

**People Committee Minutes**

Meeting held on Thursday 26 September 2024 at 4.00 pm, via Teams

*Governors:*Fabienne Bailey (Committee Chair), Stuart Blackett (Corporation Chair), Liz Dixon (Staff Governor), Grant Glendinning (Chief Executive and Group Principal) and Amanda Olvanhill

*Apologies:* There were no apologies from governors

*In attendance:* David Watson (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Link Governor)

*Officials:* Phil Hastie (Chief Operating Officer), Fiona Sharp (Chief Financial Officer), Kay Taylor (Group Director of HR & People Development), Sarah Thompson (Group Director of Governance) and Sam Young (Governance Support Officer)

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| **P24/41** | **Agenda Item 1 – Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair** |
|  | The committee agreed to re-appoint Fabienne Bailey as Committee Chair and to appoint Amanda Olvanhill as Committee Vice Chair for 2024 – 25. |
| **P24/42** | **Agenda Item 2 – Welcome, apologies for absence, declarations of interest, notification of items of other business** |
|  | The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted that it would be the Group Director of HR & People Development’s final governors’ meeting before departing Etc. No apologies for absence were received, though Liz Dixon would be joining the meeting late due to teaching commitments. The Chief Financial Officer, as a member of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS), declared an interest in agenda item 10. There were no other declarations of interest or additional business items for consideration.  Governors agreed to discuss the risks relevant to the committee under this agenda item.  STR0006: People   * [REDACTED] * Risk title – governors felt this may need review to break it down further [REDACTED] * Risk description [REDACTED] * Cause / Effect – add specific mention to the nationally recognised issue of pay disparity * Risk appetite – [REDACTED]   STR0011: Equality and Diversity   * The importance of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) across staff, management and governors and its role in teaching tolerance, inclusive behaviour and better decision making was recognised * Causes – [REDACTED] * Risk scoring – [REDACTED] * Suggestion to include governor succession planning and diversity in another relevant risk   Feedback process and mechanisms   * Consider mechanism for feedback to Senior Management Team (SMT) in their role as Risk Management Group (RMG) and then create a circle back to Audit Committee * Risk discussions from last year’s committee meetings had been collated for Audit Committee; given that the process had only been introduced in March 2024, this had identified some gaps and work to do to raise the profile of risk in committees * Importance of not duplicating work; maybe a note on the risk, for example, ‘under review by People Committee’, then Audit Committee would consider the final revised version recommended by People Committee * **Agreed** that the Chief Financial Officer and Group Director of Governance would consider the best process * The discussion was identified as a good example of governors’ challenge and use of the risk register   It was **agreed** that the RMG should review STR0006: People and STR0011: Equality and Diversity, including causes and effects and risk scoring levels. |
| **P24/43** | **Agenda Item 3 – Minutes of People Committee meeting** |
|  | Minutes of the People Committee meeting held on 18 June 2024 had been circulated and were **approved** as an accurate record of the meeting.  The action progress log had been circulated and updates were **noted**, with the following discussed in more detail:   * Governor involvement in governor induction process – the Group Director of Governance explained that there had been some inconsistencies in approach, for example, in committee chair involvement; the introduction of mentors for new governors was also under consideration. * The Chief Executive and Group Principal confirmed that he would pick up the actions assigned to the current Group Director of HR & People Development in the interim period and then do a handover to the incoming Group Director.   Governors **noted** those actions covered on the agenda for this meeting. |
| **P24/44** | **Agenda Item 4 – Review of Search and Governance / People Committee 2023-24 Performance against Terms of Reference** |
|  | The Group Director of Governance explained that each committee and task and finish group reviewed their performance, including compliance with its terms of reference, annually; this helped to confirm that committees were working effectively and had appropriate membership. The committee’s membership was considered to be strong and only one minor amendment to the terms of reference, updating Clerk to the Corporation to Group Director of Governance, was proposed.  The committee concluded that transferring responsibility for human resources matters from the Finance and Employment Committee to the newly established People Committee had been effective, reflecting the importance of people to the organisation. With an attendance rate of 94%, participation was strong, and the summary of the committee’s feedback on meeting effectiveness was deemed valuable. Although both agendas and accompanying meeting materials were extensive, it would be challenging to determine which items could be removed. The Group Director of HR & People Development proposed that, while people data should be presented at every meeting, updates on the People and Learning & Development strategies could be alternated.  