

**Minutes of the meeting of the Board of the Corporation held on  
Tuesday, 30 June 2020 at 5:00pm via Teams Conferencing**

- Present:
- John Barnett
  - George Blyth
  - Tom Crompton
  - Louise Doyle (arrived during Bd/19-20/112)
  - Louise Farthing
  - Rob Lawson (Chair) (present at Bede Campus)
  - Paul McEldon
  - Zainab Nadeem, SU President
  - Susan Pollard
  - Ralph Saelzer
  - Ellen Thinnesen, Chief Executive
- In Attendance:
- Nigel Harrett, Principal Northumberland College
  - David Howells, Chief Operating Officer
  - Vikkie Morton, Vice Principal Student Services and Registry
  - Iain Nixon, Vice Principal Partnerships and Commercial
  - Judith Quinn, Interim Deputy Principal Curriculum
  - Jo Cooper, Director of Education and Training and Interim Director Quality
- Clerk:
- Christine Stretesky, Head of Corporate Governance and Policy (present at Bede Campus)

The Chair announced that Iesha Heads, the new SU President may join the meeting this evening.

**Bd/19-20/110 Apologies and consent or absence and declarations of interest**

Apologies were accepted from Louise Kennedy. There were no declarations of interest made.

**Bd/19-20/111 Minutes of the previous meeting held 12 May 2020 and Matters Arising**

The minutes were accepted as drafted. There were no matters arising that do not appear in the papers for this meeting.

**Bd/19-20/112 CEO Report**

The Chief Executive (CE) delivered the report stating that at the national level, the Prime Minister announced opportunity guarantees for young people, consisting of apprenticeships or work placement. This comes after the Association of Colleges' (AoC) warning around the high risk of

recession. The AoC's Rebuild: a skills led recovery plan was described and Governors were asked to use the hashtags provided by the AoC and included in papers on their social media.

The CE announced that the Group has started to submit Centre-Assessed Grades to awarding bodies and the Vice Principal Student Services and Registry confirmed that the majority of grades have been submitted and noted that grades have not yet been submitted to three awarding bodies as there are students who still need to complete in person assessments.

The CE notified Governors that the T Level Capital Grant bid has been submitted, thanking the Interim Deputy Principal Curriculum for her work on the bid.

The Chair added that at a National Leaders of Governance meeting with the FE Commissioner, he announced that his staff was going to resume assessments at colleges.

At the regional level, the CE stated that there has been a change to the senior leadership team at Hartlepool Borough Council and the new managing director has asked to have a member of staff sit on the Sunderland Local Governing Board.

The North East Institute of Technology was announced as having been approved and the Board agreed that implementation is best placed to be monitored by the Sunderland Local Governing Board.

The CE stated she wanted to highlight one item at the local level, the launch of the virtual Professional Development Centre, with special thanks to the Associate Principal Resources and Legal Services. The formal launch will take place in October.

The Board asked whether the Professional Development Centre will be a source of income for the Group. The CE stated that at the moment, there was one platform launched, Safeguarding and Prevent and additional platforms will be added to provide provision on everything from developing teachers old and new and training to ensure that our staff are up to date on industry standards which will include using our employers as partners. The CE continued that we may be able to develop a platform that we can share with other colleges which may be a way to create an income stream.

*Governor Louise Doyle joined the meeting here*

AGREED: to note the contents of the report.

### **Bd/19-20/113 COVID Business Continuity and Performance Report**

The Chief Operating Officer (COO) delivered the report highlighting two aspects of reopening: returning students to college and returning staff to work. With regard to returning students it was noted that the College has never totally closed with some students on campus and all provision remotely delivered. The COO stated that there is a need for students to return to campuses for onsite assessments and senior leaders are working to have everything in place to welcome all students back in September.

The COO continued that Group risk assessments have been conducted by senior leadership as well as staff so that the continuity planning can progress to reopening and then performing. Risks around people coming back to campuses are assessed in this process. The COO stated that in preparation of returning, checklists have been created for staff and students. Common areas, classrooms and offices have been assessed. Undertaking a phased return, the COO stated that approximately 12% of students will return this academic year with most needing to complete onsite assessments.

The COO discussed the financial impacts of COVID reminding the Board that the big areas impacted are apprenticeships and the delay of the transformation programme to reduce pay costs. Senior leaders are aligning cost savings with income reductions to avoid need of an overdraft and ensuring cash will not run out this fiscal year. The COO warned that longer term, apprenticeship income and restructuring savings will continue to be affected, but assured the Board that senior leaders are aware of all of this and are looking at areas to make further savings.

