

BRACKNELL & WOKINGHAM COLLEGE

Minutes of a Meeting of the Corporation Wednesday 16 March 2011 held at Church Road Conference Room from 0830 hrs – 1030 hrs

Present:

Rev N Parish (Chair)
Mrs H Barnett
Mr I Brown
Mrs A Constable
Mr R Cops
Mr S Diegan
Mr M Dudson
Mrs J Gay
Mrs D Hayes
Mrs L Holdway
Mrs J Hughes
Mr H O’Keeffe (Principal)
Mrs L Klassen-Brown
Mr M Lovett
Mr J Meller
Mr D Passby

In attendance:

Mr M Adams (Deputy Principal – Curriculum)
Mrs S Ford (Director of Human Resources)
Mr F Perry (Deputy Principal – Resources)
Mr J Taylor (Director of Quality and Standards)
Mr B Uzzell (Director of Student Services)
Mr C Williams (Clerk)
Mr M Williams (Director of Information Services)

Apologies: Dr N Jorgensen; Mr A Stevens; Ms G Thomas; Mr P Wagstaff

Corporation Member Training and Development

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, as part of the Corporation Member Development Programme, Mrs Hilary Omissi, Director of Post-16 Commissioning gave a presentation. She worked for the Berkshire SRG. Originally all the unitaries had participated but Bracknell Forest Council will withdraw on 31 August 2011.

Nationally there were four important developments:

- The Teaching (Schools White Paper) November 2010 and Education Bill – January 2011.

- Statutory Guidance on Funding Arrangements for 16-19 education and Training (December 2010).
- Wolf Report (March 2011).
- Support and Aspiration – a new Approach to Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Disability (Green Paper – March 2011).

The White Paper showed that the Government remained committed to raising the age of participation to 17 and then 18 but it was not proposed to enforce the requirement and the subject would be reviewed in 2014. In addition a Curriculum Review would commence in 2013.

Changes to funding arrangements would hit Berkshire schools hard – it was estimated in total that £5.5m would be lost. The abolition of EMA (Education Maintenance Allowance) would also impact adversely on educational establishments.

The Wolf Report had only just been published and was still being digested. It was a major piece of work and Mrs Omissi's view was that the College was well-positioned to deal with the challenges it posed. She quoted Alastair Thomson of NIACE: *“Those whose initial schooling failed to instil a habit of learning are often motivated to return to education through vocationally-orientated courses. However modest a qualification is, it acts as an affirmation of worth and recognition of achievement.”*

Mrs Omissi then set down what she saw to be the challenges facing the College:

- Positioning the College for Raising Participation and Wolf.
- Developing school partnerships and assisting vocational progression to and from the College.
- Flexible starts throughout the year.
- Review provision for NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training) and Students with Learning Disabilities.
- Work to meet employers' needs in relation to apprenticeships.
- Cope with a major reduction in central funding.

Mrs Omissi was thanked for a very interesting and informative presentation.

01/11 – Declarations of Interest and Eligibility To Serve

All Corporation Members were asked to complete the Declaration of Interest and Eligibility that had been circulated with the Agenda. No new Declarations of Interest were declared at the meeting.

02/11 – Election of Chair for Ensuing Year

The Rev N Parish announced that owing to pressure of work, he was standing down as Chair but he would be able to remain as a Corporation Member. It was proposed by Mr Dudson, seconded by the Rev Parish and there being no other nominations, it was

Resolved: That Mrs Linda Klassen-Brown be elected as Chair for the ensuing year.

Mrs Klassen-Brown thanked the Corporation Members for their support and paid a warm tribute to her predecessor, who had very ably steered the College through a challenging period for six years.

03/11 – Election of Vice-Chair for Ensuing Year

With Mrs Klassen-Brown's election as Chair there was a vacancy for Vice-Chair. It was proposed by the Chair, seconded by Mr Lovett, and there being no other nominations

Resolved: That Mr Robin Cops be elected as Vice-Chair for the ensuing year.

04/11 - Membership

Following his move to Shropshire, Dr David Stirling had resigned as a Corporation Member, which meant that there was now a vacancy on the Corporation. The Corporation had at its previous meeting appointed Mr Ian Brown as a co-opted member of the Audit Committee and Corporation, until such time as a permanent vacancy arose and there was an expectation that Mr Brown would fill the vacancy that had now arisen.

However, at its last Special Meeting the Corporation had decided that it needed to diversify its membership by seeking more female and ethnic minority Corporation Members. It was decided that this apparent conflict could be resolved by both appointing Mr Brown to fill the vacancy and to carry out a Skills Audit on the composition of the Corporation.

