

# NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE COLLEGE FURTHER EDUCATION CORPORATION

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporation Board of North Hertfordshire College, held in Room B102, Hitchin, on Monday 4 April 2016.

## PRESENT

Richard Alberg (Chair)  
Lynne Ceeney (Vice Chair)  
Matt Hamnett (Principal/CEO)  
Nick Chesher  
Paul Harrison

Adrian Hawkins  
Rob Irving  
Paul Holgate  
Jeremy Newman  
Ruth Orpwood

## IN ATTENDANCE

Kit Davies (Deputy Principal, NHC)  
Lucy Hann (Managing Director, Hart  
Learning and Development)

Yvonne Laird (Finance Director)  
Robert Dale (Clerk to the Corporation)

## WELCOME

- The Chair welcomed Jeremy Newman to his first meeting. Jeremy would also take the Chair of the Audit Committee.

## ITEM 1(A): APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- Apologies for absence had been received from Peter Johnston, Vernon McClure and Karl Scott.

## ITEM 1(B): DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- None.

## ITEM 1(C): MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

- The Minutes of the meeting held on 4 April 2016 were signed as an accurate record of proceedings.

## ITEM 1(D): MATTERS ARISING/ACTIONS

- *Briefing Note on Pension Arrangements*: to be circulated shortly (Yvonne Laird).
- *Safeguarding Training and Board Dinner*: scheduled for Monday 20 June, starting at 18.00 and expected to finish by 22.00.

## ITEM 2: CEO'S INTRODUCTION

- The papers reflected the Board's monitoring role – assessing the impact of past strategic decisions and considering how effective delivery was. Was the Board satisfied with progress and how could the team take things further?
- The other major Part 1 item related to the recent Curriculum Reviews and the implications these – plus other analysis – had for future College delivery.

### **ITEM 3: REPORT FROM THE CHAIR OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE**

- Vernon McClure had acted as interim Chair for the previous meeting but was unable to attend at this meeting. Members accepted the written report which was provided. Jeremy Newman would take the Chair at the next meeting.

### **ITEM 4: CURRICULUM REVIEW CONCLUSIONS**

- Local labour market analysis, LEP priorities, travel to work and learn data, competitor analysis, feedback from curriculum reviews etc identified six strategic priority curriculum areas and one for proposed withdrawal.
- The six proposed priority areas were Business and Financial Services, Creative Industries, Engineering, Construction and Manufacturing, Health and Social Care, Technology and Digital and Sport.
- Three other areas (Catering and Hospitality, Hair and Beauty, and Travel and Tourism) should be maintained.
- One (Animal Management) should be phased out. Although this course showed a big improvement from last year, this had been from a low base and other local providers could offer better facilities.
- Governors discussed the sector-wide challenge of hitting targets for Maths and English outcomes; Government would only fund students with a pass (grade C) at GCSE in future. Making both subjects relevant to vocational teaching was vital to stand any chance of getting student engagement, but the GCSE syllabus had to be covered. Vocational teaching staff better understood their part in delivering Maths and English outcomes and a new delivery strategy would be in place in September. There were good practice examples already.
- Governors challenged the view that the approach to setting curriculum priorities was radically different from other FE colleges; some had experienced equally well-evidenced analysis elsewhere. This was still the right approach – tempered where appropriate by pragmatism. Taking a longer-term view of where NHC invests would be influenced by future LEP support availability.
- Governors asked why Sport was a priority area. Recognising that it was a popular and growing area for students, it felt more like a pragmatic choice rather than one based on analysis of NHC strength and LEP priorities not least because local competitors could offer better facilities for a Sports coaching-focussed approach. However, the team was developing a more science-focussed programme – an alternative to the more traditional offer.
- Should Sales and Marketing be a priority? Though some curriculum areas covered Sales and Marketing skills, there was no dedicated programme. A higher level option, discrete units or an apprenticeship could be considered.
- Governors asked about the process of phasing out Animal Management. This would involve taking on no new entrants while maintaining a good learning experience for existing students. Financial modelling was in hand, but the team was confident that a good outcome could be achieved.

- Governors discussed relationships with HE; there was merit in exploring links beyond the geographical one with the University of Hertfordshire, wherever there might be complementary specialisms.
- A LEP priority was upskilling and retraining people returning to a sector and the strategy should address the needs of students with different age-profiles. Governors were reassured that there was more detail behind this paper.
- Construction was an important sector with a major local employer (Willmott-Dixon) not highlighted in the paper. There were significant apprenticeship opportunities in construction.
- Governors welcomed the close relationship with the LEP influencing strategic thinking; active engagement over employer priorities was important.
- Governors asked about lessons from the Wheels project. There were mixed views about the effectiveness and added value of taster projects such as this; it was recognised that there could be a therapeutic element but this should not preclude consideration of finding new ways to deliver services of this kind.
- Governors endorsed the outline plan but would like to see further analysis particularly around the choice of Sport as a priority area, and the plans for phasing out Animal Management.

