

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

FRIDAY 9 MAY 2014 AND SATURDAY 10 MAY 2014



Report: Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 27 March 2014

GATESHEAD COLLEGE

Author: Clerk

Action: Approve

Status: Open

Present: Robin Mackie (Chair)
Rebecca Anderson
Catherine Dennis
Judith Doyle
Darren Heathcote
Ivan Jepson
Chris Macklin
David Mitchell
Nick Hurn
Mark Taylor
Simone Wood

In attendance: Mick Brophy
John Gray
John Holt
Gwyneth Jones (Minutes)
Emma Moody (Clerk)
Nadine Hudspeth
Mark Thompson

1840 Welcome/Apologies

Robin Mackie welcomed everyone to the meeting in particular new Governor, Nick Hurn, and John Gray, Strategy Manager, Learner & Customer Services, who had taken on responsibility for the Teaching and Learning agenda as part of the Deputy Principal role. Apologies for absence were received from Keith Cann Evans, Emily Cox, Kevin Fitzpatrick, Sally Hancox, John McElroy and Ian Renwick.

The Chair mentioned a request for photographs of Governors for the College website which had been received from the Marketing and Communications Team and suggested that these could be done at the end of the meeting. He also advised that under Any Other Business there would be an update on the Federation. This would be a restricted item so Staff and Student Governors would be asked to leave the meeting at this point. He then asked Nick Hurn to introduce himself to the other Governors.

The Chair invited members to declare any interests on any item on the agenda. He explained that Smith Electric Vehicles were moving into Barmston Court and that the Smith team were working with John Holt, Director of Finance. He had already declared this to the Finance and General Purposes Committee and would abstain from the decision making process in order to ensure that conflicts of interest were managed.

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The Clerk indicated that she had advised F & GP Committee on this issue and, in order to ensure due process, under the Standing Orders, the lease to Smith Electric (as a company connected to the Chair) would need the consent of a Minister.

The Chair said if the project at Barmston Court was successful it would create 35 jobs and 426 apprenticeships.

No other interests were declared at this stage in the meeting; however, members noted that should the direction of debate on any item result in a potential conflict of interest, this should be indicated during the meeting. Members were also reminded to advise the Clerk of any changes to be made to declaration of interests.

1841 Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 12 December 2013

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 12 December 2013 were accepted as a true record, subject to the point on 1836 mentioned below.

1842 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising which were not substantive items on the agenda.

1821 Ofsted update - The Principal referred to page 2 and said she would be reporting on the Ofsted Inspection in February 2014 later on the agenda.

1836 Review of Federation activity – The Principal referred to page 14 and said that the figure for the joint bid should be £80,000 not £50,000.

1843 Principal's Comprehensive Review of Business

The Principal, together with Executive Team, presented to the Board.

The Chair said that, from discussions with the Principal, it was clear that some things are going well and some require more focus. He hoped the Review would lead to further debate at the Board Away Day. He suggested that questions should be taken at the end of the presentation so not to stop the flow.

The Principal explained that the purpose of the Comprehensive Review was to look at all aspects of the College's work across each of the 'quadrants'. She had been set this as her priority for her first six months in post.

As part of the process she had talked to the new Executive Team and looked at their individual and collective responsibilities. They had been set high expectations and were one team with collective ownership of their strategic targets and vision. The working area for the Executive Team had been redesigned which meant they were now located in one office. Twice weekly conference calls had been introduced and two 'strategy days' had been spent working on the current position. The aim was to drive clarity and accountability across the organisation and she had talked to staff, students, governors and stakeholders. The focus was not just on what was working well but also on what was still to be done.

Students and Learning

The Principal said that the College had made significant progress in the last two or three years in terms of the performance of learners on long programmes. Standards of teaching and learning were improving and a clear focus must be

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maintained. They needed to ensure the product met the needs of students and employers and allowed the College to deliver an efficient curriculum and get learners into work.

John Gray (JG), Strategy Manager, Learner & Customer Services, explained that success rates had improved, in particular 16-18 Long Level 3 which had been a key weakness during the 2012/2013 Ofsted Inspection. In 2013/2014 rates had increased by 5% to 90%. There were legacy issues for two or three courses in SSA 5: Construction and SSA 11: Social Sciences. The programmes do not complete until the end of the current year so this was impacting on Long Level 2 and Level 3 success rates.

