



Northern College

THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Governors held on **11 March 2021**.

Present: Bob Harrison, Clive Macdonald, Yultan Mellor (Principal), Tim Thornton, Mike Bramhall, Colin Forrest, Liz Stanley, John Edwards (from B21/9 onwards), Frank Lord, Neil James, Ken Richardson, Angus Morrison and Ann Corrigan.

In attendance: The Assistant Principal – Finance and Business Services (Joy Whistlecraft), the Assistant Principal – Student Experience (Diane Lawson), the Assistant Principal – Curriculum, Quality and Market Development (Emma Beal), the Head of Human Resources (Elin Longley) and the Clerk to the Governors (Sarah Johnson).

Apologies: None.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

B21/6 Each governor present declared any potential interests/conflicts of loyalty related to items to be considered at the meeting. With respect to his roles as Deputy Vice Chancellor at the University of Huddersfield and member of the Leeds City Region Employment and Skills Panel Prof Tim Thornton declared a potential conflict of loyalty in items relating to the College's higher education provision. It was agreed that no decisions to be taken at the meeting would be affected and it was not considered necessary for the member to withdraw.

MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

B21/7 The minutes of the meetings held on 17 December 2020 and 18 February 2021 were approved as an accurate record.

FINANCE AND FUNDING UPDATE (Document 1i)

B21/8 A separate confidential minute was recorded.

FUTURE PLANNING

B21/9 A separate confidential minute was recorded.

SECTOR UPDATE (Document 2i)

B21/10 The Board received a report which provided an update on sector developments and external information that could have an impact on College business and strategic planning, including:

- response to COVID-19;
- devolution of the AEB budget;
- South Yorkshire colleges;
- local MPs;
- Barnsley Council;
- Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth.

B21/11 It was reported that the College had secured AEB allocations for 2021/22 from both Sheffield City Region and West Yorkshire in line with 2018/19 funding levels.

Resolved: i That the report be noted.

COLLEGE REPORT (Document 2ii)

B21/12 The Board considered a report which provided an overview of key items of internal strategic and operational College business, including:

- people – CLT appointments, business services team development plans, the College's digital transformation project and supporting CPD programme and wellbeing support for staff;
- curriculum, quality and market development - student experience during lockdown and the return to campus, curriculum planning, the College brand refresh and new website;
- student experience – including student recruitment and the admissions process review, the role of library services in relation to digital transformation, capital works programme and the return to campus;
- finance and business services – including development of the College's business services digital intent and capital expenditure and supporting staff resources, and implementation of a new curriculum planning tool.

B21/13 The Board particularly explored:

- the development of the College's digital presence, welcoming the positive progress being made;
- the planned launch of the College's new website in July 2021;
- updated retention and attendance data, noting that retention was currently at 93% and attendance at 87%, which meant the College was currently tracking above or in line with national averages in all areas;
- curriculum planning progress, noting that a key focus was term 3 recruitment, and that an increase in enquiries was already being reported by the admissions team;
- the imminent programme of reparative capital works funded by the previously reported DfE grant;
- arrangements for, and the student experience of, the very recent return to campus, noting that whilst it was still very early in the return process student feedback was very positive, appropriate safeguards and social distancing measures were in place, and COVID home testing arrangements for staff and students had been implemented;
- the arrangements for targeted additional learning support that were being implemented for returning students who had struggled during the latest lockdown;
- the implementation of the digital strategy, particularly in relation to staffing recourses and CPD requirements;
- the introduction of Forecast, a curriculum planning tool commonly used in the FE sector.

Resolved: i That the report be noted.

PERFORMANCE REPORT (Document 2iii)

B21/14 The Board noted that as agreed an updated dashboard had not been presented as there was very little change to that reported at the last meeting, other than in relation to student retention and achievement that had been explored as part of the College Report.

- B21/15 The Board considered the management accounts for 2020/21 to 31 January 2021, noting that:
- the position had not changed significantly since that reported to the Policy and Finance Committee in February 2021;
 - the College still awaited the details of the AEB tolerance levels for 2020/21 from the ESFA, noting that if the College's term 3 delivery plan was achieved it would reach 70% of its allocation;
 - the £1M deficit currently reported was a worst case scenario;
 - costs relating to catering in term 3 reflected the ambitious curriculum plan.

- B21/16 The Board particularly explored:
- likely AEB tolerance levels for 2020/21, the potential impact of different scenarios, the agreement with the regional ESFA that a business case would be submitted setting out the College's position should the tolerance level not be achieved, the continuing uncertainty regarding when the ESFA would notify colleges of what the tolerance level would be;
 - the impact of potential claw back in relation to the balance sheet position;
 - capital expenditure costs both in-year and over two years;
 - the College's exploration into possible furlough options as agreed at the Policy and Finance Committee, noting that options had been explored but due to the short time frame in relation to re-opening of the campus the balance of costs versus benefits had led the ELT to agree that furloughing should not be pursued at this time.

