



For the future you want

POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE

APPROVED MINUTES OF MEETING OF 01 SEPTEMBER 2020

15:00 via Microsoft Teams

Present: Lesley Drummond; Ann Landels (Chair); Niki McKenzie; Nigel Paul; Fiona Riddoch

In attendance: Jon Buglass; Nick Croft; Audrey Cumberland; Mike Jeffrey; Jonny Pearson; Lindsay Towns; Marcus Walker (Clerk)

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

1.1 No apologies were received.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 No declarations of interested were noted.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

3.1 The Committee APPROVED the minutes from 19 May 2020 as an accurate record of the meeting.

4. MATTERS ARISING

4.1 MATTERS ARISING REPORT

4.1.1 Actions from the previous meeting were complete, overtaken or on the agenda, with the exception of the following:

4.1.2 *STRATEGIC NURSERY REVIEW (Ref. 9.3/19.02.19 refers)*

The Committee NOTED that a Strategic Nursery Review Report would be presented to its next meeting on 10 November 2020. The Chief Operating Officer advised the Committee that the nursery had performed well despite the implementation of a UK wide lockdown on 17 March 2020, with the UK Government's Job Retention Scheme and a grant of £20k from City of Edinburgh Council providing further financial support during a challenging period.

5. TERMS OF REFERENCE

- 5.1 The Committee NOTED that the Code of Good Governance dictated that committees of the Board should regularly review their terms of reference to ensure they remain fit for purpose.
- 5.2 The Committee DISCUSSED its Terms of Reference and AGREED that Paragraph 3.1.5 should be updated to highlight the role of the Committee in reviewing progress towards the implementation of the 'A Future Proofed College' programme.
- 5.3 The Committee DISCUSSED a recommendation arising from the 2019 Board Effectiveness Review relating to its strategic role. The Committee AGREED that the Terms of Reference should be updated to outline its role in conducting strategic deep dives into a single pillar of a strategy or strategic KPI.
- 5.4 The Committee AGREED that a revised Terms of Reference should be presented to the Board at its next meeting - for approval.

6. 'A FUTURE PROOFED COLLEGE' REPORT

6.1 COVID-19 PANDEMIC / 'A FUTURE PROOFED COLLEGE' UPDATE

- 6.1.1 The Committee NOTED an update on developments related to the delivery of a 'Future Proofed College' and the response of the College to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Principal advised the Committee that the College had undertaken critical financial planning for the future, and submitted a Business Case for support funding to the SFC on 26 August 2020.
- 6.1.2 The Committee NOTED that College Principals continued to support the Cumberford-Little Report, and its proposed recommendations, as the core position of the sector. The Principal advised the Committee that the Scottish Government was now in the process of considering the impact of the Report on the shape of Scotland's Economic Action Plan.
- 6.1.3 The Committee NOTED that immediately prior to the meeting commencing, the First Minister had outlined the Programme for Government which set out the actions of the Scottish Government for the year ahead. The Principal highlighted to the Committee that the First Minister had placed a strong emphasis on upskilling and re-skilling, and a further update on the announcement would be presented to the Board on 22 September 2020.
- 6.1.4 The Committee NOTED developments relating to a collaboration of colleges in East Central Scotland, which included Edinburgh, West Lothian, Fife and Forth Valley Colleges. The Principal informed the Committee that the venture between regional colleges aimed to support young people, adults, businesses and schools during challenging economic times, and through the post Covid-19 recovery.
- 6.1.5 The Committee DISCUSSED the following with regards to strategic development in the sector regionally and nationally:

- (i) the potential for further funding coming into the college sector, and the restrictions placed on such funds;
- (ii) the ongoing discussions around a new national funding model;
- (iii) the importance of collaborative working during a period when all colleges and universities were facing the same challenges;
- (iv) the regional developments with other colleges, and its alignment to the Edinburgh City Region Deal;
- (v) the resilience of the City of Edinburgh region due to its digital infrastructure, which may support a 'V' shaped recovery;
- (vi) the potential impact of EU withdrawal on college sector business.

6.1.6 The Committee NOTED an update on the progress of the College in delivering its 5R Plan, a themed approach to managing the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Vice Principal Corporate Development advised the Committee that both the 're-imagining and re-invent' and the 'reform' themes were, to a large extent, defined by the recommendations of the Cumberland-Little Report, the Commission of the College of the Future Report, and the recently announced SFC Review of the Tertiary Sector.

6.1.7 The Committee NOTED that the governance, partnership and stakeholder engagement structures in place to deliver the 5R Plan, which included a Steering Group made of executive and senior staff, Trade Union and ECSA representatives. The Vice Principal Corporate Development advised the Committee both ECSA and Trade Unions had been integral to all developments, along with a large number of staff members from across the College.

