

The City of Liverpool College
Minutes of the Board meeting held on 21st January 2014

Present:

Ms Louise Barry
Ms Elaine Bowker (Principal)
Ms Charlotte Burns (Student Governor)
Dr Martin Carey
Ms Sue Carmichael
Ms Gemma Charters (Staff Governor)
Ms Clare Crowther
Mr John Denny
Mr Charles King (Student Governor)
Ms Vivienne Lacey (Vice Chair)
Mr John Nolan (Staff Governor)
Mr Ian Pollitt
Cllr Nick Small
Dr Peter Tavernor
Mr David Wilson

In Attendance:

Gill Banks (VP Curriculum)
Angela Cox (Deputy Principal)
David McIntyre (VP Finance & Corporate Resources)
Christine Lenderyou (Clerk to the Board)
Karon Brownbill (SFA)
Mark Frith (EFA)
John Dwyer (for part of meeting)
Steven Jarvis (for part of meeting)

14.1. Appointment of Governors to the Board

The Board had previously identified a need to strengthen its financial expertise. The Clerk advised the Board that she and the Principal had met with Mr Brian Cronin, Chief Executive of Your Housing. Mr Cronin was a qualified accountant with vast experience as a Financial Director. He also had experience of directing, merging and transforming large organisations and was well placed to understand public and private sector partnerships. Governors commented that Mr Cronin was also active in community based projects. The Board agreed that Mr Cronin would bring valuable skills and experience to the Board and approved his appointment.

Ms Charlotte Burns had been nominated by the student body as a student governor. Ms Burns was a student on the extended Level 3 diploma in Business and hoped to work in international business. The Board were reminded that under the Instrument & Articles of Government, the Board could only decline to appoint an elected member if either they were not eligible under the grounds set out in clause 7 of the Instrument or they had been removed as a governor from a further education college in the previous 10 years, neither of which applied to Ms Burns. Ms Burns was duly appointed by the Board.

14.2. Welcome and Apologies

In the absence of the Chair due to an unavoidable clash with his own company's Board meeting, Ms Lacey would chair the meeting in her capacity as Vice Chair.

Ms Burns, Ms Charters and Mr King were welcomed to their first Board meeting along with Ms Brownbill and Mr Frith who would be observing. Introductions were made. Apologies had been received from Mr Peter Grieve. Apologies for late arrival had been received from Councillor Small while Ms Carmichael had given apologies for her early departure.

14.3. Presentation from Curriculum Staff

John Dwyer (lecturer on Level 3 Games Design Course with 22 years industrial experience) and Stephen Jarvis (Curriculum Team Leader) gave a presentation on their recent work with the Prince's Trust and Sony. The Principal explained to the Board that as well as maintaining their usual responsibilities, Mr Jarvis and Mr Dwyer had taken a week to run an activity with the Prince's Trust and Sony with a group of people not currently in education, employment or training which had impacted positively on the students, resulting in excellent feedback.

The students were aged between 16 and 25 with a range of abilities. Within a week they were able to produce an entire level from a video game. The senior representatives from Sony in attendance had been extremely impressed by the output from the students.

Mr Dwyer explained that while there was competition locally from other providers, the College was competing on the quality of its provision and ensuring students were able to deliver within the industry. There was also a commitment to trying to increase the number of female students on the course and, in turn, the number of females working within the games industry. The students from the Prince's Trust/Sony venture had been so engaged with the activity run by the College that a number had asked to join the College as a result and consideration was being given as to how best to facilitate this.

The Principal explained that young people who came to the College had often had a negative experience of education and it was important to harness enthusiasm when it was generated, as well as cementing links with employers across the city region.

The Board thanked Mr Jarvis and Mr Dwyer for their presentation, commenting that it was a useful reminder of the purpose of the College.

Mr Dwyer and Mr Jarvis left the meeting at this point.

14.4. Declarations of Interest

The Principal and Cllr Small declared an interest in item 11 – First 4 Skills update – as they were named as directors along with Mr Brennan and Mr McIntyre.

The Principal declared an interest in items 14 and 21, along with the other senior post holders as these items related to the pay and conditions of senior post holders.

14.5. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 3rd December were approved as a true record.

14.6. Actions from previous meetings

All actions were noted as being on hold, in progress or complete. Regarding minute 13.7, the Principal explained that advice had been taken from the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and there was no real benefit to changing the corporate structure so the Board agreed the action should be removed from subsequent reports.

14.7. Performance

14.7.1 Report from Performance and Quality Task and Finish Group

The group had met for the first time earlier that day and had dissected a number of areas of performance. As Chair of the task and finish group, Dr Tavernor summarised the discussions and findings of the group, concentrating on areas of risk or concern. The group would have a sharp focus and examine key indicators of success within the scope of the College improving the quality of its teaching and learning. The group would be interrogating the data presented, ensuring it was understood, tested and utilised. The objectives had been defined as achieving grade 2 at a future Ofsted inspection and for success rates to reach at least the 50th percentile while progressing quickly to the 75th percentile and beyond. The group felt that the objectives were aspirational but realistic, taking confidence from the Ofsted monitoring visit and the continued improvement in systems and processes.

