

BRACKNELL AND WOKINGHAM COLLEGE

Minutes of a Meeting of the Corporation Wednesday 9 December 2009 held at Church Road Conference Room from 8.30am – 10.30am

Present:

Rev N Parish (Chair)
Mrs H Barnett
Mrs J Colbourne
Mr R Cops
Mr S Diegan
Mr M Dudson
Miss K Galvin
Mrs J Gay
Mrs D Hayes
Ms L Holdway
Mrs J Hughes
Dr N Jorgensen
Mr H O'Keeffe (Principal)
Mr R Knight
Mr M Lovett
Mr D Passby
Mr A Stevens
Dr D Stirling
Mr P Wagstaff

In attendance

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

Apologies: Mrs L Klassen-Brown

Member Training & Development

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, as part of the Member Development Programme, Ms Saskia Larsen, Employee Development Manager, gave a presentation on the work of her section.

She outlined the key elements of the Employee Development Scheme, which covered an induction development programme; skills training and career development. There were regular appraisals and the programme involved CPD (continuous professional development). Ms Larsen was asked by Mr Dudson how the department coped with CPD in fast moving subjects such as physics and engineering. She stated that the section made great use of IT and was also finding that the professional bodies such as City & Guilds and the Electrical Installation Institute were increasingly prepared to come to the college to talk to students.

Ms Larsen was thanked for a most interesting and informative presentation.

62/09 – Election of Chair for ensuing year

It was proposed by Mr Dudson; seconded by Mr Cops and

Resolved: That the Rev Nick Parish be re-elected as Chair for the ensuing year.

The Rev Parish thanked the members for their support.

63/09 – Election of Vice-Chair for ensuing year

It was proposed by Dr Stirling; seconded by Mrs Hughes.

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

64/09 - Student Members

The Principal stated that there was now a requirement that two places on the Corporation be allocated to student members. The Corporation had previously agreed that one place should be allocated to a person selected by the full-time 16-18 year group and the other to what for want of a better word might be termed “mature” students. Miss Kayleigh Galvin had been re-elected as the nominee of the 16-18 year group and the nominee of the mature students group was awaited.

The Chair welcomed Miss Galvin to the meeting.

Resolved: That Miss Kayleigh Galvin be appointed as a student member for the ensuing year.

65/09 – Parent Member

The Principal stated that there was a requirement for sixth form colleges to now have at least one parent member. In the case of general FE colleges the College had the option and this College had decided to exercise it. The position had been advertised and Ms Lynda Holdway, a colleague of Mr Diegan, had put her name forward.

The Chairman welcomed Ms Holdway to the meeting.

Resolved: That Ms Lynda Holdway became a parent co-opted member for a period of one year.

66/09 – Membership

The Corporation formally noted the resignation of Mr David Scott. Mr Scott had previously been thanked for his considerable contribution to the work of the college over many years.

For Information

67/09 - Declarations of Interest

No new declarations of interest were declared.

68/09 – Minutes of Corporation Meeting held on 8 July 2009

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

69/09 – Introduction of Student Member and update on their time in the College and student activities

The Chairman varied the order of business to take this item as Miss Galvin had to leave the meeting early.

Miss Galvin stated that there had been interest in becoming a student member, as a result of which there had been an election. 400 students had voted and she had received 27 more votes than the runner-up.

The Students Union had been active in organising charity events and charity fund-raising had raised more than £1,000.

Miss Galvin was asked how her colleagues found the College and whether they were experiencing problems.

She replied that overall students were very pleased with the College but there were, however, a number of niggles, which she hoped would be eliminated as the building settled down e.g. heating, tables not matching; rooms sometimes too small; not enough space inside the Café in winter, when it is too cold to sit outside. There is also a feeling that the building is a bit dull and could do with brightening up with pictures and posters. Her colleagues liked the food in the Café, though some felt it was on the expensive side.

Miss Galvin was thanked for her report.

70/09 – Minutes of the Audit Committee held on 2 December 2009

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

Minute 28/09 (College Report and Financial Statements) showed the deficit had doubled from £1,003K in 2007/2008 to £2,166K in 2008/2009, on account of income reducing and expenditure increasing. The Resources Committee would be meeting in the New Year to address the problem.

Referring to Minute 29/09 (Management Letter), there were no matters needing to be brought to the attention of the Corporation.

