

**Minutes of the meeting of the Board of the Corporation held on  
Tuesday, 12 May 2020 at 5:00pm via Teams Conferencing**

- Present:
- John Barnett
  - George Blyth
  - Tom Crompton
  - Louise Doyle
  - Louise Farthing
  - Louise Kennedy
  - Rob Lawson (Chair) (present at Bede Campus)
  - Paul McEldon
  - Zainab Nadeem
  - Susan Pollard
  - Ralph Saelzer
  - Ellen Thinnesen, Chief Executive
- In Attendance:
- Nigel Harrett, Principal Northumberland College
  - David Howells, Chief Operating Officer
  - Vikkie Morton, Vice Principal Student Services and Registry
  - Iain Nixon, Vice Principal Partnerships and Commercial
  - Judith Quinn, Interim Deputy Principal Curriculum
- Clerk:
- Christine Stretesky, Head of Corporate Governance and Policy (present at Bede Campus)

**Bd/19-20/90 Apologies and consent or absence and declarations of interest**

There were no apologies or declarations of interest made.

**Bd/19-20/91 Minutes of the previous meeting held 17 March 2020 and Matters Arising**

The minutes were accepted as presented.

**Bd/19-20/92 CEO Report**

The Chief Executive (CE) delivered the report noting that things are moving quickly, highlighting the following at the national level:

- Summer 2020 exam series has been cancelled with Ofqual communicating on how qualifications will be progressing. The CE provided a description of the process the College

will undertake and announced that the VP Student Services and Registry is leading. The Group will be ready to submit student grades on 1 June.

- Two campuses have remained open for students: Bede and Kirkley Hall. The Group is providing a substantial programme of remote delivery. Engagement data is being gathered and will be shared once collated.
- The DfE has introduced a range of temporary flexibilities around apprenticeships.
- The OfS has taken steps to reduce regulatory burden and has stated they do not expect to see changes to admission offers already made.
- Ofsted has announced a suspension to inspections until January 2021.

At the regional level:

- The CE described the work the LEP are doing around intelligence gathering, development of workstreams, challenges on results day and the economic impact of apprenticeship recruitments.
- In response to a question on her thoughts of the national discussion around college ownership, the CE replied that she trusts AoC leadership when they state that things are favourable for FE and colleges but that she is anticipating the white paper due to be published. The Chair added that he had a conversation with the FE Commissioner that morning who was clear that FE is in a very different landscape.

At the Group level:

- The Group is doing really well with virtual engagement; there have been 893 virtual interviews conducted, the Get Ahead programme at HSF has been launched and will be launched at Kirkley Hall with 250 school aged children and parents engaging in the programmes developed, 4213 participated in a UCAS live event, we have hosted FaceBook live sessions on a number of transition themes and supported 163 non-applicants on advice and guidance.
- Hartlepool Sixth Form performance places it in the top 10 college nationally which is a huge achievement post-merger.
- Sunderland College students have competed in and won the national E Sports competition.

The following questions were asked and responded to as follows:

- The Board asked whether the grades curriculum staff are assessing students are in line with what the Group anticipated achievement to be. The CE stated that the staff assigned grades still need to undergo validation and then to the awarding body for final results so it is too soon to determine that.
- The Board questioned how many students the Group anticipates would return if campuses were to reopen on 1 June. The CE stated that that will be discussed in other agenda items and asked to defer her response.

The Board thanked and congratulated the Head of Hartlepool Sixth Form (HSF) and the rest of the HSF staff for the remarkable turnaround at HSF.

The CE stated that the Group has launched WorkPlace for use by staff as a way to develop a 'one college' community and make it easier to connect people at multiple campuses. She added from a cultural perspective it is a really important tool. Governor Pollard explained the type of posts being shared on the platform from old pictures of the various campuses, to things teams are doing to

boost morale to things unrelated to work. The CE thanked the Chair for the video of him thanking staff which was shared with staff via WorkPlace.