Dr Stirling had also been the Corporation's nominee for Safeguarding issues. Mrs Anne Constable had kindly agreed to take on this role.

- Resolved:**
- (1) That Mr Ian Brown be appointed as a Corporation Member for a period of four years.
 - (2) That a Corporation Members' Skills Audit be undertaken to identify imbalances in the composition of the Corporation with a view to assisting the Search Committee when interviewing possible new Corporation Members.
 - (4) That Mrs Anne Constable be appointed as the Corporation's nominee for Safeguarding Issues in place of Dr Stirling.
 - (3) That the Corporation's thanks be extended to Dr David Stirling for his major contribution to the work of the Corporation and for his excellent chairing of the Curriculum and Quality Committee.

Mr Brown then joined the meeting and was welcomed by the Chair.

05/11 – Minutes of Corporation Meeting held on 8 December 2010

The Minutes of the previous meeting of the Corporation were approved and signed by the Chair.

06/11 – Minutes of the Audit Committee held on 1 March 2011

The Minutes were presented by Mr Diegan, who had been appointed as chairman of the meeting in Mr Wagstaff's absence.

The external auditors had commented on the fact that the College was in a third year of deficit and this raised the question of the College's ability to remain in existence as a going concern, but the auditors were satisfied that the College were aware of the problem and were tackling it. There was also an issue as regards the treatment of FRS adjustments and whether the resultant gain should be shown as income or in the reserves. Overall this was a good management letter.

The Internal Auditors had commented that the control environment was good. The auditors now operated a traffic light system and of the areas examined in detail Key Financial Controls and Long term Planning had been graded Amber Plus and Health & Safety Amber minus.

The Auditors were also arguing in favour of the College having a medium and long term strategic plan. There were so many uncertainties around at the present time that the SMT was reluctant to spend time on this but nevertheless the Committee felt that in spite of all the problems the auditors' view should be supported and the SMT should be encouraged to develop a medium to long term strategic plan for consideration by the Corporation.

Resolved: That the Minutes of the Audit Committee be received.

07/11 – Minutes of Curriculum and Quality Committee – 16 February 2011

The Minutes were presented by Mr Lovett, who had been elected Chair in place of Dr Stirling.

The College had made progress in increasing class sizes and was now at the College average with average class sizes of 12.8.

The Deputy Principal (Curriculum) had given an update on curriculum matters. As a result of the many changes that were taking place nationally the College was facing both challenges and opportunities. The loss of adult education grant and reduction of EMA represented major challenges but Wick Hill was proving a success and as mentioned by Mrs Omissi, the College was well positioned to benefit from the changes advocated in the Wolf Report.

Minute 12/11 referred to the minimum level of performance required by the Skills Funding Agency to justify funding. For various reasons a very small number of the College's courses were below the required threshold and would either have to improve or face closure.

The replacement of EMA (Education Maintenance Allowances) by a less generous scheme would also have an adverse effect on the College.

Resolved: That the Minutes of the Curriculum and Quality Committee be received.

08/11 – Minutes of Resources Committee – 3 March 2011

The Minutes were presented by Mr Dudson.

He stated that the College was facing serious financial problems. As set out in Appendix 2 of the Budget Monitoring Report the difference between income and expenditure now amounted to £447K. Student numbers were down, particularly in relation to Train 2 Gain. There was an overspend on the capital programme due to the cost of equipment, which was the College's responsibility. On the other hand the College had achieved a favourable settlement in the dispute with the Telecoms operators. The College's financial problems had not been helped by the failure of HMRC to repay the College the Lennartz monies that were owed on the VAT reclaim. The College had had to take out a short term overdraft to cover the shortfall until the payment was received.

The way the College proposed to respond to these financial problems would be considered later in the meeting.

Resolved: That the Minutes of the Resources Committee be received.

09/11 – Course Fees 2011-2012

The Principal submitted a paper (not reproduced) recommending that course fees be increased by approximately 5%. The Principal stated that it was a case of charging what it was thought the market would bear.

As funding rules had been changed as regards vocational courses to restrict remission of fees to just those on job seekers' allowance and similar, he proposed the College adopt the same policy.

Regarding non-vocational courses he proposed that the College no longer discounted fees to the over 65s. No funding was received to cover this discount. He proposed that in future evening courses should charge £6 an hour and day classes £5.

The Principal was asked if there was any comparison with the fees being charged by other colleges. He replied that this was difficult as provision varied so much from college to college.

Resolved: That the schedule of proposed fees for 2011-2012 be approved.

10/11 – Annual Report on Child Protection 2009-2010

The Report had been prepared and was submitted by Mr Brian Uzzell, the Director of Student Services.

