

Further Education Corporation

Approved Minutes

Minutes of a Meeting of the Further Education Corporation held at the Basildon Campus on Monday 20 March 2017 at 5.45 pm.

Present: Mr D O'Halloran (Chairman)
Ms S Bridle
Mr B Brooks
Ms O Buck
Dr R Gray
Mr R Launder
Mr B Mansell
Dr G Ocen
Ms A O'Donoghue
Mr Paramjit Singh Narang
Mr R Patterson
Ms M West

In Attendance: Mr A McGarel (Deputy Principal & Chief Executive)
Ms D Brown (Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality)
Mr S Smith (Vice Principal, Corporate Resources)
Ms K Mulvey (Director of Teaching & Learning)
Mr R I Millea FCA (Clerk to the Corporation)

1. Presentation: Promonitor

The Board received a presentation on the College student tracking system (ProMonitor) from Kathy Mulvey, Director of Teaching & Learning and Matt Twitchett, Assistant Principal, Learning & Standards.

The presentation covered the Management aspects of the system and three 'deep dives' in respect of specific students.

It is a central system which all tutors and lecturers are required to use (it is not optional) and it is operating fully in virtually all departments. The Quality Team is responsible for ensuring staff regularly and fully populate the system with the details of progress by each individual learner.

The system doesn't apply to HE students and adults studying short programmes. There is access available to each student to their own record at any time and also to their parents/guardians.

It is a fundamental element of the College's basis of preparation for Ofsted and it is a vital tool in aiding governor challenge. Governors have seen it in operation during the Department reviews which they have attended.

A governor asked whether all staff are signed up to the system and what happens if staff are not using it. Matt and Kathy said that it is not a choice for staff and its use is regularly checked by managers but they acknowledged that some staff have adopted the system more enthusiastically than others.

It was confirmed, in response to a governor question, that the information to support the predicted outcomes for students for 2015/16, which are included in Agenda Item 8.2 below, are based on Promonitor.

In response to a governor challenge, it was explained that, for each student, a RAG rating is set by the student tutor based on standard definitions and this rating is validated by the Quality Team. It is checked through sampling mechanisms across each department by senior managers.

A governor asked when this RAG rating is carried out. The rating is set at the end of Term 1 for each student. The RAG rating is updated for Departmental Reviews but this would be done more regularly if circumstances require it (e.g student in need of support, student underachieving, student with poor or deteriorating attendance).

A feature of the system is its consistency and that it is a workable and versatile every day tool. The staff governor confirmed he used it constantly.

A governor asked if there were any areas of weakness in the operation of the system and the Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality confirmed that in a couple of departments there are gaps due to staffing issues and where there is use of agency staff, who are less familiar with the system.

However, in response to governor enquiry, the Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality was clear that, even though there were a limited number of parts of the College (under 10%) where the system is not as good as others, we are entirely confident as a College about Ofsted looking at any area of the College and interrogating the data.

A governor wanted to know what are the benefits of the system at a practical level compared to past practice. It was explained that the system allows central instant monitoring of in year progress of students and enables quick action to be taken to resolve any problems that are flagged up.

Simply put, more information enables more scrutiny and more corrective action on a timely basis. In the past, reliance had to be placed on individual recording by departments and staff and was prone to error and to inaccessibility if, for example, a staff member was ill.

Some of the features of the system were highlighted to governors:

- Ability to identify specific types of students (e.g. Higher Needs) and track their progress
- Ability to identify areas of support for individual students
- Full learner profile is documented on a timely basis
- The system is updated on a daily basis by tutors
- A mark book is maintained for each student on the system
- Access is instant and there is no need to hunt around for information
- Targets are set and monitored for each student
- Provides data to assess whether extra support and/or challenge is needed

The Board **THANKED** Matt and Kathy for an interesting and informative presentation.

2. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies for absence were received from Gwynn Williams (Vice-Chairman), Rhys Hughes, Terry Knight, Tom Thompson and Debs Hurst (Director of Finance).

The Clerk declared his interest as Clerk to Chelmsford College and that his wife's cousin is the Clerk to Writtle University College.

Maya West reaffirmed her declaration that a Company by whom she is employed provides services to the College.

3. Urgent Business

On the recommendation of the Search Committee, the Board **APPROVED** the re-appointment of Olga Buck as a governor of the College for a four year term, with effect from 25 March 2017.

The Board noted the resignation of Tom Thompson from the Board, with effect from 25 March 2017. However, on the recommendation of the Search Committee, the Board **APPROVED** the co-option of Tom Thompson to the Audit & Risk Committee, with effect from 26 March 2017.

