

Further Education Corporation

Approved Minutes

Minutes of a Special Meeting of the Further Education Corporation held at the Southend Campus on Monday 17 October 2016 at 3.05 pm.

Present: Mr D O'Halloran (Chairman)
Mrs G Williams (Vice Chairman)
Ms S Bridle
Mr B Brooks
Dr R Gray
Mr T Knight
Ms A O'Donoghue CBE
Mr Paramjit Singh Narang (from 3.15 pm)
Mr R Patterson
Ms L Rieffel

In Attendance: Ms D Brown (Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality)
Ms D Garway (Assistant Principal, Teaching & Learning)
Mr M Twitchett (Assistant Principal, Learning & Standards)
Mr A Pease (Assistant Principal, Learner Performance)
Mr R I Millea FCA (Clerk to the Corporation)
Mrs S Mack (Assistant Clerk to the Corporation)

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Mr S Burrell, Ms O Buck, Mrs S Carr, Mr R Launder, Dr G Ocen, Mr T Thompson, Ms M West and Mrs K Mulvey (Director of Teaching & Learning).

2. Declaration of Interests

The Clerk to the Corporation declared his interest as Clerk to Chelmsford College.

3. Urgent Business

There were no items of Urgent Business.

4. College Self-Assessment Report 2015-16

The Principal & Chief Executive and the Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality presented the College Self-Assessment Report for 2015-16 for consideration and validation, if agreed, by the Board.

The Board was reminded of the process by which the SAR is produced and that it is compiled in 'Ofsted' style. The management challenge is to give assurance to the Board on the robustness of the Report and the conclusions drawn therein, in particular, the reasoning and the supporting evidence backing up the Grade 2 – Good overall assessment for the College compared to Grade 3 – Requires Improvement in the 2014-15 Report.

Governors noted the following points of context:

- Data is close to being finalised – final ILR due on 24 October
- National averages are for 2014/15 where available – otherwise, ProAchieve NA have been used
- NA 2015/16, when available, will be reviewed against actual in the draft SAR and QIP and amended as necessary
- Likely that 15/16 NA will decline because of the deleterious effect on College achievement of GCSE English & Maths
- Grade 2 in all key judgement areas (Grade 3 last year)
- Recent Ofsted guidance says that Maths and English outcomes do not necessarily limit grades awarded during an inspection
- College Maths & English results are still poor and materially affect overall outcomes for the College

The Principal & Chief Executive explained to the Board that the production of the Report was a 'bottom up' process and was designed to get staff and managers to be self-reflective of performance and then identify the steps they need to take to improve.

She further explained that the Report will be shared with our Ofsted improvement Inspector early in 2017, when our next improvement Visits will take place. The Board was reminded that it is very likely that we will have a full Ofsted Inspection in the Spring of 2017 and certainly before the end of this academic year.

A governor asked whether the Report will always be done in Ofsted style and whether that was a requirement. The Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality said that it is helpful for Ofsted in the inspection process but the style is not prescriptive and the College could do it differently. The governor was concerned as to whether the Report was really helpful for staff and students and the response was that it was more relevant to staff this year because of its self-reflective approach and it is easier for them to locate comments relating to their area. The most important outcome is the Quality Improvement Plans which are developed in response to the identified areas for improvement.

Outcomes for Learners

This area is proposed for Grade 2 – Good.

The Principal & Chief Executive asked the Board to consider whether, in its judgement, the grades awarded in the Report were appropriate and evidentially sound. It is not the intention to go through every line of the Report but to examine the highlights in each graded area, to look at the overall achievement tables and to take questions.

Governors noted that the National Averages used in the achievement tables will almost certainly come down for 2015/16 because of the effect of all students having to resit GCSE English & Maths. The 2015/16 grades will not be available till early in 2017. Alan Pease commented that the number of GCSE resits is up 10 fold this year. Resits means students who sat GCSE English & Maths in school and did not achieve grade C or above.

Alan Pease led Members through the data summaries on pages 46 to 53 of the Report. It is expected that the NA will drop due to the effect of English & Maths. As the NA are last year's figures, we are using ProAchieve.

A governor observed that our overall achievement rate for 16-19 Study Programmes is 87.9, 1.3 percentage points below the ProAchieve NA but up 7pp on our rate last year. He posed the question as to why we are Good overall given that our overall achievement for 16-19 is still below the NA.

Denise Brown responded by saying that 1.3 pp below is broadly in line with NA so is acceptable in Ofsted terms. Furthermore, the NA are expected to reduce for 2015/16 so our achievement is likely to be at least 2015/16 NA or maybe even above. As noted above, Ofsted have issued guidelines recently indicating that English and Maths outcomes do not necessarily limit grades awarded during an inspection.

