



FE Corporation Minutes

Meeting held on Thursday 9 March 2017 at 5.30pm in Room 219, SR Bede

Governors: Mr J Anderson, Ms L Brown, Mr S Chaudhary, Mr P Cook (Principal and Chief Executive), Mr D Craig, Mr N Dart, Mr D Johnson, Mr R McCallion, Mr R Poundford, Ms M Stephenson, Mr M White (Chair) and Mrs N Wilburn

Officials: Ms L Boynton (Head of Quality), Ms M Elliott (Director of Business Development), Mr J Faulkner (Assistant Principal: Curriculum), Mr M Flannery (Director of Students), Mr P Hastie (Vice-Principal: Corporate Planning and Performance), Mr M Hickey (Deputy Principal), Mr P Hiser (HR Director), Mrs F Sharp (Finance Director) and Sarah Thompson (Clerk to the Corporation)

Apologies: Ms R Hodgson and Ms M Mason

(Meeting commenced at 5.30 pm)

The meeting was preceded by a presentation in respect of NETA Training Trust attended by David Craig, Dan Johnson, Norma Wilburn, Neville Dart and Richard Poundford. It was agreed that there should be periodic NETA updates, for example, on an annual basis.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

17/8 Agenda Item 10 – Proposed Merger

The Chair reminded members that the Corporation had agreed to pursue a proposed merger with Darlington College in the interests of establishing a better, more sustainable College. Following recent developments, the Joint Steering Group felt unable to recommend dissolution of Stockton Riverside College at this time.

Mr J Anderson (student governor), Mr N Dart (staff governor), Ms M Stephenson (staff governor), Ms L Boynton (Head of Quality), Ms M Elliott (Director of Business Development), Mr J Faulkner (Assistant Principal: Curriculum), Mr M Flannery (Director of Students), Mr P Hastie (Vice-Principal: Corporate Planning and Performance), Mr M Hickey (Deputy Principal) and Mrs F Sharp (Finance Director) left the meeting.

The Chair reminded members that the selection panel for the Principal Designate for the proposed merged college had been unable to reach a decision. Due diligence had identified that Darlington College had had a deficit budget position since 2011 and reserves had been eroded.

The following paragraph has been redacted.

It was therefore proposed to pause the merger to allow a period of reflection and an opportunity for senior staff to focus on key College priorities, specifically preparation for Ofsted and achievement of recruitment targets. In response to challenges, it was clarified that it was intended to pause progress with the merger process until the autumn term and that no further costs would be incurred at this time as all work would cease.

Mr J Anderson, Mr N Dart, Ms M Stephenson, Ms L Boynton, Ms M Elliott, Mr J Faulkner, Mr M Flannery, Mr P Hastie, Mr M Hickey and Mrs F Sharp returned to the meeting.

The Chair reminded returning members and staff that, during the recent selection process for a Principal Designate for the proposed merged college, the Selection Panel had been unable to reach a conclusion. The process had highlighted differences in culture between the colleges. As a result, it was recommended that the merger process be paused to allow both colleges an opportunity to reflect. Darlington College was experiencing financial difficulties with eroding reserves and had required re-financing in 2015-16. *Sentence redacted.* The Stockton Riverside College Board recognised that merger continued to be an appropriate course of action in terms of future sustainability but this should not be at any cost. It was therefore the unanimous recommendation of the Joint Steering Group that the merger process be paused to allow a period of reflection for both colleges and opportunities for staff in both colleges to return to the day job and focus on key priorities. In Stockton Riverside College, work would be focussed on preparation for Ofsted and achievement of recruitment targets. An appropriate statement would be agreed. The merger process would be reviewed in the autumn term. The pause was also strongly supported by Darlington College governors who recognised the need for their leadership and management teams to have capacity to focus on financial recovery.

The Chair sought views from members and senior staff present and the following comments and clarifications were given:

- It was anticipated that any merger would occur in 2018 or 2019. It was not essential for the merger to take place at the beginning of an academic year.
- It would be helpful to establish a detailed risk register arising from the pause decision and identify mitigating actions.
- The Chair and Principal would liaise with key strategic stakeholders.
- Further work was required to determine the nature and purpose of the pause and next steps in respect of the merger process.
- The College should ensure any issues arising from due diligence on Stockton Riverside College were addressed over coming months.

