

News from the FE Corporation meeting, 19 May 2020

Governing Body Membership

Governors agreed to suspend the appointment of Elisha Farey as student governor, as requested by Elisha for personal reasons.

COVID-19 Update

Governors considered a report providing information about college action in response to the government restrictions linked to the COVID-19 global pandemic. It was noted that some students had been supported through the provision of WiFi dongles and that a number of staff had been placed on furlough, or part-time furlough, including catering and childcare staff.

Some face to face teaching was being planned in line with government guidance. This would be on a very small scale and specifically focussed on students required to undertake a practical assessment for a qualification. Vulnerable learners would also be invited to attend college for limited one-to-one work, with a focus on maintaining engagement and supporting progress with online learning. Some transition activities for new high needs students were also being planned and the Childcare Centre would re-open for some children.

Work was ongoing to review room capacities and install a one-way system, barriers and Perspex screens. It was recognised that re-opening would be dependent on government decisions. The college was working with trade unions on risk assessments and looking for ways to support staff that were shielding or clinically vulnerable, and to ensure staff did not need to travel at peak times. Governors were supportive of the college's approach to open the college only when safe to do so.

Governors recognised challenges in maintaining remote working and increasing face to face teaching, as well as the challenges of managing requirements of a very wide range of awarding organisations.

Governors agreed to establish a coronavirus governance and leadership group to support the Executive Team and also agreed to hold a special meeting to receive an update on re-opening in September.

Strategic Plan Update

Governors considered the potential impact of COVID-19 on the college and further education sector. Some of the issues considered included a potentially negative financial impact, requirements for staff development and investment in technology, and opportunities to support with re-skilling and upskilling. The government focus on the importance of the further education sector was also noted. Governors recognised the need to remain flexible and keep abreast of changes to guidance and requirements.

Energy Centre Update

Governors had had an opportunity to discuss documentation relating to the Energy Centre project at an informal meeting held on 13 May 2020. Governors noted a risk review of the funding agreement provided by the European Regional Development Fund and agreed that the Corporation seal should be applied to this agreement and the contract with Honeywell. Further consideration would be given to the financing option for the college at a future meeting.

Quality and Student-related Matters

Governors also received feedback from a Student Liaison Committee meeting in May. Due to requirements around social distancing, it had not been possible to invite students but a Curriculum Manager had been in attendance to provide updates on teaching and learning and use of technology. The link governor for English and maths also reported on his discussions with the English and maths Curriculum Manager in relation to their work on teacher assessed grades and the review process for this. Governors expressed their appreciation for the hard work of staff over this period.

Governors also received the Quality Performance Report and noted that there would be no published achievement rates for 2019-20 and Ofsted would effectively discount outcomes in any gradings. Awarding organisations were continuing to clarify requirements and the college was monitoring this. Priority was being given to students that needed to complete qualifications. Industrial placements had stopped and student and employer surveys had also been cancelled. English and maths examinations had been cancelled but teacher assessments were going ahead and showed that English and maths grades were slightly ahead of the 2018-19 position. No areas in the college were in special measures. Governors were pleased to note positive performance data, good progress achieved in English and maths and good performance by disadvantaged students.

Governors also considered the School and College Performance Report for 2018-19. Only a small number of students from the college were included in this data. The data would be considered further by the Quality and Standards Committee.

Financial Matters

Governors considered options in relation to refinancing of the college's principal debt and, in light of the uncertain impact of COVID-19 on the college's financial position, agreed to defer a decision on action until later in the year.

Governors received the management accounts for March 2020 and a budget update. Some rebate on examination fees was anticipated. There was discussion about the year end position and particularly whether the college would be compliant with bank covenants. Governors were assured that the month 9 position was more favourable and compliance with bank covenants was anticipated.

Governors also considered the funding allocations for 2020-21 and noted that these were higher than in 2019-20 due to an increased base rate, English and maths premium funding and two year lagged funding for Gurkha provision. The college would be seeking to agree growth in the adult education budget with the Tees Valley Combined Authority.

Governance Matters

Governors reviewed governor attendance at meetings and development activities and considered national governance issues.

Best wishes from the Board

Kate Roe, Principal
Sarah Thompson, Clerk