

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporation – Lakes College, West Cumbria

Held on Thursday, 18 March 2010 at 4.00 pm in the Boardroom of the College

Present: Damian McSweeney (Chair); Paul Pharaoh (Vice Chair); Dan Carter (Items 15-21); Michael Doyle; Andrew Oldham; Sarah Graham; Joe Holliday; Jill Killen (Items 5-21); Dr John Lackie; Cath Richardson; Susie Shepherd (Items 8-21); Dr Robin Talbot; Mark Stanger; Rick Wylie

Apologies: Norma Boyes; Mike Davidson; Adrian Taylor

Also present: Karen Wilson, Deputy Principal, Finance & Corporate Services; Chris Nattress, Deputy Principal, Curriculum & Quality; Clare McGuinness, External Relations Manager; Jane Murray, Clerk to Governors.

01/10 Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 17 December 2009 and 28 January 2010 were approved and signed as a correct record.

02/10 Declarations of Interest

None received.

03/10 Reputation & Image: Communications Strategy

The External Relations Manager presented the Communications Strategy, refreshed in response to the Governing Body's interest in this area and their training session in December 2009.

It supported the strategic objectives of the college in three key areas: Quality Improvement; External Focus and Sustainable Operations.

The strategy builds on diversification of marketing effort in response to the key challenges the College faces which includes the need to increase the market share of target areas and gaining position within new markets such as the Energy Coast.

Evaluation was key and measures would include the number of enrolments in addition to surveys. The strategy was supported by a cross-college action plan.

It was acknowledged that there would be a need to change style for key audiences. The question of electronic communications, which was

seen by Governors as a key tool, was raised and assurance was given that this would be managed on an ongoing basis and the action plan made provision for regular updates.

Governors noted their appreciation of the thought which had gone in to the strategy, which they felt was most encouraging.

Resolved – to approve the strategy

04/10 Reputation & Image: Partnership and Projects Update

The External Relations Manager provided an update of activity. This included the expansion of outreach work into Maryport and Wigton, participation as educational partners in a Carnegie Theatre funding bid and increased provision for unemployed clients, both college and community-based.

Assurance was given that there was good visibility of the outreach work in Whitehaven and Keswick. A similar level of visibility would be sought in Maryport and Wigton, however these projects were part of a one-stop shop approach, in partnership with the local authority and other regeneration agencies, and therefore visibility would be more difficult. There were plans, however, for significant press activity.

Governors noted the increase in the number of employers with whom the College was working and at 404, this was a significant increase in a relatively short period of time. In considering repeat business, it was questioned whether there was a significant number of small businesses involved, in which case their repeat training needs would be fewer. Surveys would suggest that there was not a significant amount of business being lost to other providers.

It was noted that the Energus/Gen II merger was progressing and that the Chair and Principal were due to meet shortly with the recently appointed interim Chief Executive.

The Governing Body was pleased to note the new courses, which would be launched after Easter and which responded to the Energy Coast Agenda. It was confirmed that some of the qualifications would be level 1/2 and others level 3/4.

It was noted that funding for a new construction centre continued to be actively pursued.

In noting suggestions for Governors to support partnership activity, it was confirmed that Governors would be reminded and invited to attend events.

Agreed – that there was a lot of confidence in the partnership activity and that the update be noted.

05/10 Cumbria Colleges Collaboration Board

In considering the minutes of the meeting held on Friday, 26 February 2010, the Principal pointed out that some of the collaboration groups were working better than others.

This had been the experience generally of the collaboration: at a strategic level it was working well – the Principals were able to represent each other confidently and effectively at different meetings, and share problems and protocols, but the joint delivery of contracts was proving less satisfactory.

The Principals were currently considering how to tackle the issue, whether to wind up the Cumbria Colleges Ltd at the end of current contracts or whether to refresh and rebrand. The issue was that the colleges in Cumbria were quite small players, and that feedback from outside of the county would suggest that with changes envisaged to the way in which training contracts would be awarded in the future, that far bigger players were already forming partnerships, putting that business further at risk.

The particular risk for the college was that while they had delivered on joint contracts, there were other colleges, which had not managed to fulfil their obligations, putting the college's reputation at risk by association.

The extent of the risk was questioned and acknowledged as being high – it was felt that one potential recent contract had suffered as a result. It was suggested that sanctions for non-delivery might be embedded in any future joint delivery programmes, should the joint delivery approach be sustained.

The Vice Chair, who was a member of the Audit Committee of the joint delivery company, added that there had been some adverse comment from auditors with respect to the management accounts.

Agreed – that the Principal would keep the Board informed.

06/10 Quality and Curriculum Report

It was noted that there were 40 courses in special measures (intensive care) and confirmed that as performance overall in the college had improved the criteria for special measures had been tightened.

In questioning the percentage of courses in special measures, it was suggested that it might be helpful to present information as 5% of the total number of courses.

Attendance and retention rates were still a concern following the impact of the floods. At its worst, attendance had been looking at –9%,

however this had now picked up again and was on a par with the previous year. Expectations of a dip of 2% in retention were estimated and there may well be a similar dip in success rates given the impact of the floods on individual learners.

It was acknowledged that the aftermath of the flood had been an unexpected pilot for outreach work, as there had been a concerted effort to adjust timetables, introduce blended learning and study buddies, and to provide personal tutoring and support, in addition to the transport provision which had been made.

