

Agenda No: 02



PEOPLE COMMITTEE – MAIN MINUTES

Thursday 20 February 2025 – 4.00pm to 6.00pm

Microsoft Teams

Governors	Type	Initials	Attendance	Apologies
Lisa Crichton-Jones	Chair of Committee – Independent Governor	LCJ	X*	
Michael Williams	Committee Member – Independent Governor	MW	X*	
Aneela Ali	Committee Member – Independent Governor	AA	X*	
David Alexander	Committee Member – Principal / CEO	DA	X*	
Richard Wensley	Committee Member – Staff Governor	RWe	X*	
Clerk				
Nicola Taylor	Director of Governance & Compliance	NT	X*	
Presenters / Attendees				
Peter Francis	Independent Governor	PF	X*	
Eamonn Toland	Independent Governor	ET	X*^	
Vicki Casey	Director of People & OD	VC	X*	
Jeremy Cook	Deputy Principal Finance & Resources	JC	X*^	
Lori Casson	Head of People	LC	X*	
Richard Ward	Assistant Principal	RWa	X*^	

*Attended via Teams / ^Attended for part of the meeting

P/055 1. Chair's Welcome, Apologies and Conflict of Interest

The Chair welcomed the attendees.

There were no apologies to report. The Committee **agreed** that the meeting was quorate.

No conflicts of interest were declared at the start of the meeting and members were reminded to declare any conflicts that arose during the discussions in the meeting.

P/056 2. Minutes of the People and Remuneration Committee

A. 10 October 2024 – Main Minutes

The Committee **reviewed** the main minutes from the previous meeting and **agreed** that they were a true and accurate reflection of the meeting.

B. 10 October 2024 – Confidential Minutes

The Committee **reviewed** the confidential minutes from the previous meeting and **agreed** that they were a true and accurate reflection of the meeting.

The minutes were approved.

P/057 3. Matters Arising / Action Log

VC presented the action log and provided the following updates:

- A new Equality Impact Assessment form was being developed. This would be complimented by appropriate training for staff to undertake these. A wider project relating to an overview of Equality Impact Assessments would follow on from this.
- Investigation training for the People Committee was being progressed with the College's legal advisers.

The People Committee noted the report.

P/058 4. Director of People and Organisational Development Update

VC presented the report and covered the following:

- Legislative updates, including a brief overview of the impact of the changes. The College were aware that policies and procedures would need updating in line with any changes.
- An update on the College pay award. *Covered under a confidential minute.*
ET joined the meeting.
- The improving absence figure, and the work of the HR team and curriculum managers in relation to this.
- A HR Team recruitment update, noting that a Learning, Development and Engagement Partner had now been appointed.

The Committee **commended** the HR team on their effectiveness of ensuring recruitment was an inclusive process and **noted** the positive progress made in this area.

The report was noted.

Item 10 was taken at this point.

P/059 5. People Committee KPI Annual Report

Item 9 was taken ahead of this item.

LC presented the report and highlighted the following:

- All reportable KPIs were meeting or exceeding the agreed thresholds, noting that all KPIs also had agreed targets.
- In relation to the regularly reported KPIs of absence and turnover, the College rolling year percentage for absence as at the end of December 2024 stood 4.7% with an average of 8.7 days lost per member of staff. This is a decrease on the previous year rolling year figure of 4.8% and 8.9 lost days and a decrease on the previously reported figures at October 2024 People Committee of 5.2% and 9.8 days lost. The percentage figure of long-term absence had also dropped since the last report.
- Anxiety and depression remained the largest area for absence, although the percentage total of this had decreased. Work related stress no longer ranked within the five most frequent reasons, however stress related absence had increased. Bereavement was within the five most frequent reasons for absence and the College continued to support staff in this area.

- The curriculum absence figure had significantly decreased from the previous year.
- Mental health related absence had decreased from the previous year and the College continued to support staff in this area.
- VC was working with the AoC HR Director North East Group to collate some local absence benchmarking data for use across the North East colleges.
- The current labour turnover rolling year figure for the College was 16.7% as at end of December 2024. This is a small decrease on the previously reported figure to end of October 2024 of 16.8% and an increase on the previous year rolling figure to December 2023 of 16%. Resignations relating to personal reasons and career progression had reduced and the HR Team were continuing to explore data trends around turnover.

The Committee **noted** the work of the HR team and improvements made across the year in relation to absence and turnover.