To substantiate our view that we are Grade 2 – Good, Denise Brown pointed out that we have excellent achievement with Students with High Needs, our intervention mechanisms are prompt and effective, there no clear gaps in E&D achievement terms, our Work Placements are good and we have achieved excellent grades in apprenticeships. Student Destination data supports the notion of a College which is doing well for its students in making them fit for work or further study.

Governors observed that our English & Maths high grades are not good and our value added is static with last year. Adult outcomes could be better and A/AS levels are not good (but small cohort).

A Governor asked what we planned to do this year to improve English & Maths. Denise Brown explained that we now have an effective management team and a stable full time permanent staffing base (last year had a large number of agency staff and we were providing significant support to delivery staff). A whole cross college plan has been developed for the delivery of GCSE English and Maths which is a large cohort of students (approx 3,000).

A governor asked what is the plan to rectify the poor A level performance in particular in year 1 so that we can have confidence in good outcomes on completion at the end of year 2. Denise Brown explained the interventions which are in place for the future and how we are using local schools to help in moderation of our assessments of students.

Governors commented that our A Level performance is reflective of the abilities of the cohorts involved given that the local area has both independent schools and grammar schools which hamper the quality of our intake.

Alan Pease made the point that our Ofsted Improvement Inspector (Deborah Vaughan-Jenkins), when she visited before our last Ofsted visit, criticised the lack of ability of College in predicting student outcomes. We made such predictions during her last visit and we have virtually hit those predictions for 2015-16. We now have 6 out of ten curriculum areas over the NA (last year only three) We are also much better at monitoring and checking College progress during the year.

Governors were reminded that the 2013/14 achievement statistics and NAs are on a different basis to the current system. The Principal & Chief Executive said level 1 and 2 were the poor areas last year and this year have significantly improved rising virtually to National Average (ProAchieve). Once the actual 2015/16 NAs are published, it is likely that we will be seen to be above NA.

Members queried the value of including the 2013-14 statistics in the SAR as these are no longer comparable and are misleading. It was agreed that these figures should be removed from the final version of the Report.

Denise Brown explained to members, in response to a question, that the journey to Grade 2 – Good doesn't solely depend on outcomes. The fact that we can better track learners and the pace of progress has been excellent compared to last year undeniably justifies our judgement that we have achieved a Grade 2. Members fully agreed with this judgement.

The Meeting then considered each of the key Self-Assessment Grades awarded based on the Ofsted Common Inspection Framework. Senior Managers explained the circumstances in each area and the Board were invited to ask questions.

Following this process, the Board were asked to agree the grade proposed to be awarded for that area.

The Board **AGREED** that Outcomes for Learners should be graded 2 – Good.

16-18 Study Programmes

Grade 2 is proposed on the basis that outcomes (Main Qualification Aim Overall) have improved by 7pp to 87.9 against NA of 89.2. There has been a narrowing achievement gaps and more curriculum areas are good than not.

The rolling out of the Personal Development, Behaviour & Welfare (PDBW) has been successful with Safeguarding being excellent. There is a clearer Maths & English strategy. Students are making good progression, enjoy their programmes and agree that the College provides a safe and secure environment.

A governor raised the point that our learners are often of lesser academic ability compared to local schools. Denise Brown agreed but the point is that we do well with our cohorts and we should make that point strongly to Ofsted. We have more work to do with them than those who remain in schools and this makes it very difficult to have these students gaining high levels in English & Maths.

Alan Pease stated, in response to a Governor question, that learners (and their parents/guardians) now understand how important that English & Maths is in their Study Programmes and this is producing better outcomes. More effort is needed and our efforts will not slacken. A governor commented that the Maths & English challenge is huge as during 2015/16 the College had 2823 enrolments on GCSE Maths & English and 2076 enrolments on functional Skills Maths & English.

The Principal & Chief Executive was clear that, despite improvements being made this year, that more work is required on measuring progress so as to maximize our achievement levels for our students.

The Board **AGREED** that Grade 2 – Good was appropriate for 16-18 Study Programmes.

Apprenticeships

Denise Brown commented that the achievement rates (overall and timely) are both above the NAs but have dipped from last year, which is disappointing. It was noted that some results are not completed and therefore the achievement rates are likely to increase in the final version of the Report. The performance of College partners delivering Apprenticeships was a factor in the fall in grades.

A governor commented that (p12) the College's direct delivery maths at Level 2 is low and requires improvement at 34%. However, there was no context to this comment as it did not indicate how many students were represented by this 34%. It may be a very small number and the governor suggested that percentages without the underlying actual numbers is distorting.

