



**FINANCE, EMPLOYMENT AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE
CONFIRMED MINUTES**

Date: 15 September 2021
Venue: New Boardroom City Campus
Present: Stephan Hollingshead (Chair)
Holly Anderson, staff governor – apologies 8.35 – 10.11
Novaya Bedward-Makanjuola, student governor
Peter Brooks, governor
Angela Foulkes, Chief Executive and Principal and governor
Beri Hare, governor
John Mothersole, Chair of Governors
In attendance: Alison Shillito, Governance Advisor and Clerk to the Governing Body.
Andrew Hartley, Executive Director Commercial and Operations
Martin Harrison, Executive Director Finance
Paul Simpson, Executive Director People

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**Action
by whom by when**

21/4/1 Welcome, introduction and apologies

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed members to the first face to face meeting since March 2020 and Novaya Bedward-Makanjuola to her first meeting as a student governor.
- 1.2 The Chief Executive and Principal (CEP) commented that in response to governor feedback, executive colleagues had developed the style of board papers so that the first two pages capture the risks and key issues and the following pages are the detail and/or appended data. It is intended that this style will be easier for members to absorb and identify key issues. In most cases, the author's RAG rating is based on achievement of targets. For other types of reporting, it is the author's opinion of the impact of the activity on achieving its intent.
- 1.3. The committee received apologies from Richard Calvert, governor, and Anita Straffon, Executive Leadership Team. It was noted that Holly Anderson was on-call as Duty Manager and therefore would be required to attend to any issues arising. Unfortunately, Holly was called away from 08.35 – 10.10.

21/4/2 Declaration of interest

- 2.1 The committee noted the following standing interests.

- Angela Foulkes, CEP and Accounting Officer in relation to financial reports and policies and as a director of Collab Group in relation to the Commercial and Business Development report. As the report was for assurance, it was agreed that no action was required for this item
- Holly Anderson, staff governor, in relation to staff policies and a manager with responsibilities for supporting learner recruitment – item 7. It was agreed that Holly would not be able to vote on item 7. (Holly was not in attendance when this was discussed.)
- Novaya Bedward-Makanjuola, student governor, as the Student Union President is paid by the college and may be seen as having an interest in people policies. As these policies apply to the terms and conditions of all staff, Instrument 11 (4) applies and she was not required to withdraw.

21/4/3 Minutes of the meeting on 23 June 2021

- 3.1 The committee approved the minutes and confidential minutes of the meeting held on 23 June 2021.

21/4/4 Matters Arising & Action Record

- 4.1 The committee considered the Action Record and approved removal of the completed actions. Progress on ongoing actions was reported under relevant agenda items.

Holly Anderson left the meeting.

21/4/5 People Annual Report 2020-21

- 5.1 Paul Simpson Executive Director People (EDP) presented an annual report on the implementations and impact of the People Strategy in 2020-21 and the next steps/priorities for 2021-22.
- 5.2 The committee considered the issues and the main points of discussion were as follows.

Absence reporting during remote working, It was noted that short term staff absence had been comparatively low during lockdown but rates had started to increase. A member asked if absence may have been under-reported due to remote working. The EDP said that staff were required to report sickness absence when working remotely. Fewer reports may have been due to lower incidence of coughs and colds or because staff were able to continue to work from home whereas coming into campus with cold symptoms may feel unsafe.

Go Further Reviews (GFR), a member asked if managers were concerned about the number of staff who still needed to complete their GFR for 2020-21. The EDP said that in a few areas, GFR completion had been delayed by restructuring and managers were catching up. In addition, some staff had been slow to report completion via the manual system. For 2021-22,

the college is rolling out online recording and reporting of the process to make it easier to report and track completion and audit the quality of the results.

Engagement following the much improved annual staff survey results, a member queried the rationale for RAG rating engagement as amber. The EDP said that although it is an improving picture generally, in some areas staff satisfaction indicators are not where senior managers would like them to be. Progress on the follow-up work at college and team level should help Staff Engagement to move to a green RAG rating.