#### **ITEM 5: NHC PROGRESS AND PERFORMANCE**

- NHC plans depended materially on retaining Grade 2 status; the current self-assessment was rigorous and objective and saw risks to Grade 2 from Maths and English performance (a sector-wide issue) and inconsistencies between curriculum areas in terms of performance. In each case, action was being taken to improve matters and the team felt that there was an upward trend.
- Governors asked the Executive to identify anything more that the Board could do to support work towards Grade 2. Recruiting a full team to be in place in September was central and would be a focus in the next few months.
- Governors asked about the effectiveness of induction and the quality of the current recruitment process. There was evidence of improvement in the level and quality of support for this, but more work to be done.
- Governors asked if data on staff turnover (grade and role) could be shared.
- The Quality and Innovation Committee would play a key role in discussing and challenging plans. Important also was simple messaging that governors could use in discussing performance with inspectors.
- Attendance had slipped back since the previous report; more work was required and perhaps a more 'school-like' culture, in which students were expected to comply with attendance standards set at the start of the year. Conversations with Thomas Alleyne Academy (which had had success in improving attendance rates) would be useful.
- Emphasising that NHC offered more than just qualifications – but a route into employment or further study (as the Guarantee highlighted) was vital.

## **ITEM 6: HART LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT UPDATE**

- The business had made good progress and was on track to meet its financial targets at the year-end.
- Apprenticeship recruitment was going well with 100 pledges given in the past three weeks. Messaging about the apprenticeship levy helped, and more detail was emerging from government about how this would work in practice.
- More work on selling apprenticeships and positioning Hart L&D as a partner especially with SMEs was vital to grow the business further.
- There would be very little use of sub-contracting after this year, but the flexibility to use sub-contracts when strategically useful was valuable.
- Some work around the reward strategy for the business was in hand.
- The Board could help the team by identifying potential leads to be followed-up.

## **ITEM 7: HART SCHOOLS TRUST UPDATE**

- Governors applauded the good management of the Da Vinci Schools closure which had attracted positive feedback from the Department for Education.
- Members welcomed the conversations with local primary schools over the possibility of joining the Academy Trust. These were continuing.

## **ITEM 8: FINANCE UPDATE**

- The financial picture was as forecast. One area of difficulty (albeit not material in terms of overall performance) was Plaza Activity Ltd where a clean exit might be hard to achieve. Actions to mitigate risks/minimise costs were being taken.
- Governors asked for an assessment of 'worst-case' costs; operational losses would be c£100,000 in 2015/16, and exit costs included paying off equipment leases and dilapidations costs. Seeking to minimise losses between 2015/16 and the property lease breakpoint in 2019 would be least costly financially but might distract the team from the aim of getting to Grade 2.
- A decision was needed soon; the deadline to renew the franchise is 30 April.
- To improve transparency, commentary on movements since the previous report would be added to future papers.
- Consistency and clarity of reporting were key priorities for the team; the new Finance system to be in place by August would be vital, and could help with better cash management, for example.

## **ITEM 9: ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

- None.

## **ITEM 10: DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

- Monday 6 June 2016, in Room B102 at Hitchin, starting at 18.00.
- Safeguarding Training will take place at Hitchin on Monday 20 June 2016 starting at 18.00 and will be followed by a Board dinner (20.00 to c22.00).

## CORPORATION ACTION LOG

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Minute Reference</b>	<b>Summary of Action</b>	<b>Lead/timing</b>
04/04/16	l(d)	Circulate briefing note on pension arrangements.	Yvonne Laird by 15/04/16
04/04/16	4	Consider the inclusion of construction as a key local sector.	Kit Davies by 29/04/16
04/04/16	4	Examine ways of incorporating Board feedback on Sales and Marketing and Sport into planning.	Kit Davies by 29/04/16
04/04/16	5	Circulate data on staff turnover.	Yvonne Laird by 29/04/16
04/04/16	8	Add commentary on movements since the previous financial report to future papers.	Yvonne Laird by 20/05/16
04/04/16	8	Set up meeting with Paul Holgate to discuss detail of finance reporting.	Yvonne Laird by 15/04/16