

Minutes of the Esher College Corporation
held on Thursday 26th March 2009

* Present

* Mr Terry Price (Chair)

* Mr Keith Blackwell	* Mr David Lavarack
* Mr Michael Butlin	* Mr David Lowe
* Mrs Susan Effendowicz	Mr Paul Monaghan
* Mr Philip White	* Mrs Robyn Ross
* Mrs Carole Ann Roycroft	* Mr Chris Johnson
* Mr Robin John	* Mrs Pam Whyman
Dr Anne Grant	* Dr Clarissa Wilks
Cllr Peter Hickman	* Mrs Jo Canessa
* Mr Michael Kemsley	* Mr Daniel Hill
* Mr David Irving	

In attendance: Mrs Sue Gunter: Clerk to the Corporation
 Mr Dan Dean: Deputy Principal (Advising Officer)

Part I

Terry Price welcomed the two Student Governors, Philip White and Daniel Hill to their first Corporation meeting.

1. PRESENTATION ON FRAMEWORK FOR EXCELLENCE by Dan Dean

Dan Dean began by explaining that the Framework for Excellence was a performance management tool imposed on colleges by the LSC. It provided a single overall performance rating (OPR) based on three dimensions – responsiveness, effectiveness and finance. There were Key Performance Areas for each, which in turn were measured by Key Performance Indicators. Robyn Ross asked if each of these areas were given equal weighting and Dan Dean advised that it was subject to a complex formula.

Some key points in relation to the Framework for Excellence were: -

- The aim of benchmarking data for the Further Education sector.
- School sixth forms would be included from September 2010, subject to pilot.
- The outcomes would be integrated into College SARS.
- There were tensions between this and Ofsted's Common Inspection Framework

There was a requirement to carry out a student survey based on questions imposed by the LSC. It was clear from pilots undertaken a year ago that students needed guidance in completing these, and a significant amount of work had been done to ensure that a majority of students completed the survey by the third week of the spring term.

Having set out this framework, Dan Dean advised that there had been significant protests against this “one size fits all” structure from school sixth forms, FE colleges and at the AOC Conference. In February the LSC announced that there would be no calculation of the Overall Performance Rating, with other Key Performance Areas and some Key Performance Indicators not being published. The College is due to receive a report in May but it remains to be seen in what format this will be and how the framework will be applied in future.

2. REGISTER OF INTERESTS

The Chair asked if anyone had any interests to declare with regard to the agenda of the meeting. None were declared.

The Chair took this opportunity to congratulate Keith Blackwell on receiving an OBE for his services to further education in the New Years Honours list. This was not only a personal achievement but also reflected the wider College success.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Peter Hickman, Anne Grant and Paul Monaghan.

4. CONSTITUTION

The Clerk reported that the College had initially received two nominations for the Parent Governor vacancy in May. However, one had subsequently withdrawn, removing the need for an election. The remaining nominee, Susanna Burleigh, would therefore be appointed and a copy of her statement was circulated for information. It was agreed that she should sit on the Estates and Policy Committees for the remainder of the academic year. Susan Effendowicz had agreed to be her mentor.

It was noted that a governor with responsibility for Health and Safety should be appointed at the end of Robyn Ross’ term of office.

Action: Clerk to put this on the agenda for the next meeting of the Estates Committee.

5. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

These were agreed and signed as a true record.

6. MATTERS ARISING

Item 14 Audit – procurement Dan Dean advised that Geoff Bowley was creating a new Procurement Policy which should be ready in the autumn term.

Presentation had been made at the beginning of this meeting.

Item 15 smoking. Some progress had been made on ensuring that students only smoked in designated areas and the Security Officer had been helpful with this. However, this needed ongoing monitoring.

7. PRINCIPAL'S REPORT

Keith Blackwell began his report by saying that the level of change on all fronts continued to provide challenges for the College.

In terms of Staffing, there had been a number of positive appointments but it was becoming increasingly difficult to recruit good staff. He confirmed that jobs were advertised on the website and there was a discussion about the recruitment of PGCE students and possible advertising in the voluntary sector. Under Enrolment and Funding, there were 1550 full-time students on roll, 45 above target. Funding for these would be consolidated in the next academic year, resulting in an additional £400,000 for the College. It was always difficult to predict the conversion rate of applications and it was unclear at this stage what impact, if any, the recession would have on the number of applications to the College. The College was expecting to enrol 500 non-LSC funded adult students (25FTE) this academic year.

There was a lot going on in Staff Development with staff participating in S7 programmes, in particular the leadership programme and workshops for support staff. After staff consultation the Lesson Observation structure had been changed and is now based on a two-year cycle of peer observation followed by departmental based observation.

Under Curriculum Development, there had been a superb performance from the Oxbridge cohort who completed the Extended Project Qualification, with results far higher than the national average. Two new A levels – Accounting and Computing - would be offered next year. Enrolments to adult courses are positive, with particular success in the science technician courses with people working towards degree level competence.

