

News from the FE Corporation meeting, 10 December 2019

Governor Appointments

Emma Wright, Project Manager at Wood Group, was appointed as an independent member of the Corporation for a term of four years. Following the resignation of Mati Scarlet as student governor, the Corporation is looking for two student governors. The Board is now at target composition for independent members but is continuing to seek potential governors with financial, business or education expertise to further enhance skills and experience available and support succession planning.

Strategic Plan

Following discussion at the Governor Strategy Event on 5 November, governors considered potential updates and changes to the college's Strategic Plan to reflect developments in education and funding policies and the new Ofsted education inspection framework. An update against Strategic Plan objectives was also provided. Governors were pleased to note good progress against many of the Strategic Plan targets and agreed that future plans should include four year targets, rather than five year targets as at present.

Self Assessment Report and Quality Improvement Plan

Governors thanked the Deputy Principal and all staff involved in compiling the comprehensive self assessment report. Governors had attended departmental Self Assessment validation meetings and were pleased to note that all areas were graded at least 'good' (grade 2), with programmes for adults and high needs students graded as outstanding (grade 1). The Deputy Principal highlighted the positive picture in respect of achievement and particularly commended the improvements achieved within the Engineering team. Governors were pleased to note improved attendance at English and maths.

Governors also considered and agreed the 2019-20 Quality Improvement Plan and noted that the key areas for improvement included: achievement of high grades; number of students achieving Grade 4 in GCSE maths; reducing achievement gaps; improving achievement rates in areas where these had declined; reducing the number of unknown destinations; supporting students and staff with mental health issues; and supporting students to develop technical and professional language.

Annual Report and Financial Statements

Governors considered the college's Annual Report and Financial Statements for 2018-19 and were pleased to note an operational surplus, although there remained a deficit position after pension adjustments. Governors thanked the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources and the Interim Finance Manager for their work in ensuring the accounts were of a high quality and finalised at an early stage. Governors also agreed to reappoint Mazars as external auditors for the audit of the 2019-20 annual accounts.

Energy Centre project

Governors received an update in relation to the proposed Energy Centre project and the bid for financial support from the European Regional Development Fund to support this. A decision on award of the funding remained outstanding and was now expected in January. A tender for the project work was in development and due for issue in the near future. Governors agreed to hold a special meeting in February to consider a decision in respect of the project.

Financial Matters

Governors received an update from the Finance, Estates and Employment Committee and considered the financial management accounts for October 2019. Governors recognised financial pressures during the 2019-20 financial year, primarily due to funding regulations and the deferment of lagged funding payments. There were no specific concerns in respect of income and expenditure at this stage.

Governors also considered and agreed the Association of Colleges' recommendation to award a pay increase of 1% or £250, whichever was the most beneficial to individual staff. Governors stressed their appreciation for all staff and their wish to balance a fair remuneration package against long-term financial sustainability of the college.

Governors also noted that the Education and Skills Funding Agency had issued a new financial reporting model and would require an approved return by 28 February. The Corporation agreed to hold a special meeting in February to consider this.

Quality and Student issues

Governors received feedback from the Quality and Standards Committee and noted that there were no concerns regarding performance to date and quality of provision continued to remain very high. Governors also considered the Teesside University CPCMER (Collaborative Provision Continuous Monitoring and Enhancement Report) and recognised that there were no concerns regarding higher education provision. The Curriculum and Quality Performance Report to October 2019 confirmed no quality issues in year.

The Chair of the Student Liaison Committee provided feedback on a meeting held in December and highlighted that students had expressed concern about time available for lunch and dining space available within the atrium area. Some concerns had also been raised regarding student behaviour. Students continued to be very happy with the quality of teaching and learning in the college.

Audit and risk management issues

Governors received feedback from an Audit Committee meeting and were pleased to note a significant reduction in outstanding audit actions. Governors were also advised that an updated risk register had been agreed and this would be presented to the Corporation in the spring term. At a joint meeting of the Audit and Finance and Employment Committees, governors had considered the draft accounts. The Corporation agreed the proposed changes to the Financial Regulations.

Governance Matters

Governors noted attendance levels at meetings and development activities and received an update on national governance issues. The Corporation Chair also reported on his attendance at a Chairs' training event. Governors agreed a policy in respect of retention of external income by senior staff.

Principal's and Chair's Announcements

There had been a successful visit to the college by local Councillors, including the Leader of Darlington Borough Council, Heather Scott. Governors also commended the college's fantastic Graduation Ceremony and thanked Claire Turner and the Marketing Team for their work on this.

Best wishes from the Board

Pat Howarth, Chair

Kate Roe, Principal