6.1.8 The Committee NOTED since its last meeting, in May 2020, the delivery of the 5R Plan had focussed on the 'resilience' theme, in preparation for the 'return' theme. The Vice Principal Corporate Development informed the Committee that, given the level of activity, the 5R governance arrangements would be stood down and absorbed into existing structures (e.g. Executive, Senior Management Team, Local Negotiating Committee, Health and Safety Committee and ECSA liaison arrangements) from 10 September 2020.

6.1.9 The Committee welcomed the update provided and DISCUSSED the following points:

- (i) The feedback from the staff survey conducted during lockdown;
- (ii) the challenges faced by staff, and the online training offered by the College;
- (iii) the communications provided to both staff and students regarding campus visits;
- (iv) the tireless efforts of staff to ensure that the College remained a safe environment for staff and students.

6.1.10 The Chair, on behalf of members, extended her thanks to 5R Steering Group, and the efforts of all staff, to ensure the College emerged from the initial crisis response and returned to its business from 07 September 2020 onwards.

6.2 DIGITAL STRATEGY 2020-25 UPDATE

- 6.1.1 The Committee NOTED progress against the Digital Strategy 2020-25, which was approved by the Board in December 2019. The Vice Principal Innovation, Performance and Planning advised the Committee that the implementation of the Strategy had been rapidly accelerated due to Covid-19, as the College repositioned itself to a blended learning model.
- 6.1.2 The Committee DISCUSSED the progress made to implement the Strategy, and its central importance to ensure College business continued to operate effectively during the Covid-19 crisis. The Principal advised the Committee that continued financial support from the Scottish Government would be essential to improve digital infrastructure and tackle all aspects of digital poverty.
- 6.1.3 The Committee NOTED the strategic ambition of the College to become a 'High Performing Digital College', and acknowledged the good work undertaken to implement the Digital Strategy since its launch in February 2020.

7. RECRUITMENT & RETENTION DASHBOARD

- 7.1 The Committee NOTED an overview, from the Vice Principal, Education & Skills, of the performance of the College against its 2019/20 recruitment and retention targets. The Vice Principal Education & Skills reminded the Committee that the SFC had set the College an activity target of 187,947 for the 2019/20 academic year.
- 7.2 The Committee NOTED that, in recognition of unprecedented circumstances, the SFC had 'relaxed' some of their guidance around credit claims - including the removal of the 'one-plus' limit and permitting claims for guidance delivered to Full-Time Higher Education students.
- 7.3 The Committee NOTED that, although the cancellation of face-to-face learning had meant the College was unable to start any of its planned additional credit bearing course after 20 March, it was still able to achieve its core credit target for 2019/20. The Vice Principal Education & Skills advised the Committee that the College had surpassed its activity target by 55 credits (- subject to confirmation by the FES audit return to the SFC).
- 7.4 The Committee NOTED that one of the main aims of the College in the academic year 2019/20 was to improve retention, by reducing both early and further withdrawals. The Vice Principal Education & Skills informed the Committee that a significant amount of work had been undertaken by College staff, from 23 March 2020 onwards, to ensure students remained engaged with their learning through a virtual learning environment. The Committee NOTED that this was illustrated by a 2.2% decrease in Further Withdrawals from 2018/19 to 2019/20.
- 7.5 The Committee commended the Executive Team on reaching the 2019/20 credit target and DISCUSSED the successful adoption of a holistic delivery and assessment models to achieve a reduction in Further Withdrawals. The Vice Principal Education & Skills advised the Committee that although the Early Withdrawals had increased by 0.2% in 2019/20, the College would continue to target a reduction in withdrawal rates.

- 7.6 The Committee NOTED that, despite the uncertainty caused by Covid-19, there had been a 15% increase (year on year) in the number of offers accepted. The Vice Principal Education & Skill highlighted that the default position of the College remained that all staff would continue to work from home (where possible) for the foreseeable future and that all full-time courses would be delivered through blended learning from 07 September 2020.
- 7.7 The Committee NOTED that the SFC had published their 2020/21 Credit Guidance on 06 August 2020, with the main changes as follows:
- (i) The removal of the term 'one-plus';
 - (ii) a reduction in Full-Time Further Education credits from 18 to 16;
 - (iii) No credits available for School College Partnerships below senior-phase.

The Vice Principal Education & Skill advised the Committee that the potential effect of this guidance could be detrimental to all colleges and therefore the National Vice Principal Network would be making a sector return to the SFC highlighting the shortcomings of this guidance.