In terms of Partnerships, there was still little information as to how the transfer of control of sixth form colleges from the LSC to local authorities would work in practice. However, the S7 consortium was being proactive in developing positive relationships with Surrey. A meeting had just been set up with the Consultant appointed to oversee the introduction of two new academies in the Borough of Richmond. There had been no contact with the other London boroughs.

Student Achievements - 12 students had gained a place at either Oxford or Cambridge, a significant increase on previous years and a good conversion rate from an initial 30 applications. The production of "Street Opera" had been a great success. Katya Toneva, a teacher in the IT department, had received a Learning Award for developing a sophisticated on-line discussion forum for her students.

Accommodation - It has become clear that the LSC do not have sufficient funds to meet the demand for capital projects within the FE sector and this has been widely reported in the press. The College's own LSC property advisor has confirmed that the College is highly unlikely to receive any funding at all. Fortunately, unlike some others, the College has only invested a small amount of money in developing its proposals and is still due to receive a contribution towards the cost of the feasibility study from the LSC. A meeting has already taken place with the College's project managers to consider alternative smaller scale capital projects. A recent residents meeting had been very positive with only minor complaints about litter and parking. This was a significant improvement on the position some years ago. It was suggested that the students taking positive and public action in this area could further improve the situation.

Student Council Report

The two Student Governors outlined the main points of the Student Council report with a continued emphasis on charitable fundraising. They had recently organised a uniform swap with Esher High School and would be working alongside the school's Student Council on a number of joint projects.

Finance

Dan Dean said that there was little to report in terms of variances. The key points to note in terms of income were the increased predicted outturn for adult education and lettings and the small downward adjustment to the predicted outturn for bank interest. Overall there was a positive variance of £11,418 in revenue. There was little significant to report in expenditure. The forecast overall revenue balance at the end of the year is projected to be £332,155 against a budgeted figure of £326,515. The projected cumulative surplus is £1,898,302.

David Lavarack proposed approval of the Financial Reports. This was seconded by Carole Ann Roycroft and approved unanimously by the meeting.

Quality Improvement Plan

The following points were noted:-

- It was too early to report on points 1-14.
- Point 15 The review of ILOT had taken place as previously reported.
- Point 21 The Learner Involvement Strategy had gone to the management committee for review.
- Point 31 The approach for the Development Plan had been discussed and agreed with the Policy Committee.
- Work was underway on Points 42 and 43 concerning equality and diversity. Keith Blackwell confirmed that these applied to students and staff alike, although the college received few job applications from minority groups due to its geographical position.

8. GOVERNORS TRAINING DAY

A paper had been circulated prior to the meeting with suggestions as to training topics for the training morning on Monday 22nd June. Mike Kemsley advised that the Finance Committee had considered the need for Finance training. The new system for Finance induction training was now in place and had been well received by new governors. However, he felt that there was also a need for whole governing body training in this area. This would need to be about two to three hours long and so there would not be enough time to include this in the Governors Training Day. It was agreed that a separate session should be arranged for this.

Action: Clerk to email Governors to establish best timing for this.
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In terms of the training morning itself, the QIP would need to be discussed and it was agreed that the two other suggestions of Roles and Responsibilities of Leadership and Management and the Risk Management Process within the College could usefully be combined. Geoff Bowley had pursued the suggestion that the College's Insurers might be prepared to make a presentation and it was agreed that this would be helpful.

Action: Geoff Bowley to confirm with insurers that they are prepared to make a short presentation on this area.
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Finally it was agreed that there should be a short session launching the Governor Portal. So far the Clerk had worked with David Lloyd on developing the site and governor input would be helpful before the launch.

Action: The Clerk would ask two governors to review and test the Portal prior to the training day.

All agreed that this was a good programme. Lunch would be available for those who wanted it afterwards.

9. COMMUNITY COHESION POLICY

Keith Blackwell introduced the Community Cohesion policy which was structured under the required headings of “Learning, teaching and the Curriculum”, “Equity and excellence” and “Engagement and extended services”. The policy was discussed briefly and proposed for approval by Robyn Ross. This was seconded by Pam Whyman and approved unanimously by the meeting.

10. MENTAL HEALTH (SUPPORTING STUDENTS) POLICY

This policy had been discussed in depth at the last Policy committee meeting and some changes to the draft had been agreed and incorporated in the current version as a result of recommendations made. Pam Whyman asked what consideration had been given to the inclusion of the counselling service within this document. Dan Dean said that he had discussed this in some depth with Bill McClelland who had said there had been a conscious decision not to include it here as it is not appropriate to the document. The counselling service was currently under review to ensure that it was fit for purpose and sufficiently robust to support the increasing demands on it. Carole Ann Roycroft mentioned the North Surrey Community Counselling Partnership (NSCCP), which she felt might be able to offer help in this area. All agreed that external expertise in this area would be very useful.