The Board questioned the 12% figure for returning students to campus asking why the figure was so low. The CE responded that the Group are not allowed to bring all students back this academic year based on a quota set by the Department of Education. She noted that some students are happy to continue online, and the focus by senior leaders are vulnerable students and those needing to complete assessments.

The Board asked what message is being delivered to students during recruitment on whether they will be studying onsite or remotely next year. The CE explained that the message largely depends on the student and the programme. Stating that Kirkley Hall Campus is a bit easier to plan for as land-based provision has time in the field and in the classroom, the challenging areas were identified as City, Ashington and Bede Campuses. The Interim Deputy Principal Curriculum stated that she is meeting with learning technologists and the IT Director to discuss bespoke delivery for various programmes providing that the priority will be those who need to be on campus. The Principal Northumberland College stated that senior leaders at the local college are working through the plans for all campuses with face to face delivery wherever possible. The Principal stated that transport is an issue and a complication.

The Board acknowledged that one message is not practical and challenged senior leaders on whether there needs to be a rethinking of how new college provision is being marketed. The CE provided assurances by describing the strong digital marketing practices in place providing as an example that a letter is going to every applicant, which is something the college have not done in the past, letting the student know what they can expect in the new academic year.

Recognising that incentives for employers to take on apprentices are being discussed by government, the Board queried whether senior leaders thought those will affect recruitment. The Vice Principal Partnerships and Commercial (VP P&C) stated that his team have been scenario planning around what next year will look like with four realistic scenarios informed by intelligence from employers. The VP P&C stated that the issue isn't necessarily monetary but more about having time to plan to bring apprentices on board as most employers will be just getting up to full running in September and will not be prepared to welcome apprentices at that time. Governor Saelzer agreed that that is what he is seeing in advanced manufacturing. The CE added that the North East LEP are preparing for the biggest reduction in the economy they have seen in half a century.

The Board commended senior leaders on the reporting and for casting of cash flow and liquidity.

AGREED: to note the contents of the report

### **Bd/19-20/114 Curriculum Planning and Strategy 2020-21**

The Vice Principal Student Services and Registry (VP SS&R) delivered the report reminding the Board that the local governing boards have reviewed and scrutinised the paper. Continuing, she stated that the paper provides an overview of the curriculum strategy and provides the budgetary forecasting for curriculum contribution.

Turning to the planned curriculum contribution, the VP SS&R stated that governors should be looking for high percentage rates. As a whole, the Group planned contribution is at 41.89% for a curriculum strategy that is aligned with the NE LEP economic plan.

The Board questioned how the percentage was calculated asking for specifics on what is included. The VP SS&R responded that staff drilled down quite a bit, looking at things like exam costs, staffing models, qualifications included within curriculum areas and removing those that do not add anything to a CV.

The Board asked for the figure on the number of qualifications that have been removed and how many that have been added. The Interim Deputy Principal Curriculum stated that an exact figure could not be given at that time, but at the sixth forms, teams looked at qualifications that are not helping or not adding value to student progression. The VP SS&R stated that there were some qualifications that all students at the start of college would undertake that were not impactful so those have been replaced with masterclasses that will add impact.

The Board requested information on the percentage of short courses or qualifications that have been cut or added, if this does not create too much work for staff. **(Action: VP Student Services and Registry).**

AGREED: to note the contents of the report

### **Bd/19-20/115 Committee Recommendations**

The Head of Corporate Governance and Policy stated that the committees identified in the paper have scrutinised the items and agreed to recommend to the Board approval. If there are no items Governors wish to discuss separately, they can vote to approve all recommendations.

The Chair asked whether there were any items needing to be discussed; there were none.

AGREED to approve:

- Amended Instrument and Articles of Government
- Amended Standing Orders
- Calendar of Meetings 2020-21
- Programme of Business 2020-21
- Cessation of the Sunderland Curriculum & Quality Committee
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- Creation of new committee and the Terms of Reference for the new committee
- Alison Shaw as Chair of the new committee
- Risk Management Framework Policy

## **Bd/19-20/116 Higher Education (HE) Framework**

The Deputy Interim Principal Curriculum presented the paper stating that the paper provides the range of HE provision and aspirations for the delivery of that provision highlighting:

- The framework takes into consideration local and regional economic needs
- There are a number of HE partners as the Group looks to quality, strategic alliances with universities and awarding bodies
- Partnerships with universities will be only with those universities that share our vision and quality of provision, thus current partnerships may change
- Senior leaders are looking at the added value we can get from all partnerships – i.e. professional development, progression for our students etc
- The vision of the HE approach sits well within the Group's strategic plans
- HE strategic decision making and monitoring will sit with the Board of the Corporation

In response to a question around Education and Care and where that sits within the framework, the Interim Deputy Principal Curriculum stated that it is very much a priority and sits within the Health provision.