There was improved course management, improved teaching and learning with a focus on the needs of every learner. Retention rates had improved alongside improving levels of attendance. Early assessment and setting stretching targets had resulted in College observations being 68% good or better but this had not been delivered/achieved during the inspection. There had been joint observations and 100% agreement of observation grades. Some teachers have not fully understood the requirements of expectations of good or better. Bradley Lightbody will deliver sessions next week to demonstrate how to be a good and outstanding college. Gillian Forrester, Strategy Manager, Teaching and Learning Development, and JG had met with Heads of Groups to monitor improvement in each area. The focus will remain and they will continue to press forward to tackle underperformance.

In terms of the delivery of English & Maths, too few students are making the necessary progress. A specialist English and Maths team has been recruited with the purposes of motivating reluctant, disengaged learners and streamlining them into ability groups.

Regarding Gold Standards across all delivery, there was a clear goal to aim for. Long-term and short-term goals had been identified and reviews will be measured against the Gold Standard. Stretch and challenge has been identified as an area requiring improvement.

They were currently in the process of identifying Study Programmes. Improving the quality of education and realising potential would lead to sustainable jobs. Some students had too few hours whilst others had too many hours against the 540 hours per year target minimum. The time had to be spent on a mixture of qualification and non-qualification work eg tutorial and work experience hours. Students would take part in work experience relevant to their particular area of study and information and guidance would be improved.

In terms of Student Destination Data, 81% had been collected which showed that 92% of students had progressed to work or training. Improved curriculum design will allow better evaluation and monitoring. They will build on success rates, increase good and better learning experiences and improve quality of delivery.

The Chair thanked David Mitchell for his work through the Academic Standards Committee.

Chris Macklin commented on the aspiration the College had for English and Maths and said that in the NHS, the standards for apprentices was Grade B not Grade C; he wondered if Grade C was enough. The Principal thought it was a good suggestion to have an aspirational target but build in Grade B. He said to go to a

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Grade B and have a Grade C as a milestone along the way. The Principal replied that as well as getting to a minimum they have to illustrate development. Learners were monitored at the point of entry and performance measured based on each learner.

JG said to show the distance travelled by learners, eg adults, the College undertook a diagnostic assessment to see the level they are working at. The Chair asked about post-diagnostic and JG said if a student had the academic ability to study at a particular level, there were other pathways they could take. They did not want to be setting up students to fail and wanted to ensure they were at the right study level. A Governor asked about the diagnostic test and JG replied that it involved four skills. The Principal said that it was a wide piece of software diagnostic down to punctuation or spelling and they would target support in those particular areas. It will be the job of the Learning Facilitator Team to ensure they get the right support to make progress; 'On Track' monitored individual student progress.

This area of analysis would be added to the Strategic Away Day.

David Mitchell thanked the members of the Academic Standards Committee for their work but said that he thought the Committee format 'may not be fit for purpose'. The Clerk said that this would be looked at by the Governance and Search Committee, as well as by the Board in its analysis of Board reporting systems.

Catherine Dennis, Teaching Staff Governor, said that the structure for English and Maths would be in place in September 2014. Some learners felt let down because they had not been able to access the courses.

Mark Thompson, Director of People and Organisation Development, indicated that they were being more planful when looking at recruitment. He said that he had been at Gateshead College for six months and when approving new posts he had been too reactive; there was a need to be 'fleet of foot', but also systematic.

The Chair referred to a couple of points which had been raised by Emily Cox. She understood that more of the action plan was to shift the quality of teaching. She wanted to know how the Management Team will ensure the consistency of improvements. The Chair suggested that this could be reviewed at Strategic Away Days.

People

The Principal said that there had not been a focus on the people in the past but there was now. There was recognition of this at Executive Team level and it been made explicit throughout the Strategic Plan. Some things were working well but a couple of things needed improvement.

Mark Thompson (MT), Director of People and Organisation Development, said they were working to develop the capability of the teaching workforce alongside Gillian Forrester, Strategy Manager, Teaching & Learning Development and were managing this along with the unions. There was a stable workforce, a good culture, strong core HR systems, positive metrics and opportunities to improve Performance Management.

87% of staff had been at the College for more than one year; turnover was relatively low at 11% against an average of 18% and absence levels were below the AoC benchmark. On an operational level everything looked OK. There was a good

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culture with the building blocks to get the College where it needed to be. There were robust and strong HR systems and they were currently assessing the Performance Management system (ASPIRE) and had created an online system. They were introducing a proper Learning and Development Framework (CPD) and being more explicit in the way they set objectives so staff understood their contribution and performance.

The balanced scorecard meant that people's contribution was being measured against the four quadrants. They were developing a behavioural framework with good job descriptions but there was nothing which said about the expectations from Gateshead College. They were working to have this in place in May 2014.