Action: Carole Ann Roycroft to forward details of the NSCCP to the College

In response to questions from governors, Dan Dean and Keith Blackwell confirmed that this policy related only to students. There were a number of other policies in place which related to staff.

David Lavarack proposed approval of the policy. This was seconded by Philip White and approved unanimously by the meeting.

11. GOVERNORS ANNUAL REPORT

Keith Blackwell introduced this Report, which related to the previous academic year and had been approved by the Review & Search Committee. Once approved by the Corporation, it would be put on the College website.

Jo Canessa proposed approval of the Report. This was seconded by Chris Johnson and approved unanimously by the meeting.

12. REPORT BACK FROM COMMITTEES

AUDIT

David Lavarack reported that the Committee had discussed the Financial Management and Control Evaluation (FMCE) submission to the LSC. This had identified two areas for improvement, both of which were being addressed. The Internal Audit Needs Assessment and three-year plan had also been discussed and recommended for approval by the Corporation. The total number of days audit had been reduced from 15 days to 12 as previously agreed and the College, auditors and Audit Committee were comfortable with the proposed programme. Clarissa Wilks proposed approval of the Internal Audit Needs Assessment and three-year plan. This was seconded by Chris Johnson and approved unanimously by the meeting.

In a brief review of the disaster management issues discussed at the meeting, Michael Butlin stressed the importance of destroying documentation which was no longer required. Clarissa Wilks asked if there was a requirement to carry out a business continuity exercise. Dan Dean advised that there was no legal requirement for colleges to do so but it had been done as a matter of best practice. He also confirmed that fire drills were held once a term at variable times. Finally David Lavarack provided brief feedback from the course on Risk Management that he had attended with Dan Dean.

ESTATES

In the absence of Paul Monaghan, Keith Blackwell provided feedback from the Estates Committee and confirmed that the various works requested by students was in hand. He was giving further thought to an alternative location for the Student Council offices.

FINANCE

Mike Kemsley reported that the Committee had considered the Finance Reports and a proposed new format for financial reporting to governors.

The Committee had also considered the financial implications of taking an alternative approach to site improvements now that it was clear that funding from the LSC for a major re-build project was not going to materialise. They had discussed proposals from Keith Blackwell and the College's project managers to carry out a mixture of new build and refurbishment projects with an estimated cost of approximately £3.4m. They had considered that the proposal to meet these costs with £1m from reserves and the remainder as a loan to be sound, and invited comments from this meeting on these proposals. There was a discussion on the effect of coming under Local Authority control. Keith Blackwell confirmed that although schools do not always have the power to borrow money, FE colleges could do so and this would not change with the transfer to Local Authority control. It was suggested that it might be possible to borrow at preferential rates through the Local Authority. All agreed that these proposals represented a good "second plan" and that they should be further investigated in detail. Clarissa Wilks felt that the College had a duty to current students to use reserves to improve the student experience. As part of this, it was important to maintain and improve the College site; doing nothing was not an option.

POLICY

Terry Price advised that the Committee had considered the approach to be taken in drafting the strategic plan and had agreed that it should be in the form of a “position statement” identifying the various options open to the College in the short and mid term. This would be considered at the next Policy meeting and at the summer Corporation meeting.

REVIEW & SEARCH

Carole Ann Roycroft advised that Susan Effendowicz had provided useful feedback in her first meeting both in terms of reporting back on induction and observations on parents perspective of the College.

13. MATTERS ARISING FROM STUDENT COUNCIL REPORT

None.

14. MATTERS ARISING FROM STAFF

Pam Whyman said that she felt that this term had been a particularly pressured one with a very challenging new intake who had taken a lot of work to get settled into good working practices. In addition, changes to the exam timetables for AS levels had increased the pressure on both staff and students. It was recognised that cohorts do vary year on year and governors felt that it was important that they received feedback on this in order to help track performance against expectations. It was agreed that the Student Action Plan was very important and that the Student Council should be engaged in this area.

15. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Terry Price noted that this was Robyn Ross’s last Corporation meeting and thanked her for all of her hard work during her term as a Parent Governor.

Governors Attendance at College (from College records) – not discussed

23.01.09: Robin John for finance meeting with College Accountant and to work shadow a student

30.01.09: Susan Effendowicz for finance meeting with College Accountant and to work shadow a student

February: College Production – David Irving, Mike Kemsley, Peter Hickman, and Susan Effendowicz

18.03.09: Terry Price for meeting with Principal

24.03.09: Michael Butlin for Environmental Sustainability Group meeting

16. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting is Tuesday 7th July 2009.

17. CONFIDENTIAL RESOLUTION

Terry Price proposed that in view of the confidential nature of information to be dealt with in Part II of the agenda that representatives of the press and members of the public should be excluded from the meeting during the proceedings to which this resolution applies.

Chair

Date