Turnover rate, after a period of very low turnover there had been an uptick in leavers in June/July. The EDP said that the pandemic had possibly discouraged people changing jobs. The pattern of employment in teaching does mean that people tend to move jobs at the end of a term or college year so this is not unexpected. The overall rate remains below that reported in AoC sector surveys.

- 5.3 The committee received the report and members were assured that the college is implementing the People policies effectively.

21/4/6 **People Policy Review: Capability**

- 6.1 The EDP presented the proposed new policy for managing concerns about capability. It was noted that currently, where capability issues are escalated to possible dismissal it is dealt with via the Disciplinary Policy. This is confusing for some managers and staff and therefore the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) have developed a separate capability policy to make it clear that this is about performance rather than conduct.
- 6.2 The committee considered the proposed policy and commented as follows

Discrimination, it was commented that when and how managers use procedures can differ depending on how well they know and like a member of staff. This can work against staff who are different, who may find themselves referred to a formal procedure for conduct that is dealt with informally for someone else. The EDP said that People Business Partners work with managers across the college to ensure that procedures are applied fairly and proportionately.

Communication, this important policy should be communicated via the college newsletter and emailed to all staff of the college and its companies.

Improvements, members recommended the following improvements to make the process clearer

EDP 30.10.
21

- i) Add a flowchart showing the stages and timescales,
- ii) Cross-refer to the Appeals Policy to ensure that staff understand when and how they can appeal.
- iii) review the timescales for how long a warning remains on an employee's HR record.

The timings should be the same across relevant policies and ideally the same for all written warnings at 12 months for both

- 6.3 The committee approved the policy subject to comments above and delegated authority to the EDP to finalise the policy for publication.

21/4/7 People Policy Review: Remote Working

- 7.1 The EDP presented a new policy intended to replace the previous policy on working from home. The new policy had been developed in consultation with the Health and Safety Working Group and is intended to allow managers and staff discretion in determining where best work is done flexibly. The draft is still to be presented to the Joint Consultative Committee for comment.

- 7.2 Members discussed the draft policy and the main points were as follows.

- **Facilities and equipment**, it should be clear that the college should offer on-site facilities where staff do not have the right facilities and space at home to work remotely.
- **New starters**, the EDP said that the college is communicating to applicants that remote working will be expected in some roles and some applicants are asking about the college's policy on this. Members recommended that the policy should reflect the importance for new staff of induction being in person.
- **Customer service standards** for students and other staff should be prioritised when deciding which roles are suitable for long term remote working. The EDP said that the college is prioritising on-site presence of teams who are student facing and, during the phased return of other staff, would be monitoring the impact of hybrid working on services.
- **Leadership**, members stressed the importance of the positive impact that leaders and managers have achieved by being visible and accessible to staff and students.
- **Phasing**, the CEP said that the table setting out minimum expectations for on-campus working reflects current priorities to manage the risks of over-crowding on campus by phasing the return of some business support staff. This might change if the number of Covid cases in the community changes. It is an operational matter, separate to the policy.

- 7.3 The committee agreed that the college needed to continue to phase the return of staff to campus appropriately considering safety and optimising student presence on campus. There may be benefits of long-term remote working for some staff groups due to better use of space. The long-term policy needs to address appropriateness, fairness and productivity more explicitly than the draft. For curriculum staff, it is important to test mixed mode learning approaches to ensure they were having the intended impact. For business support staff, the current phased return is a useful pilot to assess hybrid working.

- 7.4 The committee supported the ELT to continue its current phased return to campus, review the long-term policy proposals in the light of the discussion and experience. It was agreed

ACTION the committee should schedule a further discussion about the business model later in the year.

Clerk 16.3.22

21/4/8 Learner recruitment update

- 8.1 Andrew Hartley, Executive Director Commercial and Operations (EDCO) presented a confidential update on the recruitment process and progress against targets. Some discussion is recorded in a confidential minute due to commercial sensitivity. of recruitment reported that recruitment
- 8.3 The committee received the report and endorsed the actions senior managers are taking to address areas where recruitment is below target.

21/4/9 Commercial and Business Development update

- 9.1 EDCO presented a confidential report on the outturn for 2020-21 and the outlook for commercial income in 2021-22. For apprenticeships, members noted there is growth starting in some sectors, such as health and social care, and continuing uncertainty in others. The college's Kick Start Gateway is performing strongly and the college is part of a successful group tender for providing more Digital Bootcamps.