The Board were assured that our detailed data information contains the numbers of students. The Board noted this but felt that the Report should include numbers of students in the narrative, where appropriate, as well as the percentages, so that the relevance and significance can be seen and judged.

The Board considered the description of our Apprenticeship provision for 2015/16 was fair and accurate and emphasized our employer links, good skills development and the integration of British values in the provision.

The Board **AGREED** that Grade 2 – Good was appropriate for Apprenticeships. The Board did feel that the provision was close to Grade 1 – Outstanding but the drop in achievement this year mitigated against this.

Adult Learning Programmes

The Report proposed a Grade 3 – Requires Improvement – for this area of provision.

Denise Brown commented that achievement outcomes are good generally at or above NAs with students passing the qualification which they studied. There is a lot of infill with existing 16-19 Programmes, a practice which needs to stop. Our results are affected by learners who leave after year 1 of a qualification which is all they want to complete but we automatically enrol them on a 2 year programme.

Our access provision is very strong and our short provision is excellent but work is needed on level 4 courses where outcomes need to improve e.g. AAT, ILEX.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that our Level 4 provision is small (only 44 starts in the year) and is not in competition with HE institutions but is in competition with private training providers. The Board felt that the Adult Institute concept is a good way forward for Level 4 provision – it is perceived that there are growth opportunities here.

The Board asked why this area isn't a grade 2 given the achievement rates even if there should be some improvement e.g. ESOL, since the bulk of provision (entry, level 1 and level 2) show significant increases over last year.

The Board **AGREED** that the Grade should be revised upwards to a Grade 2 – Good. The justification was that achievement rates are good (at or above NAs in most areas) notwithstanding that some improvement is required (e.g. ESOL, A Levels) but recognising the context which is that the bulk of starts are for Entry level, Level 1 and Level 2 programmes (a total of 2826 starts).

High Needs

The Report proposes a Grade 2 – Good.

Denise Brown advised the Board that their provision is fully integrated in the College and there are no gaps between their achievement and those of learners without high needs – supported by the data on p48 of the Report.

The Board asked why this area is not a grade 1 given the achievements which are really good, strong retention and the illustrative case studies. We have a relatively large number of learners compared to other providers (54 learners) and this commitment by the College, coupled with good outcomes, has improved our image with local authorities.

The Board recognised that, because of the specialist Needs of many of the students, there is a real challenge in finding appropriate staffing, e.g. 1-2-1 assistance, signers, etc.)

The Board **AGREED** should be revised upwards to Grade 1 – Outstanding.

Effectiveness of Leadership & Management

Grade 2 – Good is proposed as against last year when L&M was graded Grade 3 – Requires Improvement.

The Board were reminded that the Grade 3 last year was driven very much by poor success rates and this was probably harsh. This year, clear improvement in the College outcomes and much more embedding of cross College good practice coupled with timely interventions when problems arise justifies a Grade 2.

There is clear evidence that the Governors contributed to and enhanced the Improvement process through their scrutiny function, approving new strategies, addressing risks through good risk management and an understanding of the College operations. The latter point is evidenced by the Governor Link programme where closer relationships between the College and the Board are fostered. Regular Meetings with students are held and two Governors directly liaise with the Students' Union.

The Board is in no doubt that it has had IMPACT in the improvements that have taken place this year and the rise from Grade 3 to Grade 2. They requested that the Report strengthen the wording in this respect as it is a key Ofsted principle.

One governor was concerned that we should not overstate our position and wondered whether the Board was 'highly effective' as quoted in the Report. The Principal & Chief Executive said that Senior Management hold the view that the Board is highly effective and there are a number of measures and actions which demonstrate this as noted above.

One governor asked about progress in completing staff appraisals – these are in progress for 2015/16 and should be finished shortly (on target). The governor felt that the Committee structure referred to on p25 should also mention our risk management process and monitoring.

The Board **AGREED** that Leadership & Management should be Grade 2 – Good.

Quality of Teaching Learning & Assessment

Grade 2 - Good is proposed.

Denise Brown felt that learner opinion was a key factor in pushing this to Grade 2.

Nevertheless, there remains some challenging areas:

- some pedestrian teaching of English & Maths
- some challenging areas still like differentiation
- some students have high GCSEs on entry to some level 3 courses making it hard to demonstrate value added in high performing areas such as Art & Design and Media & Performing Arts
- further development of staff ability to assess learner progress

The Board queried whether there is a risk that it is a Grade 3. The response was that it wholly depends on Ofsted's view of what has been done with regards to English & Maths and how the results look. It is acknowledged that perhaps Ofsted is not quite as severe as they have been recognising there are significant issues in this area throughout the sector.