In terms of engagement, people's attitude and motivation was patchy and needed to be moved along. If the College was doing the right things it would get engagement. A team brief system had been introduced and this had been positively received. Staff lunches were now taking place with invitations to a cross-section of colleagues to have lunch with the Principal and the Executive Team. The Executive Team were more visible, Engagement Champions roles had been created who would act as conduits and they would be developed to be a communication/consultation channel and some structural changes needed to be managed.

A Governor referred to the behavioural framework and mentioned Virginia Mason School in the USA. They had a contractual relationship and compact and if you could not sign up to the compact then you were no longer part of the set up. It was about demonstrating a commitment to the belief and culture of the organisation.

The Principal said that she understood commitment to a common standard was essential.

The Chair thought this should also be discussed at the Strategic Board Away Day. What investment could we make in our people?

There had been great investment in people monetarily but there was a need to look at the emotional aspect. Investment took time and money and it was necessary for John Holt to make sure that the College had the right level of investment in its people.

A Governor thought there needed to be a 'one team' approach with everyone's personal contribution counting towards the work in the College (this would be coupled with non-traditional targets).

Rewards and recognition for staff and clear accountability were also something for the Away Day.

Another Governor thought there needed to be a clear idea of what brand the College wanted to be and needed to look at what else could be done to help get students into work.

John Gray replied that there needed to be a clear link with job descriptions. The Action Plan needed to be clear on what the expectations of the organisation are and link with ASPIRE.

The Chair requested for students, staff or Board members to get their ideas to Mark Thompson in advance of the Strategic Away Day so they could debate them. The Principal said that at the end of the meeting she wanted to come back to this area.

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They could not ask staff to do things that they did not do. The focus of the people agenda was making sure teaching and learning was of the highest quality and developing teachers. Developing behaviours starts with the Principal and the Executive Team.

A Governor said there was a foundation for a nice healthy budget from staff development and another Governor said the strongest asset an organisation has is the people.

Business

The Principal said the vast majority of income was received from the public purse amounting to £31m of current turnover. It is very likely that the amount will decrease over the next two or three years and there will be less money for grants next year. The College was an ambitious organisation which was trying to investigate different income streams regarding international work.

Mick Brophy (MB), Managing Director, Business, Innovation and Development, said that EFA 16-18 Core (Full time learners 16-18 and 19+) was full of challenges and its different landscape where income derived from. Staff needed to be nimble, flexible and committed. The College had challenges as it was not a tertiary organisation like South Tyneside or Sunderland College. The staying on age for schools would be 18 by next year. It was a very competitive landscape and it was absolutely critical to meet those challenges. He did not see much change in this area re: funding.

There had been some diminishment of funding for SFA. They had been able to vire between headings in the past but were now quite strict. 19+ funding had not been problematic. There are flexibilities relating to employer requests and funding available. 19+ apprenticeships were on track with £3.4m achieved by the end of January/early February 2014 against a target of £4.8m. There were 743 learners equalling £600,000 so this would leave another £600,000 to hit by the end of July 2014. 16-18 apprenticeships will come in back on target. If they can capture 16-18 apprenticeships it will still be difficult to persuade employers to take a 16 year old rather than a 19-20 year old. They needed to find a good strategy on how to persuade them to pick up those learners. There was a direct correlation about how much money they will lose and how much will go to employers. The money was still there but was not coming direct to Gateshead College. This meant that the College needed to stay well positioned with employers.

In terms of Grant Income, core funding was beginning to diminish slightly. When you put forward grant opportunities you have to bid in for things. Further education or schools were not raised as a priority. £6m contract for Skills for Unemployed Programme had a real focus on getting people a job. There were flexibilities as a College to direct where resources were needed. This was high on the Ofsted agenda. The College was well-placed in terms of technology movements taking place.

Subsidiary Companies were performing well: Amacus now achieved 65% activity and were working in-house; Zero Carbon Futures was on target to achieve great commitments; Equality North East had been integrated into the College; NEAC had been integrated fully into the Apprenticeship Unit; there were issues with Charge Your Car.

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International work included a £700,000 two year deal with the EduCity Stadium and Sports Complex in Malaysia. They were looking at what they could do to support this work. Horizon 2020 was a new bidding process in Europe.

Gazelle had improving finances and were beginning to maximise some of the outputs. There could be a lot of benefit working with those other colleges involved.

The Principal referred to structural challenges. The Chair said MB and the Principal were working together to show greater transparency on outcomes for this quadrant.

The Principal said there needed to be clarity in helping those people to understand what their job was and ensure resources to develop it.

A Governor thought that a strategic, forward-looking approach was needed.

The Chair replied that this was well mentioned and should be challenged at the Away Day.