- B21/17 The Board considered revised FEC benchmarks.

Resolved: i That the report be noted.

RISK MANAGEMENT AND ASSURANCE (Document 2iv)

- B21/18 The Board considered the risk register noting that:
- the College's key strategic risks had been explored throughout the meeting;
 - new risks relating to the further education commissioner and the retirement of the assistant principal – finance and business services had been added;
 - there had been positive movement in relation to the College's ICT resources and infrastructure in relation to the digital strategy and transformation projects as already reported.

Resolved: i That the report be noted.

STRATEGIC AMBITION AND INTENT UPDATE (Document 2v)

- B21/19 The Board considered a report which provided an update on the College's strategic planning, curriculum and business services intents and implementation plans, noting that:
- it was proposed that the College's strategic plan be renamed 2025 strategic ambition and its timeframe be extended to 2025;
 - teams were currently working on developing their intent documents and implementation plans and these would be used to set College KPIs which would be reflected in the governors' dashboard.

- B21/20 The Board welcomed the active and positive focus on future development and supported the proposals.

Resolved: i That the College's strategic plan be renamed 2025 strategic ambition and its timeframe extended to 2025.

AUDIT MATTERS – FINANCIAL STATEMENT AUDITORS (Document 2vi)

B21/21 The Board considered a proposal from the Audit Committee regarding appointment of financial statement auditors for 2020/21, noting that:

- the Audit Committee had carefully considered retendering and partner rotation options but had agreed that continuity was critical in the current context and due to the imminent retirement of the assistant principal – finance and business services;
- the committee had strengthened the KPIs for the auditors to mitigate future communication issues.

Resolved: i That it be recommended to the Company that it approve reappointment of Grant Thornton as the College’s financial statement auditors for 2020/21.

POLICIES FOR APPROVAL (Document 2vii)

B21/22 The Board considered and approved the following policies:

- safeguarding children and young people;
- risk;
- business continuity;
- health, safety and welfare.

Resolved: i That the safeguarding children and young people, risk, business continuity and health, safety and welfare policies be approved.

GOVERNANCE MATTERS (Document 2viii)

B21/23 The Board considered and approved a range of governance matters, noting that:

- the section regarding governor liability previously in the standing orders would be extended and included in the governor handbook.

Resolved: i That Seb Schmoller be appointed as a governor in the category of ‘interest and experience’ for a term of office from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2025.

ii That the external recruitment process be noted.

iii That the proposed meeting schedule for 2021/22 be approved.

iv That the revised standing orders be approved.

v That the revised code of conduct for governors be approved.

vi That the revised co-chair agreement be approved.

vii That the continuation of the temporary amendment to the quorum requirements in the memorandum and articles be approved.

REPORT FROM LEAD GOVERNOR – SAFEGUARDING

B21/24 The Board received a verbal update from the lead governor – safeguarding, noting that:

- the lead governor was regularly updated by the College in relation to safeguarding activities;
- he believed that there was a story of growing and strengthening partnerships, which worked exceptionally well both internally and externally;
- cross College working in relation to safeguarding was strong;

- an increase in referrals reflected increased awareness amongst teaching staff and the understanding of their role and responsibilities in relation to safeguarding;
- the current position continued to reflect that outlined in the recent Ofsted report;
- the College provided a multi-dimensional experience for both staff and students.

Resolved: i That the report be noted.

REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES (Document 2x)

- B21/25 The committee received and noted minutes of the following meetings:
- Audit Committee – November 2020
 - Curriculum, Quality and Student Experience Committee – November 2020
 - Policy and Finance Committee – September 2020
 - Policy and Finance Committee – November 2020
 - Policy and Finance Committee – February 2021
 - Chairs' Committee – August 2020
 - Chairs' Committee – November 2020

CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES

- B21/26 The Board approved the confidential minutes of the meeting held on 18 February 2021 as an accurate record.
- B21/27 A separate confidential minute was recorded.
- B21/28 The Board noted that this would be the last meeting prior to the retirement of Joy Whistlecraft assistant principal – finance and business services. The Board formally thanked Joy for her outstanding contribution to the College, professional integrity and commitment to students.

DATES OF THE NEXT MEETINGS

- B21/29 Thursday 15 July 2021– 11.00am
 Thursday 30 September 2021 - 11.00am
 Thursday 16 December 2021 - 11.00am
 Thursday 10 March 2022 - 11.00am
 Thursday 14 July 2022 - 11.00am