### **Bd/19-20/93    Coronavirus Strategy, Business Continuity and Risk**

The Chief Executive (CE) presented the report and highlighted the following:

- The group looking at reopening the college are approaching the task in three stages: Prepare, Progress and Perform.
- In the Prepare stage:
  - A policy addressing the college response to an infectious disease outbreak is being prepared and will be shared with Governors asking for input. The policy will include defined roles and responsibilities which will be applicable to any crises response.
  - Internal and external communications plans have been developed with our communications aligning with the Group's new way of working.
  - A workforce analysis is being conducted for staff who are high risk, staff who are at home and cannot work from home, and those staff who feel they need to come in to work for mental health reasons. The framework is clear that any staff on site must comply with infectious disease protocols.
  - A Flexible Work Policy is being drafted as well and will be rolled out to staff next week.
  - With regard to the provider/supplier relief scheme, senior leaders decided not to engage with that scheme.
  - Data on offers and accepts will come in next week. Colleges across the country are expecting low numbers.
- In the Progress stage
  - Estates are looking at screens at receptions, defining exits and entrances, reconfiguring work space and stepping up the frequency and type of cleaning
  - It is highly unlikely that the Group will be reopening permanently before the end of July.
  - Review is underway on how some students can return onsite before the end of the term. Small groups, staggered over the summer to ensure those students and perspective students is being considered. ESFA stated further guidance on this is forthcoming.

The Board acknowledged that with reopening there will be some chaos around social distancing and questioned whether there will be specific requirements the Group will have to adhere to. The CE responded that the purpose of the contagious disease policy framework is to minimise the chaos as it will require rotas for staff to be on site to allow for staggering of days in the office.

The Board followed up by asking whether consultation with the unions is being undertaken with regard to the rotas. The CE stated that senior leaders have been discussing with the Group's solicitors. The COO stated that communications with the unions on furloughs and non-continuation have been positive.

The Board challenged senior leaders on the cost of staff and its place on the risk register questioning the need for different contract types. The CE requested that this be discussed during confidential items.

AGREED: to note the contents of the report and update provided

### **Bd/19-20/94 Vulnerable Students and Students of Key Workers – Provision Update**

The Vice Principal Student Services and Registry (VP SS&R) presented this report stating that it focuses on vulnerable children/young people and dependents of key workers and the support the Group has been providing. The VP SS & R stated that 26 students were identified as dependents of key workers, with 11 attending either Bede Campus or Kirkley Hall campus. 435 learners were identified as meeting the government's definition as vulnerable. The VP SS & R stated that of those, 15 have attended onsite with the majority being supported at home through regular contact with teachers. Risk assessments were undertaken for those learners with EHC Plans to ensure their needs will be met at home.

In addition, the Group have been supporting students through:

- continuation of counselling services
- issuing 322 laptops to students for use at home
- providing internet connectivity to 2 students
- the Group is depositing money into the bank accounts or issuing store vouchers to the 156 students eligible for free school meals

The Board asked the following Questions:

- Did the Group have to purchase laptops to meet the needs of the learners?
  - Stock was used first and then we looked to purchasing
- During the merger with NC, there was a plan to purchase IT equipment for the college, did that happen?
  - The COO responded that the Group did purchase some new machines and have repurposed some existing stock at NC. At the moment, the Group is not looking to bringing forward any additional spend on IT if it is not necessary.
- In response to a question on other work being undertaken, the VP SS&R stated that an analysis of looking at wider areas of vulnerability like those that come from a post code of social deprivation, etc and what additional support we can put in place is being reviewed
- The Board asked what is being done in conjunction with local authorities around vulnerable young people and September intake?
  - The VP SS&R stated that the current cohorts are being reviewed, work is being done with schools and establishing transition work with them and guaranteeing a place at college for them if they engage in these programmes. The Group is also engaging with Together for Children.
- Internet connectivity in Northumberland County is quite poor, has that been an issue for our learners? The VPSS&R stated that this has not been raised by students. Tutors are doing weekly engagement with cohorts and any issues on IT are being fed back to the IT team.
- In response to a question on whether the devices loaned out are tracked, the VP SS&R stated that anyone receiving a Group device must sign a contract which provides our expectations around use and return. All devices are marked with visible and hidden marks and cash converters are good at checking devices before they accept them.
- The Board challenged the senior leaders to provide assurances that students know where to go to receive mental health support. The VP SS& R stated that cases come in to the