Building on discussions from the recent Governors' Workshop, the committee explored the idea of grading or colour-coding agenda items based on whether they were for information only or required more in-depth discussion. It was felt that this approach could help guide governors in prioritising the most critical issues. The Group Director of Governance noted that, at present, agenda timings indicated which items needed more attention, but colour coding, developed in consultation with the chairs, could provide a clearer visual cue. The committee **agreed** that this would be beneficial for all meeting agendas.  Governors:   1. **agreed** that the current membership of the committee was sufficient and that it had been effective in meeting its terms of reference in 2023-24; 2. **agreed** the cycle of business for 2024-25, with the amendment suggested to alternate consideration of the People and Learning & Development strategies; 3. **agreed** to recommend to the FE Corporation the appointment of David Watson as a formal member of the committee and the minor change to the committee terms of reference. |
| **Employment Items** | |
| **P24/45** | **Agenda Item 5 – People Statistics**  The Group Director of HR & People Development shared the people data for quarter 4 (Q4), covering May to July 2024. She noted a year-on-year improvement in workforce stability, with turnover for 2023-24 at [REDACTED]%, a positive outcome considering the current labour market challenges. She also acknowledged the need for further progress in EDI, with plans for the strategic EDI group to lead efforts in the coming year. The report provided a comparison of Q4 staff absences against the previous year. Additionally, nine vacancies were being advertised, including the replacement of a head of department role after an Assistant Principal appointment, with no concerns regarding recruitment and a focus on attracting candidates.  [REDACTED]  The EDI Link Governor asked about the group’s ambitions regarding EDI and the gender pay gap and whether specific goals would be included in the Annual Operational Plan. The Group Director of HR & People Development confirmed that she would continue to progress this until her leaving date; the EDI Annual Report would include an outturn against the action plan and a full handover with the Chief Executive and Group Principal would take place. The Chief Executive and Group Principal added that he would be chairing the first EDI Group of the year and would be triangulating actions against the operational plan, which had a placeholder for the targets formulated by the EDI Group. The EDI Link Governor stressed the importance of the EDI Group’s membership, ensuring its work was strategic and ambitious in scope and goal setting.  The need for Etc. to increase the number of apprentices it employed was then discussed and it was thought important that, as an education provider, the group was seen to be delivering more of its own apprentices. A governor provided an example from their own organisation, which actively assessed which posts could be apprenticeships and then paid slightly more than the apprentice rate to address the challenge of an ageing workforce. It was recognised that using apprentices to fill required roles rather than adding additional posts would not affect staff cost to income ratios. The Chief Executive and Group Principal highlighted past Etc. apprentice success stories, including some rising stars in Executive and Curriculum Administration Services (ECAS), marketing, HR and finance. It was **agreed** that the new Group Director of HR & People Development be asked to review apprenticeships within Etc. and that examples of past Etc. apprentices and use of the available apprenticeship levy be considered at a future meeting.  The decrease in staff turnover was noted, [REDACTED] and, at governors’ request, it was **agreed** that further detail on the reasons for staff leaving, any actions that could be taken and any impact of curriculum staff turnover on students should be reported. A deep dive on staff turnover, national comparisons and any measures to improve retention, for example, in hourly paid staff, was also requested at a future meeting.  It was also **agreed** that national benchmarking would be included in future reports.  Governors **noted** the people data for Quarter 4, 2023-24, and that deep dives on both staff turnover, including reasons for leaving, and use of Etc. apprenticeship levy would be covered at future meetings. |
| **P24/46** | **Agenda Item 6 – People Strategy Update** |
|  | [REDACTED]  In terms of recruitment and retention, HR had worked with the Marketing team to improve onboarding and recruitment web pages; the improved site, including case studies, was about to be launched. The introduction of a new applicant tracking platform had been paused due to higher tender costs than budget and issues with MHR regarding contract renewal; this would be picked up by the new Group Director of HR & People Development. [REDACTED] Full implementation of the talent management process was ongoing and the second cohort of the Leadership Programme had been launched that day. High levels of employee engagement could be evidenced by the 93% completion rate for the 2023 staff survey and the 2024 survey would go out in November. The results of the recent Health and Wellbeing survey would feed into the next Wellbeing Week in February 2025.  