- 9.2 Governors considered the report and the main points discussed were as follows.

Young people choosing apprenticeships and whether this had been affected by the number of 18-year-olds progressing to university. The EDCO said that employment opportunities for young people were not necessarily attractive in summer 2021. Young people had been disproportionately affected during the pandemic and with many employers being hesitant about taking on new apprentices there were probably a lot fewer attractive apprenticeship opportunities than normal.

Uncertainty, members commented that the next 12-18 months will be difficult for many employers making it hard for them to commit to new apprenticeships. However, with labour shortages at all levels and supply chains disrupted, the college can help persuade employers that they cannot afford to miss another recruitment cycle. The college must be ready with options for students and employers who have not been able to find/offer the right opportunity yet. It was suggested that the college keep under close review the amber RAG rating for apprenticeships as external factors could easily make this red.

Apprenticeship completion rates have been affected by the pandemic. Members supported that the college is focusing its resources on supporting these apprentices through to end point assessment in 2021-22. A relatively slow pace of growth in new

apprenticeship is helpful in maximising support for current apprentices to re-engage and complete. In quarter 2, the college will be aiming to use its newly restructured Employer Engagement team and account managers to accelerate growth, as capacity is released by last year's apprentices completing.

- 9.3 The committee received the report for assurance and supported the work outlined in the Next Steps to develop further its support for employer engagement.

20/4/10 Finance Report (Period 12) 2020-21

- 10.1 Martin Harrison Executive Director Finance (EDF) presented the report commenting that the report is work in progress as some income for 2020-21 is still to be recognised.
- 10.2 Members considered the report and the main issues discussed were the reasons for the differences with the Period 9 forecast, when cash balances had seemed stronger. The EDF said that this was due to slow invoicing for some projects and other projects being started towards the end of the year. Although lower than P.9, cash balances at P.12 remained healthy but this did not include capital receipts for projects completing this term.
- 10.3 The committee received the report and members were reassured that despite the impact of the pandemic on income, the college is in good financial health, it met its bank covenants in 2020-21 and its cash position is secure going into 2021-22.

21/4/11 Finance in year update 2021-22

- 11.1 The EDF presented the update on the college's current position and the main issues discussed were
- The college's borrowing including refinancing loans that are due to mature in 2021-22.
 - Updates on its Lennartz case with HMRC and
 - Changes in the Finance Team and what if any impact this is having on the capacity and efficiency of the team.

Some of the discussion is recorded in a separate confidential minute for reasons of commercial sensitivity.

- 11.6 The committee received the report and requested that an update on progress on refinancing be circulated to members of FEGP and ARAC as soon as possible and before the next meeting. EDF 3.10.21

21/4/12 Higher Education Tuition Fee Policy review

- 12.1 The committee approved the policy to continue in 2022-23 with factual updates to reflect the new period.

ACTION return fees information to the Office for Students and publish the policy on the external website VP THEAS 30.9.21

21/4/13 Treasury Management policy review and annual report

- 13.1 The Committee received the review and approved the policy.

21/4/14 Financial Regulations and Scheme of Delegation

- 14.1 The EDF introduced the changes, as described in the version history at the beginning of the policy. The committee considered the updates and agreed

ACTIONS

- a) The EDF and Clerk to review the use of the word “guidance” to ensure that it is clear which regulations require staff to comply (“must”) and what is guidance. EDF Clerk 30.9.21
- b) Streamline where possible by linking or cross referencing to other policies such as data protection.
- 14.2 The committee approved on behalf of the Governing Body the updated Financial Regulations, subject to the changes above.