The Board noted strong value added in three areas: Travel & Tourism, Creative Media and Business.

A governor commented that some of the data is at departmental level for monitoring (governors see this in Departmental Reviews) but it is not in the Report. It was agreed that such figures could be included in the Report to enhance the Grade judgement.

The Board **AGREED** that a Grade 2 is appropriate.

Personal Development Behaviour & Welfare

Grade 2 – Good is proposed.

Denise Brown explained that attendance is the potential weak link in the judgement here, especially in English & Maths. Ofsted are particularly alert to PDBW in relation to attendance, which was perceived as requiring improvement at last inspection, and it could even prejudice Ofsted judging that a 2 is valid. However, the Report argues that the excellent practice in all other areas of PDBW in the College negate any criticism of attendance (which in itself is not bad but could be improved).

It is noted that our definition and our practice regarding lateness is harsh – there is no amelioration here. If a student is late, the student is late, no matter the time in question.

It was further acknowledged that it is possible that attendance could be under recorded because students are 'learning' in the College even though they haven't actually logged into their scheduled class (although they should do).

The Board agreed that students feel that the College is a welcoming and friendly environment with a good culture, which students understand and respect.

The Board **AGREED** that Grade 2 is appropriate, recognising the attendance/punctuality issue.

General Comments

The Chair stated and the Board **AGREED** that we must make sure that we keep on top of things during 2016/17. We cannot afford or allow any complacency to creep in because of the good and improved year in 2015/16. We must keep our focus given the Ofsted inspection due in Spring/Summer 2017 which we want to give us Grade 2.

The Board further **AGREED** as a principle that we must get the balance right in the text of the Report. We must not over emphasize improvement areas but acknowledge that we have more to do and ensure appropriate weight is given to progress made in the learning continuum and the dividend by way of good achievements for students without 'over-egging' the pudding.

The Board's judgement validates the College's Senior Team's judgement that we have moved from Grade 3 – Requires improvement to Grade 2 – Good and the Report should clearly reflect this.

Decisions by the Board

The Board **APPROVED** the draft College Self-Assessment Report 2015-16, subject to amendments identified during this validation process. The final Report will be approved by the Board on 5 December 2016.

The Board noted that any changes required will be minor.

The Board **NOTED** that all Governors not present at this Meeting had been sent the draft Self-Assessment Report electronically for comment with the understanding that the Report would be approved at this Meeting. No comments were received. The Clerk advised that those absent governors have, in effect, given their approval to the draft Report.

The Board **NOTED** the submission of the Report to the Area Review Team by next Friday, 21 October 2016, as part of the Area Review process and was content that be done.

5. Draft College Quality Improvement Plan 2016-17

The Board had approved the QIP 2016-17 in principle at its Meeting on 3 October 2016 subject to any changes arising from the finalisation of the Self-Assessment Report.

The updated QIP was presented for discussion and approval.

The Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality explained that this Plan is predominantly a continuation of the Plan in force last year, which has proved to have been very successful given the progress made by the College in 2015/16. Last year's plan has effectively been validated in terms of outcomes this year.

This enhances the quality of the College's ability to produce effective and focused improvement plans and actions.

A governor asked about the timetable in the Report as to whether the dates quoted for completion of actions are valid and not just a wish list. Management agreed to revisit the dates quoted to ensure they are meaningful and achievable and generally meet the College's quality cycle.

The Board noted that the Curriculum & Quality Committee receive an update of progress against the Quality Improvement as a standing agenda item at each Meeting of the Committee.

In response to a question from a governor, Denise Brown confirmed that the structure of the Plan, in particular, addressing the Key College Themes for 2016/17 matches with the content of the Self-Assessment Report. Accordingly, she believes that the Plan is complete and, if properly implemented, will produce continuing improvement in the College.

The Board **APPROVED** the College Quality Improvement Plan 2016/17.

6. Date of Next Meeting

Monday 5 December 2016 at the Basildon Campus at 6.00 pm (change from Southend). It was noted that the Second Meeting of the Area Review Panel is scheduled for 3 to 5 pm at Harlow College that day but it is not proposed to change the Board Meeting date or commencement time.

If the Chair and Principal are unable to arrive for the start of the Meeting, the Vice Chair will take the Chair and the Meeting will commence with Curriculum & Quality Matters.

All governors are to be notified of the change in venue.

There being no further business, the Meeting terminated at 4.45 pm.

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