Members **agreed** unanimously to pause the merger process to autumn 2017 to allow a period of reflection and an opportunity for managers to focus on key priorities. The Chair confirmed that he had discussed the proposal with Rebecca Hodgson, governor, and Jamie Fraser and Deborah Merrett, co-opted members of the Corporation's committees. A discussion with Margaret Mason would also be arranged.

A meeting would be arranged for Mr Chaudhary with the Principal and Finance Director to consider risk management. A joint statement would also be agreed with Darlington College for issue to staff and stakeholders.

Governors thanked staff, the Chair and Joint Steering Group members for all their work and effort towards the merger process.

Members were reminded that this information was strictly confidential.

17/9 Agenda Item 1 – Corporation Membership

A report had been circulated outlining the current Corporation membership position and presenting a student governor application.

It was agreed to **appoint** Christopher King as Student Governor.

17/10 Agenda Item 2 – Progress Update against College Improvement Plan 2016-17

Detailed updates against the College Improvement Plan had been circulated to members as part of the meeting papers for the Strategic Seminar on 3 and 4 February 2017. A further brief progress update had been circulated with the meeting papers.

The Deputy Principal highlighted that attendance at English and maths had improved compared to 2015-16 and comprehensive tracking was being embedded. Stockton Riverside College performance had been below the national rates for English and maths in 2015-16 but projections for 2016-17 were significantly above the national average and the College was confident that performance would be at least in line with the national average. The Assistant Principal clarified that work in relation to work experience was progressing well.

The update was received and noted.

17/11 Agenda Item 3 – In-Year Retention, Attendance and Punctuality

The Head of Quality presented a report outlining current retention, attendance and punctuality levels. She advised that the position was similar to the same period in 2015-16. There had been a focus on data quality to ensure accuracy of information. Retention was satisfactory with concerns particularly in relation to childcare, NETA and travel and tourism Level 2. Attendance continued to be an issue.

Governors received and noted the report and it was **agreed** that the Standards Improvement Committee would consider issues in childcare, health and social care at its next meeting on 22 March 2017.

17/12 Agenda Item 4 – Teaching and Learning Observation Outcomes

The Head of Quality presented her report outlining outcomes of graded observations of teaching and learning. She highlighted an improved profile compared to 2015-16. Concerns had been identified in relation to one member of staff exempted from graded observations on the basis of previous performance and it was likely that this staff member would return to the graded observation process. Peer observations had been successful with staff enjoying the opportunity and providing good reflections. Overall learner satisfaction had improved. Observations had identified concerns in relation to childcare and NETA.

Governors challenged the ways in which staff graded outstanding over a number of years were recognised and it was clarified that they were awarded gold pens and part of the staff group exempted from graded observations. This group comprised staff with a three-year track record of good and outstanding teaching grades and this process was to allow the College to focus on those staff that most needed support.

Governors received and noted the report. It was **agreed** that a letter of congratulation would be sent to Lyndsey Halliday, who had been graded outstanding over four consecutive years.

17/13 Agenda Item 5 – Learner Voice Outcomes

A report had been circulated detailing outcomes of Learner Survey 1, Higher Education Student Survey 1 and Prince's Trust, NETA and subcontractor surveys, as well as student feedback via Principal's Learner Forums and course feedback groups. The Head of Quality reported that there was a high degree of correlation across the surveys and with other data. Feedback from Learner Survey 1 was very positive. Student satisfaction with food at Bede remained below 80% but was improved compared to 2015-16. The number of students stating that they took part in additional activities also remained low, despite efforts to make the question clearer. There were no major concerns, although learner satisfaction at NETA was lower than elsewhere.

A governor reported on his attendance at a recent Principal Learner Forum and commended the attitude and input of students. A governor challenged that only 96% of students reported feeling safe at the College. The Head of Quality clarified that there had been no specific issues raised via forums, although learners had commented on the openness of the College. It was also difficult to ensure all learners were wearing lanyards at all times and possible solutions were being investigated, for example, access barriers. Current arrangements included challenge from staff and routine spot checks undertaken by estates staff. A governor also challenged that only 86% of students felt that they were made aware of opportunities open to them on completion of their course. The Assistant Principal clarified that there had been issues with the Computing programme in particular. However, the College was able to evidence rapid progress in respect of work on intended destinations and was aiming to ensure that each learner had an agreed destination and a plan to support achievement of this. A governor further challenged arrangements for ensuring high quality provision within NETA, in light of the lower 16-18 attendance and learner survey outcomes. It was clarified that the NETA Improvement Plan had been reported to the NETA Board at the last meeting and minutes would be provided to the next Corporation meeting.

