

**Minutes of the meeting of the Board of the Corporation held on Tuesday, 1 October 2019 at
6:00pm in the Committee Room, Ashington Campus**

Present: George Blyth
Louise Doyle
Cllr Louise Farthing
Rob Lawson (Chair)
Paul McEldon (arrived during Bd/19-20/07)
Zainab Nadeem, President, Students' Union
Ellen Thinnesen, Chief Executive

In Attendance: Nigel Harrett, Principal Northumberland College
David Howells, Vice Principal Finance and Resources
Vikkie Morton, Vice Principal Student Services and Registry
Iain Nixon, Vice Principal Partnerships and Commercial
Judith Quinn, Interim Deputy Principal, Curriculum
Emma Stookes, ESFA

Clerk: Christine Stretesky, Head of Corporate Governance and Policy

Bd/19-20/03 Apologies and consent or absence and declarations of interest

The Chair welcomed everyone and noted this as the first regular meeting of the newly constituted Board of the Corporation asking everyone to introduce themselves. The Chair thanked the team for getting the College to where it is and for their hard work before, during and after the merger, specifically thanking the Senior Leadership Team. The Chair thanked the Head of Corporate Governance and Policy for her work in pulling together the items to be approved in agenda item Bd/19-20/07.

Apologies were received from John Barnett, Tom Crompton and Ralph Saelzer.

No declarations of interest were made.

Bd/19-20/04 Minutes of the previous meeting held 13 May 2019 and Matters Arising

The minutes from the 13 May 2019 meeting were approved without amendment.

The Chair presented the following matters arising:

- Bd/19/72 Students' Union Constitution
 - On this meeting's agenda
- Bd/19/79 Monthly report with update on work at NC
 - Chief Executive's Report covers this update
- Bd/19/94 Northumberland Local Board to approve KPIs at the October meeting with the approved local plan brought to the Regional Board at its next meeting following
 - Will appear on the Board's 3 December 2019 meeting agenda

AGREED: to approve the minutes and note the status of the matters arising

Bd/19-20/05 Minutes of the Special Meeting of 28 August 2019

The minutes from the 28 August 2019 Special Meeting were approved without amendment.

The following item was taken out of order

Bd/19-20/07 Approvals of the Following Recommendations

The Head of Corporate Governance delivered the paper explaining that the Board is asked to approve the recommendations of the committees or note items reviewed by the identified committees. The Chair stated that the committees fully reviewed and discussed the items and unless there were questions, the Board would move to approve.

The Vice Principal Finance and Resources left the meeting as the Chief Operating Officer Job Description is a personnel decision relating to him.

With regard to Governance Committee recommendations the Board **approved** the following:

- Membership and Appointments
- Annual Programme of Business
- Scheme of Delegation
- Lead Governor Scheme
- Governor and Senior Post Holder Effectiveness
- Chief Operating Officer Job Description

With regard to the following the Governance Committee recommendation the Board **noted** the following:

- Register of Interests

With regard to the following recommendation from the Audit Committee the Board **approved** the following:

- Appointment of Internal Auditors

The Vice Principal Finance and Resources re-entered the meeting.

Newly appointed staff governor Susan Pollard entered the meeting and the Board introduced themselves and welcomed Susan. The Chair stated that she is a full member of the Board.

Bd/19-20/06 CEO Report

The Chief Executive presented this report reminding the Board that the report is divided into three sections: national, regional and local.

With regard to updates from a national level, the CE reported that Sajid Javid, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, announced £400 million investment in education for 16 to 19-year-olds. The boost is the single biggest annual increase for the sector since 2010. Current implications mean a one-year boost for 16-18 in further education colleges, however the expected fall in 16-18 numbers in 2019 is anticipated to partly offset any rises in 2020. The Board asked whether the increase was done as a lump sum for capital or based on student numbers. The CE responded that the two largest amounts from the reported investment will come in the form of an increase to the 16-18 base rate and higher value course support. The CE stated that it is anticipated there will be an amendment as T Levels

have a higher funding rate. £35m will be used to support Level 3 students who have achieved a 3 or below in GCSE English and maths.

The Chair announced that the College led on a press release regarding the funding investment with other regional colleges. He continued stating that we will need to be prudent with the money as it is not a lot of money and for one year only. The VP Finance and Resources stated that we do not yet know how much we will receive.

The CE stated that there is a high level of interest in adult education at the national level stating that she along with other college and sector leaders met with Gavin Williamson last week and talked about adult education, in particular a need to better understand level 1 to 2 transition as this was seen as an issue regarding social mobility. The CE announced she has been invited to speak at a committee in November.