A governor supported the introduction of a total rewards statement for staff as it would help to clarify both hidden and future benefits, which could be a game changer; the Group Director of HR & People Development **agreed** to share an example with committee members.  A governor noted that, though engagement remained high, the staff survey results showed that satisfaction rates had dropped slightly and wondered if a deep dive would be useful. A staff governor also suggested that the questions could be reviewed as they were the same every year. The Group Director of HR & People Development confirmed that the full results of the staff survey were discussed by SMT with the report breaking down comments into themes and it was **agreed** that this should be shared with the committee.  In response to a governor’s question, the Group Director of HR & People Development explained that early interventions such as absence reviews mainly involved having difficult conversations around performance management and capability; she added that there was a definite correlation between less absence reviews taking place and higher levels of absence. An automated system based on HR trigger points was also under consideration.  [REDACTED] She added that the Irwin Mitchell review was currently in draft form and had therefore not been fully considered by the SMT, who would look at the review alongside substantive data. Possible actions could include a refresh of the Staff Code of Conduct and mechanisms such as walkthroughs. It was **agreed** that actions in relation to the Irwin Mitchell review would be brought back to the committee following SMT consideration.  In response to a governor's inquiry, the Corporation Chair provided an update on industrial relations, noting ongoing collaboration with the Chief Executive and Group Principal. However, without any additional government financial support, the group was operating under tight budget constraints, with students remaining the top priority. [REDACTED]  Governors **noted** the progress made against the People Strategy, as the group headed into year two of the strategy. |
| **P24/47** | **Agenda Item 7 – Learning and Development Strategy Update** |
|  | The Group Director of HR & People Development highlighted the request to extend the review date for the Learning and Development Strategy to November 2025. This extension would allow the incoming Group Director to review it alongside a revised People Strategy. The report provided an update on progress so far, noting that Cohort 2 of the One Etc. Leadership Programme had been launched that day, with plans already underway for a third cohort. Feedback from the first Etc. Leadership Conference had been positive, with selected comments included in the report. A pilot for a new system-based appraisal process had been successful and would be fully implemented in September 2024, providing better oversight; staff would also be able to add their CPD records to the People First system. With the first phase of the talent management process complete, the next phase would be handled by the incoming Group Director. A summary of current apprenticeship and upskilling activities was also included, though it was noted that one apprentice had unfortunately withdrawn after being unable to pass their maths qualification.  Governors **noted** the update, commenting on the positive progress, and supported the proposal that the strategy remain in place until November 2025 to provide opportunity for review by the incoming Group Director of HR & People Development, alongside a new People Strategy. |
| **P24/48** | **Agenda Item 8 – Gender Pay Gap Reporting** |
|  | The Group Director of HR & People Development explained that, since the data was already available, this report had been brought forward in the business cycle. Comparative data would be available after its publication at the end of March 2025. Etc.'s data was based on 525 staff members who were 'full pay relevant' and at work on 31 March 2024, out of approximately 705 employed staff. The mean pay gap had increased from £2.28 in 2023 to £2.32, and the median had risen from £2.59 to £2.69. The gender pay gap action plan, presented at the previous meeting, would be reviewed and updated with new targets set accordingly.  A governor observed that in every organisation at which he had worked, the tendency had been for the gender pay gap to widen. He suggested that a more meaningful comparison would be to assess whether Etc. was narrowing the gap faster or slower than other organisations. If slower, then the group was probably doing something right. There was general agreement that this trend was common, raising the question of at what point it should become a concern. The Group Director of HR & People Development confirmed that comparative data would be obtained from gov.uk in April and would be reported to SMT, with the potential to analyse trends over several years. It was noted that comparisons could be further complicated by percentage pay increases and the integration of Tees Valley Catering staff into Etc., rather than outsourcing these part-time, predominantly, female staff. The increase in the number of females in the upper and upper middle pay quartiles was seen as positive. Further data analysis would feed into the targets set by the EDI Group and be incorporated into the Annual Operational Plan.  Governors **approved** the Gender Pay Gap data for the Education Training Collective for the year ended 31 March 2024 for upload to the Gov.uk website. It was acknowledged that further analysis of the headline data would be necessary to gain deeper insights. |