The report was received and noted and it was **agreed** that the NETA Improvement Plan would be considered by the Standards Improvement Committee at an appropriate meeting.

17/14 Agenda Item 6 – 2016/17 Performance Improvement Action Plan

The 2016-17 Performance Improvement Action Plan (PIAP) had been circulated. The Head of Quality highlighted improvements within Electrical and significant improvements within Children and Young People, although both areas remained red RAG (red, amber, green) rated. Most of the SRC Bede courses on the plan were now RAG rated green, with some remaining amber. NETA provision remained an area of

concern and the involvement of the Quality team had increased from January. The Head of Quality would be meeting the Interim Operations Director week commencing 13 March to discuss further.

In response to a governor's challenge, the Deputy Principal confirmed that the College was ready for inspection. There remained concerns in respect of demonstrating positive value added but outcomes would be reviewed at the end of March. All other actions were in place.

Governors received and noted the information.

17/15 Agenda Item 7 – Recruitment Update / Enrolment Plans

The Director of Students presented his report outlining the 16-18 learner recruitment position and highlighted that recruitment of a further 67 students was required by July 2017. The forecast was disappointing but was an improved picture from 1500 students in October 2016.

Overall applications were slightly up across the whole College, with an increase in vocational applications and a decrease in applications to SRC Bede. This was felt to be due to changes in student expectations and requirements. There was a demonstrable positive impact of engagement with feeder schools, with a significant rise in applications for vocational and NETA, but a decrease in applications to Bede again in this area. Overall, both applications and offers were increased. In response to a challenge, the Director of Students confirmed that he was pleased with the impact of the work of the student engagement team. Future areas of focus were work with non-feeder schools and effectiveness of social media platforms.

In response to a further challenge, the Director of Students confirmed that his main area of concern was the position at SRC Bede, with reduced applications and offers. Some staff needed to improve their understanding of potential students, particularly the 'middle achievers'. The website address for Bede also needed to be addressed to ensure clarity for search engine users. The Principal highlighted the strategic challenge in light of the background of the changing 16-18 landscape and new and expanding school sixth forms.

A governor challenged the outcomes of an 'applicant experience event' on 3 March 2017 and the Director of Students confirmed that feedback had been positive, departments had responded well with good levels of staffing and 16 applications had been received on the day. However, future events would need to be more focussed.

A governor challenged access for staff to schools and the Director of Students reported that relationships between the College and schools in Stockton were very good and there had been over 90 interactions with schools with no issues reported. The College was investing in sales training and revamping merchandise. Overall, work was progressing well. The Corporation Chair reported on his positive visit to Northfield School, together with the Principal.

Governors thanked the Director of Students for his report and received and noted the information.

17/16 Agenda Item 8 – Destinations

The Assistant Principal presented his report on learner destinations 2015-16. He highlighted that there was a high number of positive destinations, with 91.7% of students having a recorded positive destination excluding Prince's Trust and Business Development. This included learners progressing to further or higher education, gaining or continuing employment and entering the voluntary sector. Levels of positive destinations had also improved within apprenticeships, traineeships and higher education. It was positive external recognition of the College's progress that the College had been selected for research into technical qualifications as part of a Department for Education contract, due to the high volumes and good progression.

Governors received and noted the information.

17/17 Agenda Item 9 – Teaching Excellence Framework Submission 2017

The Deputy Principal presented the circulated report outlining the requirement for submission of a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) statement in line with government policy. It was noted that no issues were anticipated with the College achieving the TEF. In response to queries, it was clarified that the College's Higher Education provision would be inspected during May 2017 and the Chair would be meeting with inspectors to discuss the quality of governance in respect of HE provision.

The report was received and noted.

17/18 Agenda Item 11 – Approval of 2017/18 Strategic Priorities

The Strategic Priorities for 2017/18 had been discussed during the Governors' Strategic Seminar held in February 2017 and the presented priorities reflected that discussion. Governors had suggested inclusion of positive mental health as a key priority at that time. Following further reflection, it was felt that this should not be included in the priorities at this time, but would continue to be a high priority internally for the College. In light of the merger pause and some significant issues facing the College, there would also be further reflection on the requirement for a strategic plan for 2017-18.

Members **agreed** the proposed strategic priorities for 2017-18 as detailed in the report.