The CE explained the beginnings of the Four Nations College Alliance and its publication the Blueprint which led to setting up the College of the Future - an Independent Commission which will be considering and drafting a report on what colleges should look like in the future, of which T Levels will be a part. The CE stated that the Board will receive a copy of the report when it is published. The Chair stated that the College must stay on top of the Commission's work and asked if there were any details. The CE stated there were no details available but the work is encouraging.

Governor Doyle stated that she is aware of the Alliance and that the Scottish Minister was promoting the Scottish system asking for the CE's thoughts. The CE responded that there was a lot of learning to do across the nations. The Board noted that this work needs to be linked in to the new manufacturing hub in the region.

The discussion regarding regional level and a part of the local level information was determined to be confidential and is recorded separately.

At the local level, the CE reported on the College Leadership Structure describing the organisational chart included in Appendix 2 of the report. The Chair, noting the absence of a Principal of Sunderland College asked for an update on Plan B. The CE stated that we did not appoint a Principal at Sunderland as the panel did not believe any of the candidates were suitable to deliver the College's strategy. In response to the lack of Principal, the role of VP Quality and Curriculum Development was created (with Morgan Hunt being used to recruit) with the CE continuing on with Principal functions. Candidates for the VP position are being forwarded and shortlisting will take place soon.

AGREED: to note the content of the report

Bd/19-20/08 Safeguarding and Prevent Monitoring Bi Annual Report and Action Plan and adoption of Safeguarding Policy (EPNE)

The Vice Principal Student Services and Registry delivered this report highlighting the following:

- Policies
 - There are a large number of policies that will be under review this academic year mainly due to the merger and the need to harmonise policies
- Staff and Governor training
 - The VP noted the types of training provided to staff stating that additional safeguarding and Prevent training needs to take place at Northumberland College (NC)

- Sunderland College (SC) and Hartlepool Sixth Form (HSF) training that has taken place in the last three years, Governor training for newly appointed governors needs to be prioritised
- Pre-merger training at NC did not align to the expectations of SC
- A plan has been developed by the VP and the Group Director of People and Development to address this as quickly as possible
- 98% of new staff and governors for SC and HSF completed the initial training on the Safeguarding Policy; similar data is unavailable for NC due to lack of a central record. This is being addressed with a plan to merge and harmonise data reporting
- Staff concerns
 - This was deemed confidential and is recorded elsewhere
- Student perspective
 - There continues to be an increase in referrals to the SC and HSF safeguarding teams in relation to mental health concerns. This follows a college three-year trend which mirrors the national picture
 - The board discussed differences in the pre-merger position of Northumberland College's safeguarding referrals, and the differing methodology to categorising referrals compared to Sunderland and Hartlepool.
 - The Board questioned who is leading on safeguarding at the college level to which the VP responded the Directors of Student Services at each college.
 - The VP reported on the post-merger performance of vulnerable groups that have been supported by the college, she highlighted the lack of data from Northumberland College premerger.
- Student Voice
 - Pre-merger NC student satisfaction rates were low in response to feeling college is a safe place (89% at induction with a drop to 82% on-programme survey)
 - A number of efforts are underway to ensure students feel safe including new safeguarding measures at Ashington and Kirkley Hall Campuses and the introduction of a dedicated PCSO. The PCSO will be undertaking positive policing activities and provide students with information on how to keep themselves safe
- Historical Student Deaths whilst in Learning (Northumberland County)
 - (Redacted)
 - A Suicide Prevention Plan is being developed

The VP Student Services and Registry pointed the Board's attention to the Prevent Risk Assessment highlighting that there are separate plans for the separate colleges as there are risks specific to each college. The VP Student Services and Registry noted that a Prevent Risk Assessment was not previously in place at NC (pre merger) and both plans are routinely reported on at SLT.

The VP Student Services and Registry introduced the Child Protection & Safeguarding Policy stating the Board had a number of decisions to make including naming the Lead Governor. The Chair stated that he did not think the Board could make that decision at the time to which the VP responded that statutorily, the College must have a named lead governor and asked if it would be possible to have the current lead governor remain until another could be appointed. The Board approved that approach subject to the Head of Corporate Governance & Policy speaking with Governor Barnett to determine whether he would agree to hold the post until a new governor is appointed. **(Action: Head of Corporate Governance & Policy)**

The Board asked how aware students are that policies like this exist to which the VP Student Services and Registry stated that they are all available on Moodle for SC & HSF and Canvas for NC. The SU

President stated that when she was a student she was not aware of this policy and asked if there would be a simplified version of the policy for students as she finds this one complex. The VP stated that the Z Card will offer that simplification and will be available to all students; the Board suggested it be made into a pdf and available online. **(Action: VP Student Services & Registry)**

The Board noted that student voice and coding correctly is difficult as one student may present with multiple issues suggesting there needs to be a holistic approach. It was suggested that the Mental Health Charter Mark designed for schools be introduced into the College. The VP Student Services and Registry stated that the College has done some of the items suggested in the charter during high stress times like induction and exams.