| **P24/49** | **Agenda Item 9 – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Position Paper** |
|  | The Group Director of HR & People Development presented the draft executive summary from an independent external review into EDI policies, procedures and systems across the group by Irwin Mitchell.  A governor asked about next steps and the Group Director of HR & People Development confirmed that an action plan would be developed following review of the final report by SMT.  Governors **noted** the draft report’s findings and **agreed** that, following review of the finalised report by SMT, the action plan would be presented to the committee. They emphasized the importance of identifying specific actions to help the group move forward, suggesting that it would be beneficial to achieve some quick wins first to build momentum before tackling longer-term initiatives. |
| **P24/50** | **Agenda Item 10 – Policies** |
|  | The Chief Financial Officer explained that the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) Discretionary Policy was mandatory and would be published following approval by the FE Corporation and application of the seal. Advice had been sought from the local LGPS and discretions would be considered on a case by case basis and only approved where in the group’s best interests, strategically, operationally and financially.  A governor with experience in the pensions sector stated that this was a standard technical pension scheme, akin to what he seen in his own organisation. The Group Director of HR & People Development confirmed that decisions would be made in accordance with Managing Public Money requirements, with the necessary approvals sought, and that detailed pension calculations would be requested from the LGPS for each case. In response to a governor's concern about how decisions on discretions made by other organizations might affect funds, the Chief Financial Officer assured him that Etc. maintained its own fund within the pension scheme.  Governors **agreed** to recommend the Local Government Pension Scheme Discretionary Policy to the FE Corporation for approval; it would then be signed by the Chief Executive and Group Principal and the Corporation Chair to witness application of the college seal. |
| **Governance Items** | |
| **P24/51** | **Agenda Item 11 – Governor equality, diversity and skills data** |
|  | The committee acknowledged the quality and comprehensiveness of the data and its role in supporting committee decisions and actions. The Group Director of Governance clarified that there had been no significant changes since the data was last presented to the committee.  Referring to the significant percentages of data ‘not provided’ or ‘not available’ for students, a governor questioned whether it would be beneficial to explain the purpose of collecting this information and its importance in ensuring the group reflects the community it serves to students. It was suggested that new students might hesitate to share personal information at the start of their studies and that a follow-up exercise could address this. The Chief Executive and Group Principal confirmed that the Group Director of Marketing & Business Engagement was working on enhancing student onboarding and enrolment processes, and he agreed to work with her on improving data collection.  [REDACTED]  Governors **noted** the diversity and skills information and **agreed** to take this into account when considering governor recruitment activity; diversity and gender balance were recognised as priorities and skills gaps in certain sectors, such as low carbon energy, were noted. |
| **P24/52** | **Agenda Item 12 – Corporation and committee membership, recruitment and succession** |
|  | The Group Director of Governance outlined the recommendations detailed in the report, including appointment of Jane Spence as a co-opted member of Standards Improvement Committee to address gaps in experience in the education sector. She then explained that both co-opted members of the Audit Committee had previously expressed an interest in becoming governors; however, Gary Bowdler had asked to defer consideration of this due to current work and family commitments and JR had also expressed some reservations about the possible time commitment. She proposed that the committee recommend JR’s appointment subject to his agreement and the Corporation Chair, a former work colleague of JR’s, offered to discuss the time commitment with him.  The Group Director of Governance reported that Stuart Blackett and David Watson had been on the shortlisting panel following the Peridot search and had been impressed with the quality of the applicants; interviews would be held with the five shortlisted candidates in the next two weeks. The Group Director of Governance then asked if the committee would be happy to recommend the appointment of as many governors as the selection panel considered suitable. Following discussion, governors **agreed** that, given the diversity and quality of the candidates put forward by Peridot, they would be pleased to appoint as many as were appropriate, whilst bearing in mind committee succession planning and skills gaps. Suggestions to approach the Halo Project Charity and contacts through business development networks were being followed up and Fabienne Bailey offered to support an approach to Halo if it was needed following the Peridot recruitment process. The consensus was that all leads should be pursued given the need to increase board diversity and replace governors who had left the previous year; the use of co-opted governors to create a talent pool and encourage younger candidates was also noted, whilst recognising that co-opted members appointed through formal selection processes had been found to resign quite early in their term of office.  