

News from the FE Corporation meeting, 6 October 2021

COVID-19 Update

An update on action in response to the COVID-19 pandemic was provided and staff were commended for their professionalism and calm approach. The requirements for self-isolation were having some impact on staffing levels.

Strategic Update

The Principal provided an update in relation to: enrolment; curriculum and quality, including ongoing use of online learning; local enterprise partnership plans in response to COVID-19; the anticipated government post 16 White Paper; funding and bidding opportunities, including the college's involvement in a successful Darlington Borough Council Town Fund bid; and impact of potential devolution in North Yorkshire. Governors were pleased to note the college's involvement in collaborative projects, including the Tees Valley Industry Skills Institute.

Quality and Student-related matters

Governors received feedback from a meeting of the Student Liaison Committee in September. Students had reported that other students were behaving responsibly and responsively and staff were also taking great care. They had complimented Food Court staff on their friendliness.

Governors also received feedback from a meeting of the Quality and Standards Committee and were pleased to note positive responses in the recent National Student Survey and a very good level of returns in relation to Destinations. The committee had also considered emerging achievement rates and the annual Safeguarding Report, which had been circulated to all governors. Governors noted the increasing number of students with mental health and wellbeing issues and commended the support provided by the college. Governors approved quality targets for 2020-21.

Governors were encouraged to attend self assessment report validation meetings.

Financial and Estates Matters

Governors discussed options in respect of the college's principal loan, which was due to end in May 2021, and supported a decision to tender for refinancing options, with support from a suitably qualified financial consultant.

Governors also received feedback from a meeting of the Finance, Employment and Estates Committee. The management accounts for period 12 of 2019-20, as previously considered by the committee, had been circulated and governors were pleased to note a positive year-end position against a break-even budget. Governors also noted consideration of the annual HR, IT and Health and Safety reports, initial staff survey outcomes and progress to date with the Energy Centre project.

Governors then considered the 2020-21 and 2021-22 budget positions, taking account of autumn term enrolment and noted that 16-19 enrolment was in line with target but apprenticeships and Higher Education numbers were below target. Governors were pleased at the significant improvements achieved in monitoring student numbers.

Governors also considered and agreed plans for use of the Further Education Capital Allocation which had been provided to colleges to support infrastructure projects, with a requirement for 25% match funding and a deadline for spend of 31 March 2021.

Governors approved the updated Health and Safety Policy.

Audit Matters

Governors received feedback from an Audit Committee meeting and noted good progress in closing down previous audit recommendations, the success of online enrolment and proposals for a 'coronavirus audit' focussed on health and safety requirements, online teaching and resilience of IT infrastructure. The committee also reported on the increasingly rigorous risk management process, which now included review of a Board Assurance Framework at each meeting of the Audit Committee and annually by the FE Corporation. Governors confirmed the effectiveness of risk management in 2019-20. Implications of a revised Post-16 Audit Code of Practice and the Report of the Independent Review of College Financial Oversight had also been discussed and all governors were invited to attend the presentation of the accounts by the external auditors at the joint meeting of the Audit and Finance, Employment and Estates Committees. Governors approved the external audit regularity self assessment questionnaire and supplementary bulletin for signature by the Corporation Chair and the Annual Report of the Audit Committee, which would be submitted to the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

Governance Matters

Governors received feedback from a meeting of the Search and Governance Committee and noted the work of the committee over 2019-20 had included succession planning for the role of Corporation Chair, recruitment to governor vacancies and development of a governor skills' matrix. Governors noted ongoing work to recruit student governors and a specific gap for governors with knowledge and understanding of minority communities. Governors also noted the range of self-review activities, including reviews by individual committees, governor one to ones with the Corporation Chair and a newly introduced meeting questionnaire.

Governors agreed updated committee membership and terms of reference and a Chair's role description. Governors also noted attendance data for 2019-20 at meetings and training and college events, and an overview of national issues and developments.

Other items

Governors approved the Whistleblowing Procedure for publication on the college website.

News from the FE Corporation meeting, 10 November 2021

A special meeting of the Corporation was held on 10 November 2021 to agree documentation related to a loan to support the Energy Centre project.

Best wishes from the Board

Emma Wright, Chair

Kate Roe, Principal

Sarah Thompson, Clerk