Finance/Corporate

The Principal said that the College had good financial health. Processes to protect and secure the College's investments are well managed and embedded. The Estate and Property Portfolio are in an excellent condition. Learners benefit from excellent facilities and a wealth of resources. The only capital project in development is Barmston Court which is on track and will expand the College's capacity for staff and learners.

The Chair thanked Keith Cann Evans (Chair of Finance and General Purposes Committee) and Chris Macklin (Chair of Audit Committee) and the members for their work.

John Holt (JH), the Director of Finance, advised that the College had maintained employment of its staff which had not been done by other colleges. It had good financial health which had been endorsed by the SFA. This was providing assurance to the Board and showing how assets managed.

There had been good audit reports from SFA, Internal and External Auditors and Grant Funders. JH referred to an audit which had been undertaken by the SFA on the Skills Support for the Unemployed Project. It had identified no errors leading to a 0% error rate on the contract and he said this was because of the dedication of the Finance Team.

The College had a good relationship with the SFA and the ability to deliver targets and good stewardship.

Subsidiary companies had been targeted for financial efficiencies and some had been brought back into the College.

As regards estates and buildings, the College has 'world class' facilities and these are kept under constant review to ensure they are providing the right resources. The College had good surpluses to ensure this happened. The handover from the contractors had just taken place on Barmston Court and the project had been delivered on time and on budget. This would allow the College to work in partnership with other organisations on site and promote the whole green agenda.

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This was a fantastic facility and was a very integrated campus building around Nissan. They had been successful in securing funding from ERDF and RDA.

IT Capability and Effectiveness included traffic light monitoring and 'On Track'; people from teaching and learning perspective would drive this forward. They are working on the same substantive systems which the College had when it moved into the building five and half years ago.

In terms of Future Focus, while on the face of it funding looks great it would be 18 year olds who will have funding capped at the lower level rather than 16-18 year olds. 19+ would have a small amount of cuts and this focused the College on getting people into jobs. All of the cuts would be coming at post 18 level and they were having to run faster and faster to absorb them. There was pressure on certain cost lines with deficits in pension schemes which had not been funded for. Franchise Arrangements had exposed the risks in the College; they would continue to do so now and in the future. Regarding compliance with process they were working to address issues.

The Chair commented that JH ran a tight ship and had an excellent team, without that it would be very difficult.

Brand/Communication

The Principal advised there was a new and clear focus on building the College's brand with a lot of work done since the Strategic Plan was launched to staff in June 2013. The position was right and the strategy was working. There was an understanding of "Employment Edge" which was giving the College differentiation in the market and this had been acknowledged by OFSTED and many stakeholders. The overall challenge was the need to integrate this brand across the College.

Nadine Hudspeth (NH), Director of Marketing and Communications, explained that the brand strategy and framework provided clarity and focus. The brand only existed in the mind and it was a huge challenge for a big organisation which was complex. The Brand Review had helped to craft where the College wanted to be.

NH said she was a Brand Champion but the Principal was the Brand Leader. They constantly reinforce what the College is and what it is doing. Everyone knows what they are here to do and they need to make sure that they have one message across the College.

Priorities include the internal brand infrastructure, support for all functions starting with HR, further development of the service design capability and a communications campaign to raise standards and expectations. This would cement the 'one college' approach and keep expectations firmly in mind. They would know this was working if students came to Gateshead College because it delivered employment at the end of courses.

A Governor said that this was what Gateshead College was about not just the logo. NH replied that it was a huge process, 'brand in the hand'; clearly there was a need to go out to every area of the College to explain how they had come to this position.

Mark Taylor, 19+ Student Governor, mentioned television advertisements because that was what had got him to Gateshead College. NH replied that these were now too expensive to do and they used Channel 4 Digital online instead.

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Simone Wood, 16-18 Student Governor, commented that radio had worked last time and NH agreed that it had worked well for the College. The biggest single thing is 'word of mouth' so they should not have to do a lot of expensive advertising, but sell the College through reputation.

Conclusions

The Principal concluded that the College has the right focus and the brand is working. They continue to be an outward facing and ambitious organisation with £1.5m committed to the International Strategy. They now needed to move on their initiatives to maximise their investment having clarity and strategic overview. The College's people strategy is strong and needs to focus on ensuring that the workforce, particularly teachers, have the right skills.

There needed to be consistency of message throughout the College to drive clarity and how they can deliver the Strategic Plan.

Mark Taylor and Simone Wood left the meeting at 2.30pm

Next Steps

The next steps involved maintaining the relentless focus on ensuring that learners received excellent standards of Teaching, Learning and Assessment. They needed to maintain the College's market share at all levels of the business and their investment to date and capture new opportunities as they become available. They needed to maximise the approach to Employer Engagement and continue to integrate the brand across the business to ensure that everything they did reinforced their position. The College needed to ensure its financial health remained strong and that its structure ensured that everyone was clear on their roles and responsibilities.