Minute 30/09 (Framework for Excellence) required the College to rate its financial performance. The Deputy Principal had recommended the Committee to downgrade the College rating from "Good" to "Satisfactory". The Committee had queried this as the College's financial controls and planning were good but had eventually accepted the Deputy Principal's recommendation in the knowledge that it was highly unlikely there would be any untoward consequences for the College.

Minute 31/09 referred to the Internal Audit Annual Report for 2008-09. This was highly satisfactory and the Auditors had found that the College had adequate and effective risk management, control and governance processes to manage its achievement of the College's objectives.

Minute 32/09 referred to the Audit Committee Annual Report for 2008-2009 to the Corporation. The full Report had been sent out with the Corporation Agenda.

Minute 33/09 (Log of Audit Recommendations) contained a number of long outstanding recommendations, which the Committee felt management should consider deleting, giving reasons, if there were no reasonable prospect of compliance.

Risk management was covered in Minute 34/09. All committees would be asked to review their responsibilities in the spring cycle of meetings.

Resolved: (1) That the Audit Committee's Annual Report to the Corporation for 2008-2009 be received
(2) That the Minutes of the Audit Committee be received.

71/09 – Minutes of Curriculum and Quality Committee held on 5 November 2009

The Minutes were presented by Dr. Stirling. He said that there were no matters to which he wished to draw the Corporation's attention.

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

72/09 – Minutes of Resources Committee held on 12 November 2009

The Minutes were presented by Mr Dudson.

He stated that the College was facing serious financial problems and the Committee would be meeting on the 3 February to consider a financial plan to put to the Corporation for approval.

The first area of concern was an adverse variance on the budget of £586K. Secondly, there was a possibility that claims on the building contract would end up being settled in excess of the contingency provision. Thirdly, it was highly likely that financial provision for the FE sector would be heavily cut as part of the government attempts to reduce the national budget deficit. Fourthly, staffing costs as a percentage of expenditure were now in excess of 80%. The target recommended by the auditors was 70% and the sector norm was 66%. Fifthly, the College had been refunded £1m VAT under the Lennarz case but this was in effect a loan and would need to be repaid in instalments.

Sixthly, the College needed to budget for a surplus.

The Principal stated that it had been decided to move everyone into the new building and then review staffing. The aim would be to increase class sizes towards 14-15 per class on average and would require staff reductions. The exercise would be planned and the results would be put to Resources Committee in February.

The Deputy Principal (Resources) said that it was not clear as yet what the final outcome would be on contractual claims, but on a worst case scenario, the College would have to pay £400K over and above the contingency provision. However, this would be repayable over the life of the contract i.e. 30 years, and would therefore amount to approximately £15K a year, which was manageable.

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

73/09 – 2008-2009 Report and Financial Statements

The Report and Financial Statements were presented by the Deputy Principal (Resources).

The deficit for the year had increased from £1,003K to £2,166K as a result of increased expenditure from £13,665K to £14,084K and a reduction in funding income from £12,662K to £11,906K.

The College had budgeted for a deficit for the year of £1,332K, excluding FRS 17 pension adjustments. The final operating deficit for the year was £1,918K (excluding FRS 17 adjustments). The main variation was attributable to double accounting of income from Workforce Development. That used to be paid to the College but was now being paid to departments and the change had not been picked up. Overall the College's finances were still in line with the financial forecasts approved at the start of the project and as a result of the Lennarz VAT refunds, the College's cash position was better than had been expected.

Resolved: That the College Report and Financial Statements for 2008-2009 be approved.

74/09 – College Self-Assessment Report 2008-2009

The Report was presented by the Director of Quality and Standards.

The overall College grade was “Good” as was the case last year. Financial health had been graded “Satisfactory” for the reasons discussed when approving the Audit Committee minutes (minute 70/09). The other “Satisfactory” rating arose in relation to Success Rates. The issue here was retention. Those students who completed courses did extremely well.

Resolved: That the College Self-Assessment Report for 2008-2009 be approved.

75/09 – Corporation Members’ Development Event

The Principal stated that he would like the Corporation to develop the focus group concept, involving learners, in order to assist the move from “Good” to “Outstanding”. He would ask his PA to canvass members for a suitable date.

For Information

76/09 – Corporation Members’ Self-Assessment Report – 2008-2009

The Report was presented by the Clerk.

He stated that he had included the results of previous years for comparison purposes and the Corporation could see that there had been a year-on-year improvement. The results this year were slightly in excess of “Good”.

There was then a general discussion on what action the College needed to take to achieve an outstanding grading.