Governors noted that teaching and learning observations were good and learned that learning mentors were assigned to those requiring support.

Agreed – to note the report.

07/10 Success Rates Amendment

As had been explained at the previous Board meeting, there had been a last minute change to the nationally held data on success rates, which had affected colleges across the country. This had now been clarified and had arisen through a change by the Learning and Skills Council of how learners were counted. The result was that the confirmed success rates for 2009/10 for long courses now stood at 80% and not 81% as had been previously reported. This still kept the College in the top 10% nationally for long courses.

Agreed – to note the amendment.

08/10 Learner Experience Minutes

The learner experience minutes were received and the very helpful presentation on the 14-19 agenda noted.

09/10 Key Performance Indicators

While not wishing to go through each indicator individually, the Deputy Principal Finance & Corporate Services, reminded Governors that although the training advisor caseload was under-performing on contracts currently, a heavy profile was expected in the last few months of the year.

In response to questioning, long-term sickness absence was reducing, in part thanks to the input of the occupational therapist. Short-term absence had increased over the winter months, which was to be expected in a college. It was confirmed that special leave had been given to those affected by flooding and therefore this had not had an impact on sickness levels.

It was also questioned who had ownership of the target to reduce dependency on LSC income, which was the Deputy Principal, but there were difficulties in achieving with a comparatively small employer base at a time of economic decline. Other sources of funding, such as European funding, were being researched.

Energy consumption had increased and was being investigated, but it was thought that the particularly cold weather was a contributory factor. It was confirmed that lights were movement sensitive and went off of their own accord.

It was noted that the one Health and Safety Riddor reportable accident had been a member of staff who had slipped on ice and required a hospital visit.

10/10 Draft Key Performance Indicators 2010-11

Proposed indicators for 2010-11 were discussed and the new format welcomed by Governors. Under 3.3 it was suggested that the staff absence indicator might be better worded to reflect a positive output. At 5, it was also suggested that the indicator for partnership working with schools should be more explicit. It was also felt that it would be helpful to have some indicators for how the safeguarding and equality and diversity agendas were being driven forward.

Resolved – to agree the revised format subject to the above comments.

11/10 Strategic Risk Register

The Strategic Risk Register was received by the Committee. It was questioned whether there was a need to revise the residual risk rating on S6 in light of the information imparted on collaboration earlier in the meeting.

It was also felt that it would be helpful to review in detail on a regular basis the high and very high risks, and further suggested that this should also include the flooding aftermath.

Resolved – that the strategic risk register be received and that regular review of high/very high risks be undertaken.

12/10 Management Accounts

The management accounts were presented which showed that in spite of difficult economic conditions, performance was strong and steady and on target to retain an 'outstanding' health grading. The intention was that the financial position should remain sufficiently robust to weather the pressure coming in the next year.

Agreed – to note the update.

13/10 Resources Committee Minutes

In light of the anticipated financial pressures, it was noted that the Committee had agreed only half of the requested capital spend at this time, at £150,000, which could be revised depending on the eventual funding outcomes. It was questioned whether there were any projects that might suffer as a result with implications for the College in respect of issues such as health and safety, and assurance was given that such projects would be prioritised in the current allocation.

14/10 Audit Committee Minutes

The Audit Committee minutes were received and Governors were informed that a joint meeting would take place the following day to agree recommendations for the appointment of internal auditors, which would come to the Board in due course.

15/10 Chair and Vice Chair Election

The Chair and Vice Chair withdrew.

It was proposed and

Resolved – that Andrew Oldham assume the temporary Chairmanship.

On being put to the vote, it was unanimously

Resolved –

- 1) That standing orders be waived; and
- 2) That Damian McSweeney be re-appointed as Chair from 1 August 2010 to 31 July 2012; and
- 3) That Paul Pharaoh be re-appointed as Vice Chair from 1 August 2010 to 31 July 2012.

16/10 Governance Structure and Calendar for 2010-11

The Clerk introduced proposals for a revised structure in response to both the self-assessment process the previous year and feedback on the length of Board agendas.

This would mean more board meetings but fewer committee meetings – Board meetings would be themed to ensure that there was sufficient scrutiny of key items and a governance trail for the approval of key documents was included.

It was hoped that this would allow the Governing Body to achieve a better balance between scrutiny and strategy. However, it was also noted that a return to the former structure was not ruled out should priorities change.

Resolved – that the revised structures and calendar at Appendix A be adopted for 2010-11.

17/10 Lead Governor Role

Resolved – that the position statement be adopted.

It was questioned whether the Link Governor Scheme was welcomed by staff. One Governor had been very involved and it was noted that it was perhaps working better in some areas than others and this would be picked up in the review.

18/10 Interim Appointments to Committees

Resolved – that until the review of standing orders to come into effect on 1st September 2010

- 1) Sarah Graham be appointed to the Audit Committee as the staff member.
- 2) That Rick Wylie be appointed to the Audit Committee.
- 3) That Robin Talbot be appointed to the Learner Experience Committee.

19/10 Appointment of New Governor

Les Agnew was known to the college and his nomination was welcomed by the Chair of the Search and Governance committee.

Resolved – that Les Agnew be appointed as a Governor until December 2013.

The meeting closed at 6.15pm