8 FINANCE REPORT

8.1 MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS TO JUNE 2020

- 8.1.1 The Committee NOTED the financial performance of the College as outlined in the Management Accounts to June 2020.
- 8.1.2 The Committee NOTED that over 250 employees were on, or had participated in, the UK Government's Job Retention Scheme (JRS). The Head of Finance advised the Committee that the College had received over £600k of JRS income, and this figure had been recognised in the College's year-end projections.

8.2 FINANCIAL FORECAST 2020/21 TO 2024/24 UPDATE

- 8.2.1 The Committee NOTED a verbal update on the financial forecast following the approval of the College Budget 2020/21 by the Board on 31 July 2020.

9. GATHER & GATHER CATERING UPDATE

- 9.1 The Committee NOTED that the College had been informed by its catering partner, Gather & Gather, it had made a difficult decision to modify its current catering provision due to campus closures and future restrictions on staff and student numbers on campuses due to Covid-19. The Chief Operating Officer advised the Committee that Gather & Gather, like many other businesses and organisations in Scotland, had been placed in the difficult position of taking tough decisions to remain financially viable.
- 9.2 The Committee NOTED that the College had been formally notified that Gather & Gather would now begin a redundancy consultation process with their staff. The Chief Operating Officer informed the Committee that the Board had been informed (via email) on 18 August 2020, and the College continued to maintain

dialogue with Gather & Gather to establish what support it could offer individual staff.

- 9.3 The Committee NOTED that the College was working closely with Gather & Gather to determine the best approach to service provision for those staff and students who would be on campus from the start of the new academic session.

10. CONSTRUCTION & TECHNICAL INSTITUTE: OUTLINE BUSINESS CASE UPDATE

- 10.1 The Committee NOTED a verbal update on the Construction & Technical Institute Outline Business Case which had been submitted to the SFC on 08 June 2020. The Vice Principal Corporate Development advised the Committee that discussions remained ongoing with City of Edinburgh Council regarding a potential site for the Institute.

11. HUMAN RESOURCES REPORT

- 11.1 The Committee NOTED a Human Resources Report which included updates on employee relations, HR operations and organisational development.
- 11.2 The Committee NOTED feedback from the staff survey undertaken in June 2020, which had resulted in 864 responses. The Chief Operating Officer highlighted that 2.8% of respondents were in the 'NHS Extremely High-Risk Group' (formally the 'shielded' category), whilst 14.3% were in the 'NHS High Risk Group'.
- 11.3 The Committee NOTED that the main challenges highlighted by staff through the survey related to working from home were IT equipment (24.7%) and remote access (12.2%), whilst 23.2% stated that they faced 'no challenges'. The Chief Operating Officer advised the Committee that detailed survey data had been supplied to line managers, about issues for their teams, and individual assessments were now being conducted to ensure a safe return for staff who were required to work on a campus.
- 11.4 The Committee NOTED that an Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) led research study in 2018/19 had shown that 25% of BAME staff and students had experienced racism at university. The Chief Operating Officer informed the Committee that in response to recommendations from the study, the SFC had commissioned Advance HE to deliver materials and initiatives to support both colleges and universities to eliminate racism from campuses.
- 11.5 The Committee NOTED that significant progress had been made to develop training material, launch a campus awareness raising campaign and, subject to approval for funding, the development of a bespoke reporting tool for students and staff at Scotland's colleges and universities to report incidents of racism (and potentially discrimination on other protected characteristics). The Chief Operating Officer advised the Committee that the HR Team were also working with the Equalities Officer and the WAX-ED Group to deliver a number of actions based on evidence-based decision-making.
- 11.6 The Committee NOTED the HR Dashboard for Quarter 4 of 2019/20, and DISCUSSED the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the mental health of staff. The Chief Operating Officer informed the Committee that the College would

continue to develop guidance for staff on best practice to support those working from home.

12. CLOSED ITEM OF BUSINESS

12.1 Items of business were considered by the Committee as part of a closed session. Closed items were recorded under a separate minute (Closed Minutes 12/01.09.20 refers).

13. ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

13.1 None.

14. FOR INFORMATION

14.1 REVIEW OF COMMITTEE OPERATION 2019/20

14.1.1 The Committee NOTED a final version of the Review of Committee Operation 2019/20, as agreed by members' out-with the meeting on 30 June 2020.

14.2 HORIZON SCANNING REPORT

14.2.1 The Committee NOTED a Horizon Scanning Report which outlined major political, economic, social, technological, legal and/or environmental developments that could impact on the five strategic plan aims of the College.

14.3 COMMITTEE PROGRAMME OF WORK 2020/21

14.3.1 The Committee NOTED its proposed programme of work for the 2020/21 academic year.

15. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

15.1 The next meeting of the Policy & Resources Committee will take place on 10 November 2020.

Meeting closed at 17:00