It was noted that Committees for Business and People would be needed to support the two quadrants.

A Governor referred to the 'one team' mentioned and thought it was the role of Governors to support this team to take the College further.

The Chair said there was a need to re-test the branding and strategy. They needed to look at what they could do to support the drives/objectives within the quadrants. He asked for ideas about what governors would like to see at the Board Away Day on Friday 9 May and Saturday 10 May 2014. One of the Governors advised that he would not be able to attend on these days and this resulted in a debate about whether the dates should be changed. The format for the Away Day was discussed ie should it be one longer day rather than the two days with an overnight stay as currently planned.

Ofsted Report

The Principal advised that key themes had been identified coming out of the Ofsted Inspection. The Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) had been built into since the findings of the report. The key themes formed the basis of the Post-Inspection Action Plan (PIAP). There were some inconsistencies in terms of learner achievement and success; good progress had been made but there was more to do. There was not enough teaching at good or outstanding and they were not fulfilling their potential in getting the high grades. There were a number of strengths

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which the Ofsted Inspection had told them to keep doing. They had excellent partnerships which benefit learners and support their strategy.

Next Steps

The next steps included continuing with the focus on teaching, learning and assessment; ensuring that all staff understood the high expectations the College has for all learners; maintaining the sustained improvement in success rates for all learners; and ensuring a whole College approach to the implementation of the PIAP. Copies of the QIP and PIAP were circulated to Governors.

Underperformance in terms of staff performance had been identified very quickly and there would be greater expectations next year. There had been improved attendance around 'Job Pursuit' and there was a need to make sure that everyone knew the College's data well. They had to understand everything that needed to be done around lesson observations and that they were carried out to the same standard; Gillian Forrester was working with John Gray on this.

A visit by Malcolm Fraser, HMI was taking place on 10 April 2014. It would have a support and challenge focus and David Mitchell would be part of it.

Key actions in the PIAP would be monitored at the Academic Standards Committee and progress would be reported to the Board.

The next Ofsted inspection was likely to take place from September 2015. As Robin Mackie said there was a need to maintain and sustain the improvements already made.

The Chair said that clearly Ofsted was going through its own transformation and he asked how the College could keep abreast of what they wanted. The Principal replied through Support and Challenge Visits; the College could be inspected again under the fourth regime and they would be challenged at every stage. Nick Hurn said he was on the Focus Group for Ofsted and would take questions forward.

David Mitchell advised that he wanted to spend more time on this subject. Two years ago, a Grade 3 for the College was a shock but it was still classed as 'satisfactory'. They were now two years down the road and were still classed as Grade 3. Gateshead College was one of only two colleges which were classed as Grade 3. It was one of the lowest performing colleges in the region. Inner city colleges had gone up from Grade 3 to Grade 2 and Gateshead College had not. As a Board Governors needed to have a closer grip on what was happening; there needed to be much greater scrutiny of activity and challenge of the Exec Team. There were clearly lots of areas where the College was not ambitious enough. He suggested having a Task and Finish Group to support the Executive Team. He said that some of the judgements had been over optimistic; they had decided in January 2014 that the College was a Grade 2 but it was not. They did not just need fine words but needed more challenge.

The Chair replied that David Mitchell was correct to say these things and reminded everybody that the Board had a responsibility. He thought the statistics for the region were very interesting; suddenly there was clarity around the organisation and how they interlink and work together.

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Nick asked if it was happening in the classroom. Another Governor commented on the 68% good or better observations and thought that was where they needed to prioritise.

Review of the teaching and learning quadrant would be undertaken during the Strategic Away Day (subsequently confirmed to take place on 22 May Board meeting). The system of reporting needed to be overhauled. Governors need to take more responsibility.

1844 Any Other Business

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Mick Brophy

Deputy Principal Recruitment

Catherine Dennis, Teaching Staff Governor, asked about the process for the appointment of a new Deputy Principal and Mark Thompson, Director of People and Organisation Development, replied that timelines for the selection process were in place.

The remaining Staff and Student governors left the meeting

Federation

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1845 Date of next meeting

May 2014 – date TBC.

[Following this meeting it was agreed that Board Away Day would be held on Friday 9 May and Saturday 10 May 2014 and look at People, Business and Corporate Services. The Board meeting on 22 May would be dedicated to Teaching and Learning to ensure attendance of David Mitchell.]

1846 Chair's Review of Business

There were no comments made.