

News from the FE Corporation meeting, 11 December 2018

Governor Appointments

Governors appointed Chris Coyle, adult student studying Access to Health, to one of the student governor vacancies. There remains one student governor vacancy to fill. Governors also continue to seek a person with accountancy expertise to support the Governing Body.

Strategic Plan

Governors reviewed progress against the plan. As discussed at the Governor Strategy Event in November, there remained challenges with 16-18 recruitment and higher education student numbers. However, apprenticeship income remained very healthy, pre-16 numbers were also above target and award of the Ministry of Defence contract would boost in-house delivery of adult education budget training.

Members also considered the external environment, challenges of policy initiatives and possible future opportunities for growth, building on the college's existing strengths.

Some changes were made to the strategic plan targets to ensure appropriate challenge in light of the strong quality outcomes achieved in 2017-18.

Quality

Governors considered the range of issues highlighted by students at the Student Liaison Committee meeting, including concerns regarding availability of equipment in some curriculum areas, some issues related to students with disabilities and some premises issues, including lighting in the car park and bus shelter. Governors were pleased to note that students continued to feel very supported in respect of teaching and learning.

Governors also received an update from the Quality and Standards Committee and considered the CPAMER (higher education) and 2017-18 College SAR. Governors were pleased to note the positive quality of higher education provision and the improvements in student feedback against 2017-18 outcomes. In respect of the college SAR, governors were pleased to note that the college continued to self assess as 'Good' (Ofsted Grade 2), with many curriculum and support areas judged to be 'Outstanding' (Grade 1). Governors noted the identified areas for improvement and the planned actions, as detailed in the Quality Improvement Plan. Governors thanked and congratulated college staff on these positive outcomes.

Governors considered quality progress in the current year and were pleased to note a high number of students working at or above target grades at this point in the year. Work experience placements were also above target, teaching and learning observations were strong and student satisfaction was high. There were some issues with data, which was making it difficult to assess some retention and attendance rates, although attendance at English and maths remained an issue. The college was continuing to closely monitor delivery by subcontractors and, in line with the strategic plan, was aiming to bring further adult education training in-house.

Audit and risk management issues

Governors received feedback from an Audit Committee meeting and approved the 2017-18 College Strategic Risk Register. Governors also approved the updated college Financial Regulations.

Annual Report and Final Accounts

Members considered documents related to the year end audit for 2017-18 and were pleased to note that the external auditors had identified no areas of concern. The college's 2017-18 annual report and final accounts were approved for submission to the Education and Skills Funding Agency and publication on the college website. Mazars were reappointed as external auditors for the audit of the 2018-19 year end accounts in autumn 2019.

Financial Matters

Governors received an update from the Finance, Estates and Employment Committee meeting and considered the October management accounts. There were no significant concerns regarding income or expenditure, although 16-18 numbers were below target and this would impact on college funding in 2019-20.

Members also agreed to a pay award of 1% or £250 (whichever was most beneficial to the individual employee), effective from 1 January 2018 and an additional discretionary day's holiday on 24 December 2018.

Governance Matters

Governors reviewed their attendance at meetings and development activities and received information about national governance developments.

Principal's and Chair's Announcements

Governors received information about the Local Authority's proposed charter for a 'Richer, Fairer Darlington and were pleased to support this on behalf of the college. The Chair also commended the recent 'Casino Night' for local businesses and employers held in the college. Governors also commended the quality of food and service in the Glasshouse Restaurant, at a Christmas meal, and the fabulous college Graduation Ceremony. Governors were also pleased to note that the Leader of Darlington Borough Council would be touring the college site.

Governors thanked all staff and students for their hard work and contribution to the positive quality and financial position of the college and wished all a merry Christmas and a relaxing break.

Best wishes from the Board

Pat Howarth, Chair

Kate Roe, Principal