safeguarding team from tutors and teachers and that the counselling team has been fantastic in taking additional students. There is a coordinated effort with social media and the youth work team to talk about wellbeing and the counselling services.

The Board agreed that the Student Services team have done a good job of supporting students during this time.

AGREED to note the contents of the report.

### **Bd/19-20/95 National Achievement Rates – analysis by College and Group**

The Interim Deputy Principal Curriculum delivered this report stating it is a report showing the achievement rates and positions for 2018/19 for EPNE for general education and training and apprenticeships. This is the first time the Group appears as EPNE in the tables but that internally, the data has been broken down to college brand level. She noted that due to COVID, for this academic year, there will be no performance data so this data is the data that the Group will carry forward to future OFSTED inspections.

The data and positions were discussed with the following highlighted:

#### **EPNE Group Level.**

- Education and Training: 37<sup>th</sup> position out of 172 GFE Institutions (all ages and qualifications).
- EPNE is 6.4% (86.5% AR) below the achievement rate of the number 1 ranking college, Nelson and Colne (92.9% AR).
- Apprenticeships: 138<sup>th</sup> overall position out of 172 GFE Institutions (all ages, all levels).

#### **Sunderland College and Hartlepool Sixth Form**

- Education and Training: 15<sup>th</sup> position out of 172 GFE Institutions (all ages and qualifications). Improved significantly from 45<sup>th</sup> in 2017-18 due to improvements in 16-18 and adult achievement rates.
- Apprenticeships: 50<sup>th</sup> overall position out of 172 GFE Institutions (all ages, all levels). Improved from 52<sup>nd</sup> in 2017-18.
- Apprenticeships: 17<sup>th</sup> timely position out of 172 GFE Institutions (all ages, all levels). Improved from 19<sup>th</sup> timely position in 2017-18.

#### **Northumberland College.**

- Education and Training: 133<sup>rd</sup> position out of 172 GFE Institutions (all ages and qualifications). Declined from 86<sup>th</sup> in 2017-18.
- Significant change in adult provision position from 31<sup>st</sup> to 106<sup>th</sup> due to the decrease in achievement rate by 3.2%.
- Apprenticeships: 159<sup>th</sup> overall position out of 172 GFE Institutions. (all ages, all levels). Declined from 140<sup>th</sup> in 2017-18.
- Apprenticeships: 153<sup>th</sup> timely position out of 172 GFE Institutions (all ages, all levels). Declined from 136<sup>th</sup> timely position in 2017-18.

The Board acknowledged the hard work ahead to improve quality at NC.

The Board asked for clarity on the Apprenticeships data. The Interim Deputy Principal stated that the difference between the two figures was that one was overall achievement and the other was timely achievement.

AGREED to note the content of the report.

### **Bd/19-20/96 Management Accounts**

The COO delivered the report highlighting the following:

- The report should be read in conjunction with item 99 as the management accounts cover the period up to lockdown
- EBIDTA of 1,890K (or 6%) is almost on track with budget
- We were on target for the outturn for the year that was forecasted for at the end of March
- Adult skills budget at the end of February was moving toward achieving target. This is much more challenging now as recruitment of new adult learners cannot continue. The priority now is to keep existing learners on track with remote learning
- In terms of income, the Group will get the full ESFA funding for the year as we indicated that we would have achieved target for the year and will see a shortfall of target for learner loans. HE income was on target
- Staff costs is slightly underbudget and only a small element of restructuring costs have been used up to this point
- Other Operating costs are on budget
- The key movement on the balance sheet is the decrease in net current assets
- Cash flow was low, and the Group was overdrawn at the end of March but should recover by end of year

The Board questioned creditors that were due payment in more than one year. The COO stated that it is largely due to the treatment of the TU grants and is a presentational issue.