The Board requested that, if possible, the scheduled Meeting of the Policy & Resources committee on 24 April be transferred to 27 April, to allow more time, due to Easter, for completion of the preparation of the March monthly accounts. Bob Patterson will be invited to the Meeting as an Observer since he will be deputising for the Chairman at the SFA Monitoring Meeting on 2 May.

ACTION: CLERK

4. Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 5 December 2016 and the Special Meetings held on Monday 30 January 2016 and Tuesday 28 February 2017

The Minutes of the Meetings held on Monday 5 December 2016, 30 January 2017 and 28 February 2017 were **APPROVED** and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

5. Matters Arising from the Minutes

There were no Matters Arising from the Minutes which are not otherwise dealt with on the agenda.

6. Strategic Developments in South Essex (Paper FEC.17.03)

This was deemed to be a Confidential Item under the Instrument & Articles and a separate minute has been prepared in connection with this item and is attached to these minutes.

7. Finance Matters (Paper FEC.17.03)

This was deemed to be a Confidential Item under the Instrument & Articles and a separate minute has been prepared in connection with this matter, which is attached to these minutes.

8. Curriculum & Quality Matters (Paper FEC.17.04)

8.1 Student Destinations 2015-16

The Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality **PRESENTED** a Report detailing student destinations for last year.

Information was gained from students who left College in July 2016, enquiry was from October 2016 to February 2017. The response rates were excellent with 94% of 16-19 learners recording a sustained destination. The majority of 16-19 learners (63%, 2,978) who completed a Study Programme in 2015-16 remained in education. A further 28% (1,294) secured employment, this is a 11pp increase compared to the previous year. Only 4.5% declaring themselves NEET.

There are no like for like national benchmarks available for comparison. Nevertheless, most learners completing 16-19 study programmes achieve positive destinations.

Internal progression of learners remains strong given that significant numbers of learners enter College with low prior attainment. In addition, progress to Higher Education is good and above the UCAS national average. Adult progression from Access programmes to HE is very good.

The Board **NOTED** the Report and the successful progression and achievements by last year's students.

8.2 Progress against Academic Performance Targets 2016-17

The Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality **PRESENTED** a Report showing the predicted outcomes for 2016-17 matched against the targets approved by the Board on 5 December 2016.

The Academic Measurement Tables for 2014-15 (National Averages) have been inserted in the Report to enable comparison against this year's College targets and the predicted outcomes. We expect 2015-16 validated NA data shortly.

In all areas bar one, the predicted outcomes for this year are at or above the 14/15 National Averages.

It is noted that it is not possible to disaggregate the data by age – it is reported by type of course.

The Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality commented that the predictions look high, but they are a reasonable estimation based on information and evidence base from Heads of Departments. The VP, Curriculum & Quality did make the point that it is difficult to predict achievement in some areas (e.g. GCSE English) as this has a new syllabus and marking scheme, but the predicted success gives a clear indication that we are closely monitoring students.

Governors also felt predictions could be high but noted that the information is derived from Promonitor and review/input from both Department Heads, Tutors and the Quality Team.

It was reported that Value Added information was not yet prepared but would be ready within two weeks at which time it will be circulated to governors.

ACTION: VP, C&Q

A governor asked how we compare to other good Colleges. The VP, C&Q stated that, on progress measures, we rank fourth out of fourteen local Colleges on vocational programmes. We are very strong on data.

We have good attendance and retention this year which gives confidence as to our predicted grades in all areas.

However, A Levels are less good. The Board were concerned that this is still a weak area (although better than it has been) and that the future of delivery of A Levels should be kept under review. The Schedule provided did not include data relating to A Levels and that is to be circulated separately.

ACTION: VP, C&Q

The Board were circulated with a letter (dated 15 March 2017) from the SFA/EFA stating that South Essex College is below the level 3 academic minimum standard.

Under these new measures, an institution is underperforming if it has an academic value-added score below -0.50 and both its upper and lower confidence intervals are negative. This relates to A Level students of which there are about 300 students currently enrolled.

A response from the College as to action being taken to address the weaknesses highlighted by this letter must be sent to SFA in response by 29 March 2017.

The Board will continue to keep 'A' level performance under review.

In the light of this letter and generally, governors expressed considerable concern about A Levels. It hasn't been good for some years and the Board may need to consider its future in the College overall provision.

The Board was informed that the completion of work placement is currently predicted to be 4.2% below the College target, mainly because Construction Trades learners are currently predicted to undergo work related activity rather than formal work placements due to restrictions of learners being on construction sites without having the requisite certification.

The Board **RECEIVED** the Report.

8.3 Safeguarding Report

The Board **RECEIVED** the College's Annual Safeguarding Report, which had been reviewed in detail by the Curriculum & Quality Committee at their Meeting on 28 February 2017 and who recommended that it be approved by the Board.