The CE suggested that the Board may wish to see an update on training, specifically at NC to which the Board agreed it would. The Board suggested that the Northumberland Local Governing Board should receive reports on the ongoing NC staff cases.

The Board questioned how policy effectiveness is measured and monitored to which the VP Student Services and Registry stated that it is monitored through learning walks and asking students on their awareness, surveys on safety and self assessments. The Principal NC stated that it is important to make sure students are aware of who to go to if they need assistance. The Board suggested that checking in with students on this during student lunches noting Ofsted will ask students about Prevent.

AGREED to:

- Note the receipt of the safeguarding report
- Approve approach to Lead Governor
- Approve changes to the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy

Bd/19-20/09 Adoption of Fees and Refunds Policy

The Vice Principal Finance and Resources delivered this paper stating that the fees policies for the two colleges have been merged following a lot of work done at SC on fee setting including a review of appropriate fee levels with work completed to cross check against NC fees. Adopting a harmonised policy is the next step. The VP Finance and Resources stated that the policy represents best practices having been drafted after consulting other FE and HE policies on fees. The policy is comprehensive and addresses fee liability, instalment payments, student loan finance, advance learner loans, refunds, fee waivers, non-payment of fees, and complaints and appeals.

The Board questioned whether the policy should outline that part of the fee, for apprenticeships in particular, goes from the College to an assessment provider to which the VP Partnerships and Commercial responded that that sits with the employer and costs are explicitly stated in those contracts.

AGREED: to approve the Fees Policy

Bd/19-20/10 Students' Union Constitution and Budget

The Vice Principal Student Services and Registry and the Students' Union President delivered this report with the VP Student Services and Registry providing a brief history of students' unions at SC. The VP explained that the Constitution presented is based on the model constitution drafted by the Association of Colleges and the National Union of Students, though, as this is the first year, there are not as many officer roles as the model suggests. Through the election process for Students' Union Officers there was one candidate for the Vice President Sunderland and one for the Vice President

Northumberland. The remaining roles will be re-advertised with extended deadlines. The VP stated that she is seeking approval of the Constitution with a view to amend at the end of the academic year.

The SU President asked if voting will be done differently next year to which the VP replied that it would, the single transferrable vote required in the Constitution will be replaced with first past the post.

The Board questioned the requirement of meetings once every fortnight and whether the Union will have enough administrative support for this noting particularly minuting. The VP stated that the students will take on those responsibilities on a rotating basis and the President reports in to the VP so if there are any issues, they can be raised.

The Board questioned whether funding for student groups could be cashless to which the SU President responded that it depends on what the students want. The VP stated that for this year, they will have to follow College financial procedures.

The SU President reported on the budget stating that £5k was not a lot to work with but that she plans to use it wisely, in the following three areas:

- Events
 - The SU President reported that she would like to focus on making student life a bit more fun and is planning events that will not cost the students a lot of money to attend
- Marketing
 - The SU would like to develop their own branding designed and voted on by the students with Marketing team support
 - Purchase of banners, pens and badges which will be sustainable and not single use
- National Union of Students meetings, training and events
 - Funds will be spent on fees, trains and accommodation

The CE noted that the SU President sits on her Green Group and will be leading on a waste audit of the College.

AGREED to approve:

- the Students' Union Constitution with review at the end of the academic year
- the proposed Students' Union budget for 2019/20

The following item was taken out of order

Bd/19-20/18 Complaints Bi-Annual Report (EPNE)

The Vice Principal Student Services and Registry delivered this report highlighting the data from last year.

The Board asked whether there were any themes contained in the complaints to which the Principal NC replied that with regard to NC, there was a culture of not resolving informally with some complaints arising because there were no appropriate procedures in place for certain things. He continued that there appeared to be no learning from the complaints particularly around curriculum and assessment and there were a number of complaints around teacher performance from students' parents.

The Board suggested that the Northumberland Local Board be presented with a report to which the VP Student Services and Registry stated that a report on year-in complaints is recommended to be presented to the Northumberland Curriculum & Quality Committee.

The Board questioned where and how corporate learning is captured in relation to complaints to which the VP Student Services and Registry stating that that is part of the report that the Northumberland Curriculum and Quality Committee will review. The CE stated that case studies can be part of the next biannual report.

The Board agreed that case studies are particularly important to have in preparation for an Ofsted visit. It was agreed that the report going to the Northumberland Curriculum and Quality Committee be circulated to all Governors (**Action: Head of Corporate Governance and Policy**). The CE stated that it is important to triangulate this information with the student survey results.

The Board AGREED to:

- note the report
- have the Northumberland's Curriculum & Quality Committee to review complaints in-year
- approve the separate Complaints Procedures for the autumn term with a view to harmonising into one procedure by 01 January 2020.