Dr Tavernor then summarised how the themes from the monitoring visit had been analysed and how they related to actions subsequently taken, in particular with relation to the Post Inspection Action Plan (PIAP). The draft self-assessment report (SAR) was acknowledged by Ofsted as being honest and self-critical but the group cautioned against being too critical at the expense of capturing real and tangible improvements; the SAR needed to be a constructive and accurate reflection of the College's performance.

Areas of progress were identified as increased progression between courses and levels and improvements to the advice and guidance service ('right course, right choice'). The group had looked at areas where the data appeared to be inconsistent but after analysis understood why this was, however the consistency of reporting was an item for further consideration.

The PIAP was centred on the quality of provision. The group acknowledged that it would have been an easier option for the College to close certain areas of provision, however the College had committed to improvements as it had a moral obligation to the learners of Liverpool and it was emphasised that all areas of the College had significantly improved.

The next meeting of the group would see Heads of School attend. The intention would be for the group to test the assurances they were given at Board level regarding improvement strategies.

Councillor Small joined the meeting at this point.

The group appreciated the importance of ensuring staff engaged with the improvement processes as a willingness to improve was key to the success of the strategies.

Dr Tavernor concluded by saying his overall perception was of an impressive transformation, which was certainly one of the biggest he had witnessed and that he and the group were able to take confidence from the session.

The Vice Chair thanked Dr Tavernor for his input and for the benefit of the Board asked him to clarify the key measures which would be taken to ensure the objectives were achieved, which were testing the integrity of the data and testing performance management strategies. Ms Barry added that the group had really welcomed the opportunity to get underneath the headline information but were conscious of the need to avoid increasing the work of the senior team during an already difficult period.

Governors asked what the role of link governors would be in relation to the work of the task and finish group and it was clarified that the structure of the group was fluid so that governors could be co-opted members as appropriate. In response to a query about how the Executive team felt about the explicit statement of grade 2 at Ofsted re-inspection being an objective the Principal advised that there was a degree of trepidation; as there would be no new success rates, it would depend to an extent on the weighting given to the improvement processes and the in-year measures such as retention, attendance and the number of on target students. As the College was subject to another Ofsted support and challenge visit at the end of January, it was unlikely the re-inspection would take place before the end of February, but would almost certainly have taken place by the end of May.

Dr Tavernor understood the Executive's reluctance to categorically state the College was a grade 2 but felt the narrative of the monitoring visit report combined with the evident trends, improved processes, staff development, improved advice and guidance, and OTLs consistent with Ofsted's should all be factors which gave confidence. The Deputy Principal stated that the College strengthened every week and that timing would play a part in what grade the College ultimately judged itself at the time of re-inspection.

The new student governor asked whether Ofsted made allowances for the circumstances of students at the College. The group had also discussed this and felt that while there was some provision with the use of Value Added scores (which needed to improve), the College should not use this as justification for underperforming and, that while challenging, it should be a motivation for improvement.

Governors agreed that the group had made a strong start but queried how the rest of the Board would be engaged. Dr Tavernor reiterated that group was open to all governors to attend as relevant and that the aim was to report by exception to the Board with high level data being presented. Attendance by link governors would be welcomed with a digest being relayed to other governors. Performance

and quality remained the responsibility of the entire Board, and reports such as the Performance Dashboard and Post Inspection Action Plan would continue to come to Board meetings, but the Board could direct the group to look at specific areas for a deeper level of assurance.

14.7.2 Post Inspection Action Plan (PIAP)

The Deputy Principal highlighted the key points of the PIAP. Attendance was holding up at 85% but there remained some challenges to punctuality. Monitoring of students on track continued, and although there were some concerns, intervention was being put in place; this did not mean the students would not achieve but was designed to enable swifter intervention and an increased likelihood of achievement.

The Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) was being widely used and the quality of content was regularly reviewed. The Board noted that staff absences were having a significant impact which was being mitigated by the use of the College's bank staff rather than Protocol. Governors noted that the appraisal targets had gone from green to red which indicated an area impacted by absences and governors asked for specific details of what managers were doing to address this. The Deputy Principal pointed to the improved HR policies, along with the appropriate use of the capability procedure where required. The occupational health provider had been changed which enabled faster referrals. Although the absence rate increased in December (in line with national trends), it had decreased slightly since. One school was specifically highlighted as having had 12 absent staff with this since being reduced to two staff members on long term sick.