The Report provides the full Section 11 Audit for the College in order to give assurance that College's functions are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

The Audit was completed by the Head of Student Services and the Head of Human Resources and involved a range of criteria in twelve areas. No areas are considered to be inadequate or non-compliant with best practice. Only one criteria was considered to be moderate compliance but this has now been raised to high compliance.

The unapproved Minutes of the Curriculum & Quality Committee of 28 February 2017 provide more detail.

The Board noted that the Safeguarding Governor (Mrs G Williams) has met with Jane Belcher and Roney Brooks to discuss the Report and in particular to confirm that she agreed the content of the Section 11 Audit Report.

The Board **APPROVED** the Annual Safeguarding Report.

8.4 HE Update

8.4.1 New HE Partner

The Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality presented a Report on progress regarding a possible partnership arrangement with the University of East Anglia and the Open University, which had been discussed in detail by the Curriculum & Quality Committee on 28 February.

Two successful meetings have already taken place with UEA and an Institutional Review will take place at the end of July 2017. Assuming that is satisfactory, the majority of the current University of Essex provision will be transferred to UEA for the September 2018 entry.

The validation of the Initial Teacher Training cannot be included in the UEA provision and these courses will be validated by the Open University in a validation event commencing 26 June 2017. Courses will start from September 2017 for ITT with the Open University.

On the recommendation of the Committee, the Board **APPROVED** pursuing a partnership agreement with the University of East Anglia and the Open University as indicated above.

8.4.2 HE Annual Provider Review

As previously reported to the Board, the College did not meet two of the HEFCE benchmarks in the Assurance Review. These were overall NSS scores for the last three years and retention rates for 2011-12, 2012-13 and 2013-14.

There was some confusion in what the HEFCE required and after clarification, it was established that the College has a continued decline in retention rates for first year students – in 2014-15 retention was 82% against the College's benchmark for retention is 89%.

The NSS score for overall satisfaction has improved significantly in 2015 but the overall score across the three years is adrift of HEFCE acceptable limits.

The College is addressing these issues. In addition, the response by the College indirectly addresses the metric for 'employment or further study' which, whilst not an area of concern, nevertheless has a rather negative profile and is related to part of the intervention strategy for student satisfaction.

The Board were presented with a copy of the College response to the Annual Provider Review preliminary assessment letter of 1 February 2017 and the supporting documentation. We believe it is a robust reply and look forward to seeing if HEFCE feel we have addressed the issues raised.

This response and appendix was **APPROVED** by the Board. The Board recognised the requirement from HEFCE that the Board understand and be fully engaged in HE matters. In this connection, it was **AGREED** that further updates on the College's progress in addressing the issues of weakness will be reviewed by the Curriculum & Quality Committee in May and the Board in July.

9. Matters for Approval by the Corporation (Paper FEC.17.06)

The Clerk presented a verbal Report outlining matters for approval by the Corporation arising from items already considered in detail by Committee and are recommended for approval by the Board.

From the Curriculum & Quality Committee

The Board **APPROVED** the

- i. Updated Self-Assessment Report 2015/16
- ii. Recommendation that the College adopts the University of East Anglia as its principal new Higher Education partner, subject to due diligence being completed (see item **8.4.1** above)

10. Items for Information Only

The Board **RECEIVED** the following Committee Meeting Minutes (unapproved):

- Search & Governance 6 February 2017
- Curriculum & Quality 28 February 2017
- Policy & Resources 6 February 2017

The Board **RECEIVED** the following papers which had been considered by the Curriculum & Quality Committee:

- Current Learner Performance 2016-17
- Monitoring of Quality Improvement Plan 2016-17
- Findings from Departmental Reviews – January/February 2017

11. Governance Matters

The Board **RECEIVED** a verbal update on the Recruitment of New Governors. Taking account of recent resignations of Stuart Burrell (8.2.17) and Tom Thompson (25.3.17), the actual membership of the Board will be 15, against a determined Membership of 18.

The Principal & Chief Executive is hopeful that the current CEO of a large company she is talking to might be interested and she is meeting with him tomorrow to explore matters further.

The Clerk **PRESENTED** a Report on the Governors' Self-Assessment questionnaires for 2015/16. Eleven governors out of thirteen had responded and the findings tabulated.

The Search & Governance Committee will consider the outcomes of the Report at its Meeting on 15 May 2017, including how to arrange development of a more formal Governor training programme.

ACTION: CLERK

12. Forthcoming Events (Paper FEC.17.08)

The Board **NOTED** the contents of the paper, prepared by the Clerk.

13. Date of Next Meetings

Monday 10 July 2017 at the Southend Campus.

There being no further business, the Meeting terminated at 8.25 pm.

Signed.....Dated.....