The Board asked whether there were plans for the Group to seek awarding powers. The Interim Deputy Principal Curriculum stated that that is not something senior leaders are currently pursuing. The CE stated that due to the impact on Group finances caused by the merger with NC, it would be unlikely that we would be successful at this time.

The Board asked whether there is any consideration to work in partnership with universities on apprenticeship delivery. The Interim Deputy Principal Curriculum stated that there is a one-year cap on HE recruitment, though it does not take into account those students progressing from our college or apprenticeship programmes. The Board noted that universities struggle with the work placement aspect of apprenticeships and that there may be an opportunity for the Group to support universities with this. The Interim Deputy Principal Curriculum agreed that the strategic alliances with universities is about sharing good practice and working in collaboration not competition. The VP Commercial and Partnerships noted that there are opportunities to co -design and co-develop to play to each other's strengths.

AGREED to: approve the Higher Education Framework for EPNE

## **Bd/19-20/117 Safeguarding and Prevent Monitoring Annual Report and Action Plan**

The VP SS&R presented the paper highlighting:

- Data has been seen at local governing boards for their respective colleges
- With regard to staff training completion rates sit a 99% for SC and 98.8% for NC which is much better than what was reported in October
- Across the Group, there 1224 student safeguarding concerns which may look like an increase but with the introduction of MyConcern, an online referral system, the process has been streamlined
- There has been a 130% increase in mental health concerns, but a reduction in the serious risk of harm concerns as we are seeing concerns earlier than previously
- There were no reported concerns with Prevent agenda
- There was one hate crime incident reported occurring outside of college
- There were 28 bullying incidents

- Since February, there has been only one incident reported. It was an online incident and has been dealt with
- 17 of the bullying allegations were at NC with 13 at Kirkley Hall campus
- There has been a lot of work by intensive support team during campus closures
- The team are taking a number of key steps to improve the service and keep students safe
- The Group have undertaken PREVENT champions training by Northumberland Police

Governor Blyth shared that he attended staff Safeguarding training in November stating it was an eye opener and noted the need for support services now more than ever.

The Board questioned the following:

- The increase in bullying incidents: the VP SS&R stated that upon reviewing the cases there is nothing pointing to a cause. Staff are looking at our anti-bullying policy and what support can be put in place for personal development
- The figures in tables 2.3 and 2.4: the VP SS&R replied that the safeguarding team are doing a lot of work with staff so that they know who to contact and to better understand our students explaining that prior to merger NC did not get safeguarding records from schools which is now happening
- The increase on internet hits on pornography: the VP SS&R explained that the increase was due to viewings of an image on Twitter not pornography websites. She continued stating that the Group are piloting eSafe which is a tool that looks at hits whilst in college and whilst out of college on college equipment
- How the Group are engaging with the Black Lives Matter movement: the VP SS&R stated the safeguarding team are discussing with IT how to best track words that may incite bigotry and hate crimes

AGREED: to note the contents of the report

### **Bd/19-20/118 Compliments and Complaints Annual Report and Policy Review (EPNE)**

The Director of Education and Training and Interim Director Quality (Director) presented the paper and the policy stating that the paper covers the annual report for the Group and seeks approval for the new policy. With regard to the Compliments and Complaints Annual Report, the Director highlighted:

- There were 45 formal complaints made, 78% relate to NC (down from 91% last year)
- Most complaints received at NC were received in August and September with only 15 received since October
- 24 complaints were found to be justified
- 2 were found to be partially justified
- The analysis in appendix 2 shows an historic trend of more females filing complaints. Staff are triangulating data with QDP survey results to understand why this might be
- There were no complaints regarding how bullying is handled at the College
- 9 complaints from HE students with only one of those around academic standards; no complaints progressed to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator
- No appeals received at the time of the writing of the report

Turning to the policy, the Director summarised key provisions from the policy and the changes made from the previous version specifically noting that it now requires the Group to capture suggestions and compliments as well as complaints. She stated that legal advice was being sought on the potential remedies provided and emphasised the importance of staff being trained on complaint handling.

The Board agreed that widening the policy to compliments and suggestions was an excellent way to move forward.

The Board offered that a simplified guidance tool on how to make a complaint, compliment and suggestion would benefit a wide audience. The Director stated that plans were in place to develop guidance which will be published online and in handbooks.

The Board questioned what success looks like suggesting that an increase in complaints might not be negative. The Director agreed saying staff are very keen to critically reflect and continue to improve so are open to hearing what students and stakeholders have to say.