Dr Stirling stated that it was important to keep focused on the primary aim of the College, which was to achieve a “Good” result for learners. Mr Cops suggested that the College examine the criteria under which Ofsted operated but the Principal stated that the criteria kept changing. He added that the College assessment system had integrity and it was more a case of persuading departmental heads to raise their self-assessment ratings than the reverse.

Mrs Hayes suggested that the Corporation needed to recruit ethnic minority members – there were none at present.

Mr Cops suggested that the Corporation appoint a working party, tasked to work with focus groups to see what steps were needed to achieve “Outstanding”.

The Chairman queried whether the Corporation would have to give up some subject areas if they judged the areas in question were incapable of achieving “Outstanding” rating. Such action would require the Corporation to change its mission.

Dr Stirling stated that the Corporation had to realise that moving from “Good” to “Outstanding” would not happen overnight – it would be a long hard struggle.

Mr Dudson asked the Principal to circulate an up-to-date organisation chart to him. The Principal stated that he would do this. The Corporation was also reminded that this and various other documents could be found on the college intranet, to which members had access.

Resolved: That the Members’ Self-Assessment Report be received.

77/09 – Minutes of Academic Board – 16 November 2009

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.

78/09 – Budget Monitoring Report – October 2009

The Deputy Principal presented the report. An overspending against the approved budget of £83K is currently forecast, as a consequence of an expected shortfall in funding for Workbased learning but it was planned to eliminate the deficit by the year-end.

Train 2 Gain income was well down and some activity areas had been hit by recession. Management was also trying to work out the cost of running the new building – at the moment it was difficult to work out how much the ground source heating was costing.

Mr Perry was asked about staffing and replied that the budget was based on cost rather than numbers, which fluctuated during the course of the year.

Resolved: That the October Budget Monitoring Report be received.

79/09 – Quality Improvement Development Plan (QIDP) – 2008-2009 Final Summary Update November 2009

The final Summary of the 2008-2009 QIDP was presented by the Director of Quality and Standards.

Colour coding had now been introduced to indicate progress. 41 actions had been achieved; 19 were work in progress and five had not been achieved.

Mr Dudson commented that section 13 on staff learner ratios did not contain any statistical or financial measures, so that it was difficult to judge progress year-on-year. He made a request that wherever possible financial/statistical measures should be introduced.

Resolved: That the QIDP Final Summary be received and the Director of Quality and Standards be thanked for the Report.

80/09 – Business Planning for 2010-2011

The Principal stated that the funding position was likely to worsen, and the FE sector was facing major cuts. The LSC was being disbanded on 31 March 2010 to be replaced by the Skills Funding and Young Persons Funding agencies, which was an added complication, but next year's financial planning process would continue to be handled by the LSC.

For Information

81/09 – Official Opening of New College

The Principal stated that he had been advised by the Lord Lieutenant's Office that the Queen would not be available to open the new building, as she was now cutting back on the number of her official engagements. An approach was now being made to Prince Andrew or Prince Edward.

For Information

82/09 – Principal's Report – Autumn Term 2009

The Principal had circulated a written report. The Principal had already referred to anticipated cuts in the sector, a leaked press report putting these at £340m with Train 2 Gain being very heavily cut. The capital programme would also be cut back, so the College had obtained their new building just in time.

With an election pending, the opposition had announced support for new university technical colleges for 14-19 year olds (i.e. academies) and had stated that they would allow FE colleges to compete with schools for 14-16 year olds.

It appeared that some colleges were indulging in sharp practice to inflate success rates. The Chief Executive of the LSC had written to colleges demanding such practices cease forthwith. This College was not one of the culprits.

An interesting and hard hitting report from King's College argued that the FE sector had been "devastated" by central planning over the past 30 years, that had wasted £2billion on activities that added no value to learners' lives and had not achieved any growth of the gross domestic product. Quangos were constantly being created and disbanded, at last 20 in the past four years! The FE sector was seen as the means of a "quick fix" solution to cure all of society's social ills, which was unrealistic. The regulatory system was also being constantly changed.

It was suggested that whoever won the election would inherit an FE "wasteland" requiring fundamental reforms.

Resolved: That the Principal's report be received.

83/09 – Annual Review

The Principal stated that the Annual Review was still being prepared and would be circulated to members as soon as it was complete.

84/09 – Date of next meeting

Wednesday 17 March 2010 at 0830hrs in Church Road Conference Room.

CW/JHOK/BPW/TK161209..