

News from the FE Corporation meetings, 8 February and 16 March 2021

Senior Post Holder appointment

A special meeting was held on 8 February 2021 following submission of a letter of resignation from the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources. Governors noted proposals in relation to support from recruitment agencies and agreed a Selection Panel to take forward the recruitment and selection process. A further update was provided at the 16 March meeting, including adjustments to the Selection Panel membership and revisions to the planned salary scale.

The following items were discussed at the 16 March meeting:

Governor appointments

Governors appointed Beverly Neeson and Nicola Wemyss as student governors for a term of office of up to four years.

COVID-19 Update

Governors noted that the college had successfully reopened for students on 15 March with rotas in place to manage the number of staff and students on site.

Strategic Update

Governors considered the outcomes of curriculum planning and noted that no significant changes to the college's offer were planned, although the college would continue to adjust course level and content to align with regional and national priorities, including the impact of COVID-19. Governors noted developments in respect of Higher Education provision and plans for pre-16 delivery.

Governors noted publication of the Government White Paper, 'Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth' and potential opportunities to take part in pilots and trailblazer schemes in relation to proposals within the White Paper. Governors also received information about the college's possible involvement in the Darlington Borough Council Town Fund regeneration project, specifically in relation to creation of an Adult Skills Centre and the award of funding to invest in facilities to support delivery of T Levels in engineering and health and social care from September 2022. Governors approved submission of a bid to the Further Education Capital Transformation Fund to support additional capital requirements related to T Level delivery. Governors also discussed an approach from Hambleton District Council in relation to creating local provision for construction skills training, recognising both potential benefits and possible risks, and agreed to discuss further at a future meeting.

Student-Related and Quality Matters

Governors received an update from the Quality and Standards Committee meeting in March and noted the Quality Performance report, detailing the college's current quality position. Governors recognised and thanked staff for their work in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Governors also received an update from the Student Liaison Committee, which had met online. Students had reported that they were progressing well with theory work and reported on a range of strategies used by tutors to maintain knowledge and reinforce understanding, and support some practical work at home. All students expressed how keen they were to return to practical work and also see friends and colleagues again.

Financial and Employment Matters

Governors considered the outcomes of a tendering exercise in relation to refinancing the college's principal debt on conclusion of the college's current loan arrangements in May 2021 and supported a proposal to establish a Revolving Credit Facility with Barclays Bank.

Governors also received feedback from a meeting of the Finance, Employment and Estates Committee and approved the Gender Pay Gap Report for publication. Governors received and noted management accounts for January 2021 and were pleased to note a positive variance against budget, although announcements on reconciliation of the adult education budget were still awaited. Governors acknowledged the work of the Executive Team and all staff in ensuring a positive financial position.

Audit Matters

Governors received feedback from an Audit Committee meeting and also received and noted the Board Assurance Framework. It was agreed that this should be further reviewed to ensure this was an effective strategic planning tool and a review of this would take place against the revised Strategic Plan in the next academic year.

Governance Matters

Governors considered and agreed recommendations from the Search and Governance Committee in relation to improving online meetings, specifically in respect of including breaks and using the 'Chat' as a formal element of meetings. Governors also agreed to use of a 360° review tool to review the Corporation Chair's performance and considered feedback from a governance review event held in February.

Other items

Governors received feedback from a meeting of the Remuneration Committee, which had reviewed the performance and salaries of senior post holders and the Clerk.

Best wishes from the Board

Emma Wright, Chair

Kate Roe, Principal

Sarah Thompson, Clerk