17/19 Agenda Item 12 – Safeguarding Update

A report had been circulated detailing recent discussions at the College Safeguarding Management Group and other recent safeguarding activity. Governors were pleased to note that ID checks were being applied to all groups in the College, including governors.

Governors received and noted the report.

17/20 Agenda Item 13 – Enrichment Update

A report had been circulated detailing College activity in respect of student enrichment. The Deputy Principal highlighted, in particular, the College's Equality and Diversity competition which had been won by the Enterprise Team and their 'Educating Grandad' submission, an inter-generational discussion of equality and diversity issues. Stickers outlining 'Fundamental British Values' were being issued for attachment to ID badges. Governors were also pleased to note a diverse range of sport enrichment activity for all groups of learners, including learners with additional needs.

The information was received and noted.

17/21 Agenda Item 14 – Single Equality Scheme

An updated Single Equality Scheme for the College had been circulated and was **approved** by governors for adoption and publication.

The Head of Quality left the meeting.

17/22 Agenda Item 15 – Corporation minutes and actions

Minutes of the Corporation meetings held on 15 December 2016 and 3 February 2017 had been circulated and were **approved** as an accurate record.

Notes of a Governor Workshop held on 19 January 2017 and the Governors' Strategic Seminar held 3 to 4 February 2017 had also been circulated and were received and noted, together with positive evaluations arising from the Strategic Seminar. It was noted that Mr Chaudhary had been in attendance at the seminar but omitted from the attendance list.

Actions and updates were noted. In particular, it was noted that a group of governors had been identified to monitor closely College progress towards inspection. The Director of Students also reported on work linked to the forthcoming Tees Valley mayoral elections, including campaign work, development of posters and social media. It was requested that a brief outline of this work be shared with local MPs and the Tees Valley Combined Authority via the Principal.

17/23 Agenda Item 16 – Subsidiary Company Board / Committees and Task and Finish Groups

Minutes of the following meetings had been circulated and were received and noted:

- Standards Improvement Committee meeting held on 9 January 2017
- Search and Governance Committee meeting held on 26 January 2017
- Strategic Partnerships Task and Finish Group meeting held on 12 January 2017

Members were also advised that a NETA Board meeting had been held on 3 March 2017. Minutes would be presented to the next Corporation meeting.

In line with recommendations from the Search and Governance Committee, governors **agreed** to:

- i) reappoint Mrs Norma Wilburn for a term of office of three years;
- ii) introduce a governors' safeguarding induction for any newly appointed governors.

17/24 Agenda Item 17 – Chair’s Appraisal

A proposed ‘Chair’s Appraisal’ questionnaire had been circulated and was **approved**. Members were asked to return completed questionnaires to the Clerk no later than 11 May 2017.

17/25 Agenda Item 18 – Calendar of Meetings 2017/18

A draft calendar of meetings for 2017/18 had been circulated. Members were asked to provide feedback to allow a final calendar to be circulated at the next meeting.

17/26 Agenda Item 19 – Governor Development

A report had been circulated outlining recent development activities attended by governors.

The information was received and noted.

17/27 Agenda Item 20 – Governors’ Code of Conduct

Proposed amendments to the Governors’ Code of Conduct had been circulated.

Governors **approved** the revisions and confirmed their re-acceptance of the Code.

17/28 Agenda Item 21 – Standing Orders

Proposed revisions to the Corporation’s Standing Orders had been circulated and were **approved** by governors.

17/29 Agenda Item 22 – FE+ Annual Report

The FE+ 2015-16 Annual Report had been circulated and was received and noted.

17/30 Agenda Item 23 – Any other business

There were no additional items of business notified for consideration.

17/31 Agenda Item 24 – Approval of Documents for Public Inspection

It was **agreed** that the agenda and supporting documents of the current meeting be made available for public inspection with the following exceptions:

- Student governor application form, which contained personal and private information
- College Improvement Plan, Performance Improvement Action Plan, retention, quality and recruitment information and merger information which were deemed commercial in confidence
- Staff names related to teaching and learning observation outcomes, as this was personal information
- Committee meeting minutes pending committee approval

Corporation Minutes would be published following approval at the next meeting.

17/32 Agenda Item 25 – Date and time of next meeting

Thursday 11 May 2017 at 5.30 pm at SRC1, Teesdale

The Chair thanked members for their attendance and contributions.

(The meeting ended at 7.30pm)