

News from the FE Corporation meeting, 11 October 2018

Curriculum Department presentation

Governors received a presentation from Lois Calvert, English and maths manager, outlining the significant improvements in English and maths results achieved in 2017-18. This was across GCSE, functional skills and ESOL. Lois also highlighted some key activities within the department, including the recent award of the extended Ministry of Defence contract, participation in the Maths4Life project and organisation of a regional maths and English conference in association with FE+ colleagues.

Governors congratulated the team on the significant improvements in outcomes and asked that their appreciation be passed on to all tutors.

Governor Appointments

Calvin Kipling, Chair of the Quality and Standards Committee, was appointed as Vice Chair of the Corporation. Governors also appointed Gareth Devine, Operations Director at Robertson Strategic Asset Management, to the final vacancy on the Board and agreed to continue to seek a person with financial expertise to support the Audit Committee. Recruitment to the two student governor vacancies is also ongoing.

Strategic Plan

Governors reviewed progress against the plan and noted, in particular, very healthy apprenticeship recruitment and high numbers of pre-16 enrolments. Governors were also pleased that the college had been successful in bidding for the extended Ministry of Defence contract and that implementation of Pro Solution had been concluded prior to enrolment.

Governors noted key headlines arising from the staff survey, including high staff awareness of strategic priorities but some challenges around improving communications. A full report would be provided to a future meeting of the Finance, Employment and Estates Committee.

A full update against the Key Performance Indicators would be presented to the December meeting following completion of the annual accounts and targets would be reviewed against the current year's performance.

Members also noted the challenges experienced in placing students for longer-term T-level industrial placements, in part due to student part-time jobs and barriers relating to English and maths. These would be fed back as part of the pilot.

Governors were very pleased to note that the new college website was live and also commended the clarity of the Strategic Plan summary document for staff.

Quality

Governors considered the range of issues highlighted by students at the Student Liaison Committee meeting, including concerns regarding the size and location of the smoking shelter, choice of food and issues with Wifi. Students had also raised concerns regarding use of late cards and the availability of College incentives across all College student groups, including adult students.

Governors also received an update from the Quality and Standards Committee and were very pleased to note a five year trend of improvement, with very high outcomes in 16-18, 19+ and all ages and increases against 2016-17 outcomes in many areas. A few areas had performed less well and would be monitored by the committee over the coming year. Apprenticeship outcomes had improved fractionally and were above the national rate. Governors congratulated staff on this excellent trend of improvement.

Financial Matters

Governors received an update from the Finance, Estates and Employment Committee meeting and considered the latest 2017-18 year end update. They were pleased to note the positive budget outturn, particularly the achievement of target income for apprenticeships and underspend against pay and non pay budgets. Governors recognised action to ensure full use of college allocations, including more in house delivery of adult education training and introduction of distance learning

Governors also considered the 2018-19 college enrolment figures against the financial plan and recognised that these were slightly below target, although recruitment was ongoing. There were particular concerns around low recruitment to higher education. A range of strategies were in place to improve numbers, including short construction courses for former armed forces personnel, 'Building Heroes'. Governors would review final enrolment figures once analysis was complete.

Governors also considered the national picture in relation to funding for staff pay awards in education and would consider affordability of a pay award to college staff at the December meeting.

Annual reports and Policies

Governors received a number of annual reports at this meeting: Safeguarding; Equality and Diversity; Health and Safety; HR; and Audit Committee. Governors also approved the updated Safeguarding Policy.

Audit and risk management issues

Governors received feedback from an Audit Committee meeting and approved the Internal Audit Plan for 2018-19, which had been developed by the recently appointed internal audit firm, Audit One.

Governance Matters

Governors reviewed their attendance at meetings and development activities in 2017-18 and refreshed the membership and terms of reference of committees. Governors also agreed a response to a national AoC consultation in relation to a proposed Remuneration Code for senior staff in colleges and recognised the need to improve succession planning within the Corporation. The Search and Governance Committee had reviewed Corporation performance against the English Colleges Code of Good Governance and this would be reviewed by governors.

Principal's and Chair's Announcements

The Chair and Principal had attended a national march organised by Association of Colleges as part of action to lobby the government for increased funding to further education. A college petition had also been organised and presented to the MP for Darlington, Jenny Chapman, who had agreed to present it to Parliament.

Governors were advised of changes to the Curriculum Management structure and the intention to support Curriculum Managers through appointment of curriculum leaders, who would have teaching remission to provide management support. It was hoped that this initiative would also support college succession planning.

Members also noted regional and national developments, including the launch of the North East Challenge fund to support school improvement.

Best wishes from the Board

Pat Howarth, Chair

Kate Roe, Principal