The Group Director of Governance then outlined a proposal to allow the current student governors to stay on as co-opted members of the Corporation from 1 January to 31 July 2025; she added that, following the successful trial, it was also proposed to seek three student governors to be appointed from 1 January to 31 December 2025. In response to a governor’s question about increasing student governors’ term of office, the Group Director of Governance explained that students were mostly on two-year courses and, with the exam period, tended to only commit to a one year term of office.  Following the handover of Audit Committee chair over the summer, a governor proposed that the appointment of committee chairs and vice chairs should be agreed at the last meeting of the summer term rather than at the first one of the academic year and suggested that appointments should be for more than one year to engender consistency. He also proposed that the People Committee could appoint committee chairs, possibly at the recommendation of the Corporation Chair. The committee supported the proposals to appoint at the summer term meeting and for a longer term of office but that individual committees should be trusted to make appointments. The Corporation Chair confirmed that he had no desire to take on this formal responsibility and highlighted that the People Committee already had a role in committee chair succession planning.  The potential to improve visibility between the Audit and Finance, Capital and Resources committees was discussed, with the Group Director of Governance confirming that the Instrument and Articles of Government precluded membership on both committees but that chairs observing each other’s committees would be feasible, while being cognisant of chairs’ workloads. She also suggested exploring other communication routes such as regular catch ups between the chairs.  Governors:   1. **agreed** to recommend the appointment of Jane Spence as co-opted member of Standards Improvement Committee; 2. **agreed** to recommend the appointment of John Robson (JR) (current Audit Committee co-opted member) as a governor, subject to his agreement; 3. **noted** the update on the recruitment process by Peridot, **agreed** that the interview panel comprise Stuart Blackett, David Watson, Grant Glendinning and Sarah Thompson, and **agreed** to review any recommendation from the Selection Panel to appoint one or more candidates via email; 4. **agreed** continuation of a student governor appointment period from 1 January to 31 December and to recommend that current student governors be appointed to serve as co-opted members of the Corporation from 1 January 2025; 5. **agreed** the focus (diversity, Standards Improvement Committee membership and leadership, and Audit Committee membership) and approach to future governor recruitment activities; 6. **agreed** to recommend to the FE Corporation that committee chair and vice chair appointments for the coming year should be agreed by each committee at their summer term meetings and that a longer appointment period should be considered. |
| **P24/53** | **Agenda Item 13 – Review of committees and Link Governor roles** |
|  | The Group Director of Governance requested that the committee undertake a high level review of the Corporation’s committee structure and utilisation of Link Governors; this included a proposal to reinstate the Business Engagement Link Governor role. The committee supported this proposal, noting that expressions of interest would be sought.  Governors:   1. undertook a high level review of the membership and terms of reference of the Corporation’s committees and task and finish groups, including taking account of the need to regularly review and refresh membership and **noted:**    1. the focus on strengthening Standards Improvement Committee membership and leadership succession planning;    2. the need to increase Audit Committee membership, possibly through appointment of a co-opted member;    3. minor changes to committee terms of reference and a proposal to rename Audit Committee as Audit and Risk Committee. 2. reviewed the Link Governor role descriptions and appointments and **agreed** to recommend reappointment of existing link governors and reinstatement of the Business Engagement Link Governor role to the FE Corporation. |
| **P24/54** | **Agenda Item 14 – Governance Self Assessment** |
