2 Governor Workshop notes

An overview of discussions at the Governor Workshop held on 23 April 2020 had been circulated and notes 2020 would be made available on BoardPacks.

10.3 To consider any matters arising and outstanding actions

Governors **noted** completed actions and progress against outstanding actions.

20/28 Agenda Item 11 –Committee feedback

The following committee meetings had taken place since the last Corporation meeting and key themes were outlined and **noted** by governors. Draft minutes for all meetings would be made available on BoardPacks following approval by the Board / Committee Chair:

11.1 Audit Committee held on 12 March 2020

The Chair of Audit Committee commented on the valuable input from the internal auditors, AuditOne, and, in particular, the presentation they made to this meeting on fraud and prevention measures.

11.2 Search and Governance Committee held on 30 April 2020

The Clerk outlined the recommendations for appointments to the FE Corporation, the Standards Improvement Committee and the NETA Board; since her report had been circulated, an application form had also been received from Martin Gray and was included in the BoardPack. The Chair of the Search and Governance Committee added that she felt that all the prospective members would add value and was proud to recommend their appointments on behalf of the committee.

Governors **agreed** to:

- i) appoint Vanessa Housley as co-opted member of the Standards Improvement Committee for a term of four years;
 - ii) appoint Anne Vickers as Corporation member (nominee of the Sir William Turner Foundation) for a term of four years subject to receipt of a second satisfactory reference and DBS check;
 - iii) appoint Martin Gray as Corporation member for a term of four years subject to receipt of satisfactory references and DBS check;
- and to note the recommendation to appoint Mark Wilson as a member of NETA Board, subject to a decision by the NETA Board on this appointment.

The Clerk agreed to send formal notification to the new appointments, along with previous Governors' Digests.

20/29 Agenda Item 12 – Governance Update

The Clerk detailed the proposed amendment to Section 11 of the Instrument of Government to allow written resolutions and that, as this was a procedural matter, proposed that consultation was not required; she also thanked governors for their attendance at meetings and training undertaken.

Governors **agreed** to amend the Instrument and Articles of Government to include an additional paragraph (7) at Section 11 of the Instrument. Governors **noted** attendance at meetings, training and development opportunities and other governance events and the request to notify the Clerk of governance activities and specific training needs.

20/30 Agenda Item 13 – Strategic Updates

The Group Executive Director Planning and Infrastructure set out some considerations that may impact on the strategic decision making of governors in the future, with a particular view to a return to a more 'normal' strategic context post COVID-19. The Strategic Goals agreed by the Corporation for 2020-21 had been mapped against the College of the Future themes.

In response to a governor's question, the Group Executive Director Planning and Infrastructure noted the strength of the support from the AoC to colleges during COVID-19. Another governor commented that the strength of the AoC's lobbying to position the FE sector had been evidenced in a recent Prime Minister's Questions.

Governors **noted** the update.

20/31 Agenda Item 14 – Any Other Business

The Chair of the Finance and Employment Committee extended thanks to the Clerk and Governance Support Officer for their work in enabling meetings to continue effectively. On behalf of the North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust, Gary Wright thanked Etc. and, in particular, Neil Bowen and his team for their support.

20/32 Agenda Item 15 - Approval of Documents for Public Inspection

It was **agreed** that the agenda and supporting documents of the current meeting be made available for public inspection with the exception of the reports for Agenda Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11.2, 13 and 18 which were considered commercial in confidence. Minutes would be made available following approval and consideration at the next meeting.

20/33 Agenda Item 16 – Date and time of next meeting

FE Corporation meeting: Thursday 2 July 2020, 5.30 pm

20/34 Agenda Item 17 - Key Themes

- Updates on quality, finance, safeguarding and learner recruitment
- Update on High Needs funding
- Consideration of Recovery Planning COVID-19 risk management
- Appointment of Martin Gray and Anne Vickers as Corporation members and Vanessa Housley as a co-opted member of the Standards Improvement Committee
- Noted recommendation to appoint Mark Wilson as a member of NETA Board
- Agreed addition of Instrument 11(7) to the Instrument and Articles of Government to allow written resolutions

Sam Beel, James Ruddock and officials, with the exception of the Clerk and the Governance Support Officer, left the meeting.

20/35 Agenda Item 18 – Confidential Item

This item was deemed confidential to governors excluding staff and student members and is included in the Confidential Appendix.

(The meeting ended at 7.35 pm)

Approved at a remote meeting

Date: 2nd July 2020