Policies and procedures had been revised and the report set out the training that was in place for designated child protection officers and staff dealing with vulnerable adults. College staff were also liaising with the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

The report summarised anonymously a number of cases involving vulnerable College students and the steps that had been undertaken, in most cases successfully, to enable them to complete their chosen course.

Resolved: That the Report be received.

11/11 – Wick Hill Opening Event

The Principal advised that he was in touch with BFC and WBC to agree on a date for an official opening of Wick Hill. He had suggested a lunch time in June.

For Information

12/11 – Student Member Update

Mr Meller stated that College Relief was busy raising funds for its chosen charities, which were “Help for Heroes” and “Fight Teenage Cancer”. Discussions were also taking place on the location of the smoking area.

For Information

13/11 – Staff Liaison Committee Report

Mrs Jan Gay gave a report. It transpired that many staff were unaware of the existence of the committee, so a poster campaign had been undertaken. The financial position and its effect on the curriculum had been discussed.

Parking had been raised as it had been noticed that there were often unused car park spaces in the area behind the barrier.

Several Corporation Members had attended meetings of the committee and Mrs Gay said that this was very much appreciated by staff. The next Staff Liaison Committee meeting would be held on 23 May at 1530 hrs.

For Information

14/11 – Minutes of Academic Board – 7 March 2011

The Principal presented the Minutes but said that there were no matters he wished to draw to the attention of the Corporation.

Resolved: That the Minutes of the Academic Board be received.

15/11 – Corporation Members' Attendance – 2010–2011

The Clerk submitted a report (not reproduced) detailing Corporation Members' attendance at Corporation and Committee meetings. The Corporation had set a target of 70% and this had been well exceeded in spite of several Corporation Members experiencing personal problems either through illness, or in two cases, deaths of their spouses.

Mr Diegan, Mr Dudson, the Principal and Mrs Colbourne, the former Academic staff Corporation Member now succeeded by Mrs Constable, had all managed 100% attendance.

Resolved: That the Clerk's Report be noted and received.

16/11 – Budget Monitoring Report – 31 January 2011

The Deputy Principal (Resources) submitted a Report (not reproduced). He stated that expenditure was within budget and under control. The College's problem lay with income, which was declining. The Balance Sheet in Appendix 3 and Cash Flow Statement in Appendix 4 showed that financially the College was now in a weak position. It had a long-term loan of £5.6m and had had to take out an overdraft of £1.3m to cover the shortfall in income as a result of the delay by HMRC in re-funding the VAT due to the College as a result of the Lennartz case.

Mr Dudson stated that creditors were now in excess of current assets and Mr Brown commented that the ratio was now 0.3, whereas you would expect it be around 1-2. He wondered if the Deputy Principal had considered allocating budgets on the basis of full overhead recovery as a way of showing budget holders the true cost of their activity. The Deputy Principal stated that he had seen this system in operation at Newbury College, but in his view it confused rather than assisted budget holders, so he would not advocate introducing it at the College.

Resolved: That the January 2011 Budget Monitoring Report be received.

17/11 – Principal's Report – Spring Term 2011

The Principal had distributed a written report (not reproduced).

Pensions had become an issue because of the Hutton Report and the possibility that public sector pension contributions would be increased. The Unions were talking

about industrial action if this proved to be the case and the UCU had declared a one-day strike next week. It remained to be seen how much support the Union received.

March had seen the publication of the much awaited Wolf Review into vocational education. The report runs to 200 pages and makes 27 recommendations. Further education colleges come out of the report quite well, with Professor Wolf stating that most vocational provision in FE colleges is of good quality. Major changes are proposed such as permitting colleges to enrol students from the age of 14 and allowing college lecturers to teach in schools. Professor Wolf would like schools to be able to use vocational specialists, many of whom are already FE college lecturers, and she would like to see school funding tied into programmes rather than qualifications.

As ever, implementing the report would in part depend on funding being put in place and with public sector funding having to be cut to address the deficit, many of the recommendations might well remain just recommendations.

Resolved: That the Principal's Report be received.

18/11 – Social Event

The Principal suggested that to mark the Rev Nick Parish's retirement after six years as Chair and his own departure, the Corporation might wish to hold a modest social event. He suggested that if the start of the next Corporation meeting on 13 July was put back to 1030 hrs, the social event could follow on.

Resolved: That the Principal's suggestion be approved and the next meeting of the Corporation commence at 1030 hrs.

19/11 – Date of Next Meeting

Wednesday 13 July at 1030 hrs in Church Road Conference Room.

CW/JHOK/BPW20110505