In response to Board questions around cash flow, the COO stated that cash flow is very tight but that more information will be discussed during item 99.

In response to questions around financial health scores, the COO stated that the Group remains at requires improvement and that we are on track to meet bank covenants.

The Board questioned whether the governance around regularity is robust enough given the current circumstances. The COO stated that there is planning underway to hold a couple of meetings, one in mid-June and one in August between a small group of governors and senior leaders focused on risk and finances. The CE explained that the group will be comprised of governors with financial acumen to come together, maybe 4, to scrutinise and support the financial risk assessment. The Chair asked those interested to contact the Head of Corporate Governance and Policy.

In response to questions around the offer from governors to explore developing learners' entrepreneurial skill and green innovation, the CE stated she has been discussing this with individual governors, and the North East LEP. The Principal of Northumberland College stated he spoke with the county council that day on those topics.

AGREED: to note the content of the report

### **Bd/19-20/97 Students' Union Report**

The Students' Union President delivered the report stating that she assumed all members read her report and that as an update since the report, seven students have shown an interest in running for SU President with candidates from all campuses.

The Board asked the President whether there was anything she thought the Group could be doing for students during this time that is not being done. The President stated that students are receiving lots of support and she could not think of anything else the Group could do.

AGREED to note the contents of the report.

### **Bd/19-20/98 Governance Committee Recommendations**

The Head of Corporate Governance and Policy delivered the report stating that members of the Governance Committee interviewed both candidates and voted unanimously to recommend their appointment.

The Chair asked members if they agreed to the recommendations of the committee.

AGREED to approve the appoint:

- Derek Cogle, Head Teacher, Harry Watts' Academy, for appointment to the Board of the Corporation and Lead Governor for SEND
- Chris Jones, retired OfSTED, for appointment to the Northumberland Local Governing Board and Northumberland Curriculum and Quality Committee
- Both with a start date of 1 July 2020

### **The following items were taken out of order**

#### **Bd/19-20/100 Current E-Learning Strategy, Platforms and Engagement**

This item was determined to be confidential with minutes maintained separately.

#### **Bd/19-20/101 HE Update: QAA Report**

This item was determined to be confidential with minutes maintained separately.

#### **Bd/19-20/102 Apprenticeships Performance and Retention**

This item was determined to be confidential with minutes maintained separately.

#### **Bd/19-20/103 Confidential Minutes of the previous meeting held 17 March 2020 and Matters Arising**

This item was determined to be confidential with minutes maintained separately.

***The SU President and Staff Governor left the meeting at this time.***

**Bd/19-20/99 Financial Implications of COVID19**

This item was determined to be confidential with minutes maintained separately.

**Bd/19-20/104 Any Other Business**

There were three items:

- The Chair stated that the Governance Committee met with the CE and the COO to discuss and approve the plan for staff furloughs using the authority provided in the Standing Orders and acknowledged at the 17 March 2020 meeting;
- The Chair stated that he had a conversation with the FE Commissioner who was very complimentary of EPNE and showed confidence with the ELT;
- The CE provided an update on the capital development programme at Northumberland College stating that contractors are on site and developing protocols to ensure the health and safety of their workers. On 18 May, NGU will be back on site to construct the Equine Centre and the new SEND facility. Malcolm Hollis are hopeful for an October half term completion for those projects. The residential accommodation refurbishment should be completed within 4-5 weeks. The scaffolding is coming down at Ashington and should be completed within 4-6 weeks.

**Bd/19-20/105 Date, time and venue of next meeting: 30 June 2020, 5:00pm, via Teams Conferencing**

There being no further business the meeting closed at 19:28.