|  | The Group Director of Governance highlighted the extensive data collected through a range of self assessment activity undertaken by the FE Corporation for the 2023-24 academic year and added that this would be streamlined in the future including identifying information that could be collected less frequently, on reappointment or on taking on new roles. The committee was asked to consider whether the right themes had been identified in the report.  Governors **agreed** that the self-assessment exercise had worked well and had drawn out useful themes resulting in a comprehensive action plan.  In response to a governor’s query about ensuring governor learning walkthroughs were seen as supportive by staff, the Staff Governor explained that these could be quite daunting to staff if they were too formal and suggested that renaming these visits might be helpful in changing staff perceptions. She added that staff were also keen to know more about governors.  *Fabienne Bailey left the meeting and Amanda Olvanhill then chaired the meeting.*  The committee then discussed how staff awareness of governors could be improved. In addition to the existing governor update in editions of One Etc., suggestions included introducing new governors in the Chief Executive and Group Principal All Staff emails; more opportunities for informal visits to colleges; and inviting governors to the Chief Executive and Group Principal’s new starter sessions. The Group Director of Governance also suggested that governors could provide feedback to staff following visits and communication before a visit.  Governors:   1. **noted** and discussed feedback to date arising from governance self-assessment activity and particularly increasing staff awareness of governors and consideration of renaming governors’ learning walkthroughs; 2. **agreed** initial proposals for the 2024-25 Governance Action Plan and **noted** that this would be further developed and presented to the FE Corporation at its meeting in November. |
| **Closing Items** | |
| **P24/55** | **Agenda Item 15 – Any other business** |
|  | At the request of a governor, the Chief Executive and Group Principal gave a verbal update on the Group Director of HR & People Development recruitment process; this had been overseen by FE Associates who had undertaken initial interviews with 17 applicants and then full Teams interviews with a selection to produce a longlist. Following a selection panel, five had been invited for interview and the preferred candidate was now going through the appointment process.  There were no additional items of business considered by the committee. |
| **P24/56** | **Agenda Item 13 – Approval of documents for public inspection** |
|  | It was **agreed** that the agenda and supporting documents should be made available for public inspection, with the exception of reports under Employment Items (agenda items 5 to 10) deemed commercial in confidence and the governor application forms supporting agenda item 12: Corporation and committee membership, deemed to include personal information. Following Corporation approval, the Local Government Pension Scheme Discretionary Policy (agenda item 10) would be made available on the Etc. Staff Gateway. Minutes would be made available following approval and consideration at the next meeting. |
| **P24/57** | **Agenda Item 17 – Date and time of next meeting** |
|  | Thursday 5 December 2024, via Teams, **4.00 pm** start time confirmed |
| **P24/58** | **Agenda Item 18 – Meeting effectiveness and key themes** |
|  | i) Meeting effectiveness and impact, particularly have we focused enough on strategic issues:   * Signposting of key items on agendas discussed; governors felt that it had seemed to happen naturally during the meeting but supported formalising this approach * The risk discussion at the start of the meeting was felt to have framed the meeting * Identification of areas in which the committee felt they needed more data / information * Productive meeting helped by having some questions raised in advance for discussion at the meeting * As with every governors’ meeting, the quality of debate and discussion was felt to be high, with a good level of openness, reflecting the quality of governors, management and governance in general   ii) Consideration of strategic risks:   * Risks discussed under agenda item 2 with actions identified   iii) Key themes to highlight to Corporation:   * Comprehensive review of Strategic Risk 6: People and Strategic Risk 11: Equality and Diversity, with actions relating to causes, effects and risk scoring levels to be reviewed by the Risk Management Group * Approval of the committee’s terms of reference recommended to the FE Corporation, with the transfer of consideration of human resources matters to the People Committee from 1 January 2024 deemed to have been effective * Employment matters:   + People data: acknowledged the need for further focus on increasing the diversity of Etc. staff and of recruiting younger staff, including apprentices   + Updates on the People Strategy and Learning & Development Strategy, with agreement to extend the review date for the latter strategy to November 2025   + Gender Pay Gap data for the year ended 31 March 2024 approved for upload to the gov.uk website, noting that further analysis of the headline data, including benchmarking, would be undertaken   + Draft Irwin Mitchell review of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion across the group presented, with further review planned after SMT consideration of the final report and actions to be taken * Governance:   + Reviewed board composition data and governor recruitment priorities and agreed recommendations on governor appointments to the FE Corporation   + Agreed recommendations to the Corporation in respect of committee chair and vice chair appointment process   + Considered a range of Corporation self assessment outcomes, including development of the Governance Action Plan 2024-25; discussion on staff perceptions of governor visits and improving staff awareness of governors * The committee thanked Kay Taylor for her work as Group Director of HR & People Development and in supporting governors and wished her good luck for the future |

*The meeting ended at 6.00 pm*

**Approved at a meeting held on 5 December 2024**