The Board questioned the list of potential remedies asking for an explanation. The Director and Vice Principal Student Services and Registry explained that the monetary remedy to make a complainant whole is used when damage occurs to personal property and the complainant is out of pocket to fix or replace the item.

AGREED to:

- Approve the “How are we performing” (Complaints, Suggestions & Compliments) Policy subject to legal advice
- Note the contents of the Complaints Annual Report

### **Bd/19-20/119 Students’ Union Budget**

The VP SS&R and the Students’ Union President presented the item highlighting:

- The proposed budget ask is £5k
- The new president has been consulted and is happy with the 2020-21 budget request
- The entire budget from the previous year was not spent due to lockdown but plans are to spend it to create branding for the Union along with branded merchandise
- If it were not for COVID all funds would have been spent with an equal ratio for each campus for events

One governor noted that at the virtual student/governor lunch the students in attendance were not aware of Union or the activities it hosts. The Board agreed that using funds to create branding and increase awareness of the Union was a good use of funds.

The Board asked about the diversity of candidates for the Presidential election. The SU President stated that there was a lot of interest in running for office, and in the end, two female candidates ran.

AGREED to: approve the Students’ Union Budget

### **Bd/19-20/120 Student Council – Feedback from lunches**

The Chair invited the local board chairs to provide feedback from the virtual Student/Governor Lunches:

Governor Barnett thanked the Governors who attended and stated that in large part students were very positive about remote learning and how learning is continuing. One student needed support, and this has already been resolved.

Governor Crompton stated that students at Northumberland College reported that tutors are going above and beyond right now. There were issues identified with the facilities at Berwick which are all being addressed.

AGREED: to note the contents of the oral reports.

### **Bd/19-20/121 Management Accounts**

The COO delivered the accounts noting they have been reviewed and scrutinised by the Finance, Resources and Projects Committee. Providing a brief overview, the following was highlighted:

- EBITDA is at £2.1m
- Covenant compliance tests were all passed in December
- Signposting to section 6 – tight cash flow position earlier in the year however, we will be not needing an overdraft this fiscal year
- Financial Health score is at 130 points

The Board asked for some clarification to the headings of the columns in section 8 to which the COO responded with clarification.

AGREED: to note the contents of the report

### **Bd/19-20/122 Confidential minutes of the previous meeting held 12 May 2020 and Matters Arising**

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

### **Bd/19-20/123 Confidential minutes of the Special Meeting held 18 June 2020**

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

### **Bd/19-20/124 Student Transport – Tender Approval**

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

### **Bd/19-20/125 Sub-contracting Partnerships – Strategy and contracts over threshold update**

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

### **Bd/19-20/126 Health and Safety Annual Report and Strategy**

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

### **Bd/19-20/127 Papers from Local Boards:**

- Estates Annual Reports

AGREED: note receipt of the papers

### **Bd/19-20/128 Draft Minutes of the following Committees**

- Audit Committee
- Finance, Resources & Capital Committee
- Governance Committee

AGREED: note receipt of the papers

### **Bd/19-20/129 Gratitude and Farewell:**

The Chair announced that this meeting was the last meeting for two Governors: George Blyth and Zainab Nadeem.

Providing background history of Governor Blyth's time with the College, the Chair praised and thanked him for his nine years, commitment and loyalty as Chair of the Audit Committee. Specifically noted was Governor Blyth's talent for asking the right questions at the right time and in the right way.

Noting that Zainab Nadeem is the first SU President for the new Students' Union, the Chair thanked the President for her enthusiastic commitment to the College stating that she was a fantastic representative of the student voice.

The SU President thanked the Governors for making her feel welcomed.

Governor Blyth stated that this was a sad time as the College has become a part of his life. He thanked the CE, Senior Leadership Team and the Head of Corporate Governance and Policy with a special thanks to the COO who he credited with assisting him in developing the Audit Committee.

### **Bd/19-20/130 Any Other Business**

- 1. Approve items 130a – d as provided in the paper addended on Monday.**

The Board discussed item 130b seeking clarification that the contract was to lease copiers with Apogee the recommended vendor. This was confirmed by the COO.

AGREED: to approve all items 130a-d

***The Chair asked the staff and SU President to leave the meeting as the remaining items were deemed confidential as to them.***

**2. Items from the CE Report that were identified as confidential**

This item was deemed confidential with minutes recorded separately with limited circulation.

***The Chair asked the CE and all remaining ELT members were asked to leave the meeting as the next item was deemed confidential to them.***

**3. Item 130e – Chief Executive Salary**

This item was deemed confidential with minutes recorded separately with limited circulation.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 19:52.