Bd/19-20/11 Results – ENT & Apprenticeships (EPNE)

The Interim Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality delivered this report highlighting that these are provisional results with overall achievement rates at 87.9% compared to 87.4% last academic year.

Other key points highlighted included:

- EPNE 16-18 current achievement rate is at 85.3%, (National Average 82.1%; Best Case 87%) this is a slight improvement in comparison to 2017-18 end of year 84.5% achievement rate
- Adult current achievement rate is at 90.6% (National Average 88.3%; Best Case 93.7%), compared to 2017-18 end of year achievement rate of 89.6%.
- A Level and AS pass rates have shown improvements on the previous year. High grades have also improved at both Hartlepool Sixth Form and Sunderland College for both A Level and AS Level
- Areas for improvement at AS and A Levels is Maths and Science at Sunderland College and AS Maths and Sociology at Hartlepool Sixth Form in particular
- GCSE English and maths, high grades have declined at SC and HSF though NC has seen good results for maths

The Board questioned whether the 8.1% figure for NC English grades 4-9 was correct to which the Interim Deputy Principal responded that it was and that there is a whole College approach to English and maths with a committee being formed chaired by the CE and the Interim Deputy Principal. The Board asked whether it was still difficult to recruit teachers to the GCSE English and maths posts and whether that was disruptive to learners. The Interim Deputy Principal responded that it was difficult to recruit and it is disruptive but the team understands that there needs to be a lot of time and investment put into this area.

The Interim Deputy Principal reported that combining the two colleges' data has the biggest negative impact on the achievement for Apprenticeships, with overall achievement at 56.7%, best case 68.5%, with 94 unknowns being worked on; timely achievement is 52.9%, 61.5% best case, with 91 unknowns. Specifically, NC has overall achievement of 40% currently, 62.5% best case; timely

34.7%, best case 49.9% (94 unknowns) and SC has overall 72.4% currently, 74.2% best case (7unknowns +17 continuing) and timely 73.2% projected.

The VP Partnerships and Commercial noted that when looking at NC numbers, there are a disproportionate number of 'unknowns' which is due to poor practices. 'Unknowns' was defined for the Board as enrolments on the system that weren't finalised, so those continuing on with studies or achieving and completing their studies are not being counted.

The Principal NC stated that there is a large issue with 'unknowns' at NC with 3000 being discovered a month ago being reduced to 1200 at present. This is due to a lack of processes and procedures in place. The CE stated that SC staff have been mobilised to help NC and we are teaching NC staff as we go along stating that the two new Associate Principals understand the issue and the importance of reducing unknowns. With achievement now being captured we may see those numbers rise.

The Board questioned the 11.9% achievement rate for maths at SC and asked whether the classes could be split. The Interim Deputy Principal stated that they could not due to not having the teachers. The Interim Principal noted that the College is now taking on lower achieving students (those who received 2s in previous attempts) and the CE stated that looking at progress data is really important to which the Board requested that data. The Interim Deputy Principal stated that data is being compiled manually and there is still quite a bit of work to do.

AGREED: to note the contents of the report

Bd/19-20/12 Capital Development Programme

This item was determined confidential with minutes retained separately.

Bd/19-20/13 Capital & Transaction Unit Spend Report

This item was determined confidential with minutes retained separately.

Bd/19-20/14 Budgetary Control Statements

This item was determined confidential with minutes retained separately.

Bd/19-20/15 Enrolment Against Target Report (EPNE)

This item was determined confidential with minutes retained separately.

Bd/19-20/16 Confidential minutes of the previous meeting held 13 May 2019 and Matters Arising

This item was determined confidential with minutes retained separately.

Bd/19-20/17 Confidential minutes of the Special Meeting of 28 August 2019

This item was determined confidential with minutes retained separately.

The Chair noted receipt of the following informational items:

- **Bd/19-20/19 Estates Update (EPNE)**
- **Bd/19-20/20 Draft Minutes of the following Committees**
 - Audit Committee
 - Finance, Resources & Capital Committee
 - Governance Committee

Bd/19-20/21 Any Other Business

The Vice Principal Partnerships and Commercial raised one item of other business, high value subcontracts. The VP stated that in 2018/19 the College had a high value contracts with:

- Sora valued at £623K with £273K at Sunderland and £350k being worked on at Northumberland
- Skills Network for £359k; this was with Northumberland and we are not clear on the due diligence undertaken

For the 2019/20 academic year, approval is being sought to continue to subcontract with Sora for £350k to provide engineering provision complimentary to the College's provision.

AGREED: to approve the subcontract with Sora for the 2019/20 academic year.

Bd/19-20/22 Date, time and venue of next meeting: 3 December 2019, 6:00pm, Conference Room, City Campus

There being no further business the meeting closed at 20:40.