14.7.3 Performance Dashboard (incorporating staff absence report)

The VPPBD was unable to present his report due to personal circumstances but the full Executive were well versed in the content and were happy to address any questions. Governors were reminded that progress against targets was crucial as they were the key indicators of whether students were on track to achieve. The Mayoral and people targets would be reviewed.

The Deputy Principal highlighted that punctuality should be included. The PIAP included a target of 97% but that was on the basis of not having accurate historic data to make a meaningful comparison with. The actual rate stood at 96.7% but the Deputy Principal cautioned this was with a spiky profile. Governors asked whether poor attendance correlated with underperforming schools and were advised that it often did. The Principal made the point that attendance for young people was better but punctuality was better for adults meaning a differentiated approach in terms of strategies was required. The VPC added that attendance and punctuality were intrinsic in action plans across curriculum areas, with every staff member being responsible, although different approaches were more successful in different areas. Employability factors were also highlighted.

Governors asked how far the Value Added information was disseminated and whether having the information available helped staff. The Deputy Principal explained that an aspirational Advanced Level Performance Systems (ALPS) target was set which went down to course level. Each student also had targets. ALPS targets could only be applied to graded subjects but other courses still had targets. Success rates and current performance data were shown by school at Principal's briefings across College. All courses knew where they were in relation to national targets.

14.8. Financial position and budget

The VPFCR referred governors back to his presentation at the recent strategic planning event and advised that some substantive work was being carried out in January with regards to the mid-year reforecast. Income and cash flow remained the key issues.

[Part of minute removed due to commercial sensitivity or containing references to third parties].

The new student governor asked for clarification about funding sources and it was explained that the majority of the College's funding came from the government via the SFA and EFA, however this funding was anticipated to reduce in the future and the College was seeking to become less reliant on it.

[Part of minute removed due to commercial sensitivity or containing references to third parties].

The indicative funding position should be clearer at the end of the month.

14.9. Confidential Item

[Minute removed due to commercial sensitivity]

14.10. Risk Management

Governors noted this report with most risks having been covered by other items.

14.11. First 4 Skills update

Governors noted the report regarding First 4 Skills which reflected the overall positive position of the company. An Ofsted inspection was anticipated and a mock inspection had been carried out which was largely positive.

14.12. Health and Safety termly report (Autumn 2013)

The VPFCR explained that the governors had received this report in response to their request at the previous Board meeting. There had been no reportable incidents in the autumn term. The annual report would come to the next Board meeting as it would then be possible to include the annual AoC comparators which had not yet been published.

14.13. Safeguarding termly report (Autumn 2013)

Governors noted the upward trend in the number of incidents. Additional resources had been engaged in response to the number of incidents related to mental health. The number of incidents involving 16-18 year olds had increased. The link governors for safeguarding and equality and diversity would look at the report outside of the Board meeting, which the Deputy Principal would facilitate.

Action: AC

It was asked whether the figures indicated the College's commitment to inclusivity and the Deputy Principal agreed that the College did encourage more students with complex needs. The increase of mental health related issues had been noted nationally. The VPC added that inclusivity now went right back to the application process. It was also confirmed that safeguarding training to all staff would continue, with the Head of Pastoral Support examining different approaches.

14.14. Senior Post Holders grievance and disciplinary policies

Both policies were aligned with the staff policies that had come to the Board in October 2013. Both policies were approved.

14.15. Committee minutes

The minutes of the last Finance, Estates and General Purposes meeting were deferred.

14.16. Any Other Business

The Clerk gave a summary of the decisions regarding governance that had been taken at the January strategic planning event. The Board had considered the priorities of the College, recent reports on governance in the sector, the composition of the Board and the skill sets of current governors and agreed that:

- the Remuneration, Search & Governance and Finance, Estates & General Purposes committees would be disestablished;
- as a mandatory committee, the Audit Committee would remain;
- a Task and Finish group focussed on Quality/Performance with specific objectives and timescales would be established;
- the Task and Finish group(s) would scrutinise information and report by exception to the Board;
- governors would ordinarily serve two terms but this was not absolute;

- Board Chairs and Vice Chairs would serve a maximum of four years in the role.
- the Board would normally operate with 19 governors;
- recruitment of governors would focus on (chief) executive level finance, audit and business professionals at the current time;
- as the Search and Governance Committee would be disestablished, arrangements for recruitment of new governors would be delegated to the Chair, Principal and Clerk with the new appointments being approved by the Board; and that
- the Clerk would amend the Board Policy Manual to reflect the changes detailed.

14.17. Confidentiality of items

Item 1 – Appointment of Governors: Personal details

Item 8 – Financial Position and Budget: Commercially sensitive information

Item 9 – Entire item

14.18. Date of next meeting

The next Board meeting would take place on 11th March 2014.

Staff and student governors left the meeting, along with the Deputy Principal and the VPC.

Minutes 14.19 to 14.25 are confidential.

Meeting closed at 7.30pm