The Committee discussed and queried the following:

- Trend data relating to specific reasons for absence within departments with higher levels of absence and preventative support measures – it was noted that some high levels of absence had been stress related however trends were considered on a department basis and there were no clear trends to report.
- Utilisation of benchmarking data when this could be below the College's aspirations and instead the College considering performance against top performers and learning from best practice. The Chair **noted** the improvement in reporting and monitoring however agreed that the thresholds within the report may require revision and so would like to revisit these in line with the ambition of the College.

Action: LCJ/VC to discuss thresholds and targets for agreed KPIs.

The Committee **noted** the level of work undertaken to support absent staff.

The report was noted.

P/060 6. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

VC provided context of the College's journey in relation to EDI and presented the reports, noting that the annual report was historic however, there remained a thread of interconnectivity between the reports in this section. The level of EDI work across the College had been accelerated in year following the re-engagement of the College EDI Steering Group. The Group would now be overseeing EDI work across the College, alongside developing an action plan to underpin the EDI objectives proposed.

6.1 Annual EDI Report 2023/24

LC presented the report and provided a presentation which covered an overview of the staff EDI data for 2023/2024 in relation to gender, disability, ethnicity, religion and beliefs, and sexual orientation. This included planned actions relating to:

- Workforce and succession planning
- Organisational policy
- Workplace accommodations / adjustments

- Recruitment strategies
- Cultural awareness
- Staff inclusion groups
- Further data analysis.

The Committee discussed and queried the following in relation to the staff EDI data:

- The mechanism for collecting staff data, noting that circumstances may change – it was confirmed that staff data was collected upon appointment however annual refresh checks were undertaken with staff as part of the annual DfE FE workforce data collection. It was agreed that confidentiality would be reiterated with the encouragement for staff to provide / update this data where necessary.
- The inclusion of neurodiversity within the disability data – it was confirmed that this was included.
- The positive shift in the split of the age of the workforce however noting that the majority of the workforce was within the 41-60 age bracket.

The Committee **requested** for the presentation of the staff and student EDI data to be consistent in reporting going forward. VC noted that the data for staff and students had been presented as one report however the following year would see two separate reports, one for staff data being reported to the People Committee and one for student data being submitted to the Curriculum & Quality Standards Committee. These reports would then be merged into the final report to be shared on the College website.

The Committee discussed and queried the following in relation to the student EDI data:

- The significant number of students whose beliefs had not been captured, and how this information was informing the College's learner experience. RWa noted that the collection of EDI data for students was voluntary and therefore although there was an aim to collect this, this wasn't required. The College were exploring ways to more effectively capture this data, being cognisant that some data collection was at the beginning of a learner's journey, and they may not feel comfortable to report at this point. The level of voluntary reporting had increased however there was still further work to do.
- The changing demographic profile of learners and what impact this had on teaching styles, potential unconscious bias, and learning and development needs. The Chair of the Curriculum & Quality Standards Committee suggested that this would be a consideration for the Curriculum & Quality Standards Committee going forward. RWa noted work undertaken to consider attainment gaps between different group of learners, alongside considering learner voice through learner surveys and the Course Representative model. External partners were also being utilised to engage effectively with different groups of learners.

DA noted the diversity amongst the College workforce and noted that EDI data relating to adult learners was also being explored to consider their experience.

The Committee recommended the EDI report 2023/20224 for Board approval.

Action: NT to progress EDI Report for Board approval.

The report was noted.

RWa left the meeting.

6.2 Gender Pay Gap Report 2023/24

LC presented the report and noted that the College's overall pay gap remained the same as the previous year, and this was lower than the national median and mean averages. Actions included within the report linked to the EDI action plan.

The Committee recommended the Gender Pay Gap report 2023/2024 for Board approval.

Action: NT to progress Gender Pay Gap report for Board approval.

The report was noted.

6.3 EDI Strategic Objectives

VC presented the report and highlighted the following:

- The document set out a strategic and coherent approach to EDI going forward. The importance of the College EDI Steering Group was pivotal, along with understanding learner voice.
- There had been lots of consultation and input from partners to reach the proposed objectives.
- The proposed strategy statement set out the approach, and the objectives were linked to the themes of campus, culture, curriculum and community.

The Committee queried if this document would form part of the College's underpinning strategies and it was confirmed that it formed part of the People Strategy, however this document set out the direction of travel specific to EDI. The Committee challenged if this was explicit enough and suggested a revision of wording to make this clear.