21/4/15 Health and Safety annual report and update

- 15.1 The EDCO presented the Health and Safety update including an annual report on 2020-21 and a look ahead to 2021-22. The report included that
- **Accidents**, the number of accidents in 2020-21 had again reduced compared to previous years. Although there had been fewer people on campus for much of the year, most of the students had been engaged in practical learning so the reduction was welcome;
 - **COVID-19** continues to be a significant issue to manage in 2021-22 as more people return to workplaces and social activities and cases rise. The college is anticipating some disruption in the new term, with more staff reporting positive tests. The ELT Covid Response Team is continuing to meet weekly to respond as the situation develops. The Governor COVID-19 Group met at the end of August, they endorsed the college’s plans for full opening and are meeting again in October to review the next iteration of the outbreak plan
 - **Fire Risk Assessment**, managers are completing the actions. The Health and Safety Team checks all work before actions are agreed as complete. There will be a new Fire Risk Assessment in summer 2021-22 to verify progress and reassess the risk status. This is RAG rated as amber because there are still lower priority actions in progress.
 - **New interim Head of Health and Safety** is doing some very good work on the college’s Health and Safety strategy, working with staff on fostering a positive health and safety culture.
- 15.2 Members welcomed the report and in discussion made the following points.

Profile and culture of health and safety, the previous head of health and safety had identified issues with culture and recommended some improvements, how were these being addressed. The EDCO said that the points had been thoroughly considered with the new Interim Head, who had presented to a governor event on the steps being taken to address gaps and develop a positive health and safety culture. Some actions are still in progress, in line with the plan, and new health and safety working groups are being convened to engage more staff in making their team and local workspace safer.

Staff resource, the committee welcomed that the college is investing in health and safety with the appointment of new roles, a Senior Health & Safety Advisor and Health & Welfare Officer. This is additional capacity will also help the college to expand its network for student work placements and, where appropriate, support remote working health and safety assessments for staff.

Fire awareness and prevention, members welcomed the progress on the fire risk assessment and asked how the college is promoting increased awareness amongst staff and students of the importance of fire prevention. The EDCO said that the strategy is for training local working groups and champions to take forward health and safety roles, including the fire warden role. The college maintains a rota of fire wardens to ensure there is adequate cover at all sites even though some wardens may still be working remotely in their main role.

- 15.3 The Committee received the report. Members commented that the Health and Safety presentation and discussion at the Governor event had been very well received. Safety for everyone at college continues to be an important priority for the whole Governing Body and FEGP agreed to continue to seek assurance on the college's progress with its new health and safety working groups and an expanded team.

Holly Anderson re-joined the meeting.

21/4/16 Any other business: UCU notification of an industrial dispute

- 16.1 The CEP reported that on 14 September she had received a notice of strike action from the University and College Union (UCU) on 28 September 2021 and 6-7 October. This followed the college improving its offer to UCU on local pay and conditions. She said that UCU were balloting members on this offer with a recommendation to accept. The college hopes that members will accept the improved offer and call off the proposed action. ELT is preparing in case action goes ahead.
- 16.2 The committee thanked the CEP and ELT for their work on achieving a positive outcome to negotiations and hoped that they had been able to avert strike action that would have disrupted the college at a critical time for new and returning students. Members asked for an update on the outcome of the ballot. It was noted that the approved budget accommodates the

enhanced pay award although this will inevitably have a bearing on the affordability of future pay awards.

21/4/17 Review of meeting and closing remarks

- 17.1 As recommended in the external review of governance, members considered the impact of the meeting on students and commented,
- governors setting clear expectations with ELT on cash balances and finance KPI targets means that the college has been able to invest more in capital projects and developments to support students.
 - Because the college's finances are on a firmer footing, the college has been able to offer staff a pay award that is higher than that of many other colleges. Averting strike action and improving staff satisfaction with pay, as far as it can, will have a direct positive impact on students being able to attend college this term without disruption.
 - The committee's continuing priority on health and safety signals to all staff that safety matters. In addition, giving students a good grounding in workplace health and safety is an important aspect of formation training in all disciplines.
- 17.2 Members also commented that meeting face-to-face has been quicker and have made a positive impact on the quality of discussion. The main area where the committee is seeking assurance is on loans and the area where members would like to seek further assurance from ELT is the long-term strategy for remote working.

21/4/18 Date and time of next meeting

24 November 2021 at 0830-10.00 in the New Boardroom City Campus

16 March 2022 at 0830-10.30 in the New Boardroom City Campus

22 June 2022 at 0830-10.30 in the New Boardroom City Campus