The Committee discussed the document at length and provided challenge around the following areas:

- Whether the objectives should be less passive in places, suggesting that this didn't recognise that EDI was an enabler for equity.
- The number, and measurability, of the statements feeding into each objective, and what the output / outcome would be for each, along with an appropriate KPI.
- Recognition of the College's role within the wider community and its civic responsibility.

The Committee noted the work of the EDI Steering Group.

DA left the meeting.

The Committee agreed that the document would be reviewed further and revised. There was a requirement for the EDI objectives to be published on the College website by 31 March 2025 and therefore a revised document would be circulated by email for recommendation for Board approval.

Action: VC to revise the EDI strategic objectives and statement based on Committee comments and to circulate for recommendation for Board approval ahead of the 31 March 2025 deadline.

The report was noted.

P/061 7. Policy Updates

LC presented the report setting out that the College had recently refreshed a number of HR policies and procedures. The People Committee were asked to recommend the following policy statements ahead of seeking Board approval:

- Family Friendly Policy
- Preventing Harassment and Bullying Policy
- Alcohol and Drugs Policy
- Equal Pay Policy

The Committee recommended the policies for Board approval subject to any changes following trade union feedback.

Action: NT to progress the updated policies for Board approval subject to any changes made following trade union feedback.

The report was noted.

P/062 8. HR Case Work Update

Covered under a confidential minute.

The report was noted.

P/063 9. LGPS Pensions Discretion Policy

Item taken after item 10

JC presented the report, noting that this policy was a requirement of the LGPS Tyne and Wear pension scheme regarding the discretions which could potentially be exercised. There were no changes to the College's position on these discretions.

The Committee **queried** the currency of the Equality Impact Assessment from 2023, JC noted that there had been no material changes to the Policy and therefore this still applied.

The Committee recommended the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) Discretions Policy to the Board for approval at the meeting on 2 April 2025.

JC left the meeting.

Item 5 taken after this item.

P/064 10. Strategic Risk Register

Item taken after item 4.

JC presented the report and noted that the three risks under the remit of the People Committee had been highlighted within the report. The Executive Team had recently undertaken a review of risk appetite, and a number of amends had been suggested. This was due to be taken through the Audit Committee ahead of Board for approval. The risk appetite for the risks under the remit of this Committee were Business Continuity – Cautious, Recruitment and Selection – Open, Health and Safety – Averse.

There was an ongoing process for the procurement of Internal Audit. A 3-year audit plan would then be drafted. JC sought the Committee's views on any particular areas they would like to see included within the plan, noting that the areas covered within

the recent cycle were Health & Safety (Strong assurance), HR (Strong assurance), Payroll (Strong assurance), Business Continuity (Strong assurance) and Staff wellbeing (Strong assurance).

The Committee discussed and queried the following:

- Consideration of risk appetite in relation to the upside and downside of risk and the need to consider this further in terms of further development of risk management. DA agreed that this would be taken away to be considered at the Audit Committee.

Action: JC to facilitate a conversation at Audit Committee when reviewing risk appetite in relation to downside and upside of risk.

- The approach to the internal audit plan, and whether this was a standardised approach or risk driven. JC confirmed this was a combination as the College's strategic risk register would be considered in developing the plan, however the College would also consider reviews as part of the previous cycle of audit. The Committee **suggested** that they wouldn't expect to see areas graded with Strong Assurance being reconsidered in the short term. Instead, it would be positive to consider new emerging risks, with the suggestion of linking those to new legislative changes, and EDI.

Action: JC to consider People Committee suggestions for internal audit plan of not re-considering areas of strong assurance in the short term and instead considering new emerging risks, new legislative changes and EDI. JC to work with VC on any areas relevant to the Employment Rights Bill and whether these would be appropriate for audit.

- The future look of the Horizon Scan. It was noted that this had been brought up at recent committee meetings and did require a refresh.

Action: JC to revise horizon scan based on Committee comments.

- Potential risk of industrial action and the impact this would have on staff and learners. VC suggested that industrial action was believed to be unlikely however the Executive Team were aware of this potential risk. Nationally, there continued to be disparity between the pay of school and college teachers.

JC noted the potential risk of increased learner numbers in 2025/2026 and the associated impact this would have on risks relating to the People Committee remit.

The report was noted.

Item 9 taken after this item.

P/065 11. Any Other Business

N/A

P/066 12. Date of Next Meeting:

The next meeting was confirmed as Thursday 15 May 2025 at 4.00pm