

**MINUTES OF THE FEC BOARD OF GOVERNORS MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 28 JANUARY, 2009**

Present: Nick Brown, Ian Hill, John Hodgkinson (Chair), Irene Howard, Scott Jackson, Cllr. Kay Knox, Richard Lee, Iftikhar Naweed, Mike Pitt, Ed Stacey, Peter Treadwell (part)  
Apologies: Phil Brisk, Steve Lowe, Asim Mahmood, Gloria Oates, David Read, Jackie Scholes, Mick Walsh  
Absent: Khadija Begum, Linda Newitt  
In attendance: Jayne Clarke, Bev Beaumont (part), Peter Roberts

In the absence of the Chair and Vice-Chair, JH was elected to Chair the meeting. JH explained that the Chair had been called away on urgent business in London but would endeavour to join the meeting later if return transport allowed.

1. **Declaration of Interests**

None was declared.

2. **Minutes of the last meeting**

JH drew attention to the fact that GO had chaired the last meeting and not he as stated in the Minutes. Subject to this amendment, the Minutes of the meeting held on 8 October were agreed as a true and correct record.

3. **Correspondence**

There was no correspondence.

MP arrived at this point.

4. **Chairman's business**

**Committee membership**

JH drew attention to the paper which had been circulated prior to the meeting which gave details of current membership of Corporation Committees. JH explained that this paper had been presented for two reasons. Firstly, a member of each of the Personnel and Quality Committees had recently stood down and, from 1 May 2009, there would be two vacancies on the Audit Committee as ES has indicated his intention to stand down from the Board when his term of office ended. As Audit is one of the two statutory Committees, the vacancies should be filled as soon as possible. An invitation was extended to any Governor wishing to serve on any of these Committees to speak to the Clerk. The second reason was to prompt a discussion of the optimum timing of Committee meetings which were currently held either over breakfast or lunch, with the exception of Personnel which took place mid-morning to coincide with the lunchtime LJC meetings attended by the Chair of Personnel. Any suggestions regarding the meeting schedule would be welcome.

At this point, following PR's query, the Clerk confirmed his membership of the Quality Committee. Angela Williams had been co-opted onto the Committee because of her role as Quality Manager and as responsibility for quality had now passed to PR he had automatically been co-opted onto the Committee when AW left.

**Membership of the Board**

The Chair also reported that SL, whose term of office ended on 31 March had indicated his willingness to serve for another term and this would be discussed at the next Search Committee meeting. Governors agreed to support the Search Committee's recommendation which would be ratified at their meeting on 29 April. In addition, it would be necessary to recruit a new Governor and this would be discussed by the Search Committee at their next meeting.

**Cycle of Meetings**

In order to maximise attendance, the Clerk suggested that a reminder of meetings scheduled for the coming term could be sent out to Governors, to ensure their diaries were up to date. **This was agreed.**

5. **Principal's business**

**(a) Value added**

NB drew attention to the Press Article, a copy of which had been circulated prior to the meeting. The article confirmed that the College now ranked in the top 5%, nationally, for contextual value added scores, which were used to illustrate how much students had improved since their GCSEs. This placed the College alongside independent schools, an achievement which was even more significant given the number of students enrolled and the wide range of their abilities. It was also pleasing to note that one of the College's Partner schools had been voted the sixth most improved school in the country, whilst at another A-C grades at GCSE, including Maths and English, had improved from 13% - 30%. NB added that increased achievement at GCSE would inevitably lead to more students being offered places at the College and this, in turn, was likely to boost enrolment at the new Science Centre.

**ACTION**

(b) Best Companies' Award

NB reminded Governors that the College had entered the *Best Companies' Award* once again this year, again achieving a grade of *Outstanding*.

JC presented the following update:

- the questionnaire included a challenging set of criteria against which to measure the College's performance. Private sector organisations, with the resources to spend more on staff benefits, were assessed alongside Government-funded educational establishments;
- although one College scored higher last year, in the 2009 Awards Oldham Sixth Form College was now the highest rated educational employer, receiving two star *Outstanding* status, the second highest level possible;
- the Best Companies' 2009 Awards related to the Sunday Times Top 100 Companies scheme, although the College had not entered the Sunday Times competition.

On behalf of all Governors, IHo congratulated the College on its achievement.

BB arrived at this point

(c) Visit by Peter Housden

NB explained that Peter Housden, the Permanent Secretary for the Department for Communities and Local Government, would be visiting the College on 3 February because it was believed that Oldham exemplified an area where FE led the local agenda for regeneration. The visit would involve both the College and the Council and a meeting would take place including partners and representatives from the Public Services Board in Oldham. In addition to the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council, the Public Services Board had expanded its membership to include partners, in order to demonstrate transparency and sharpen discussions. This was seen as very best practice by Ministers and the College was proud to be associated with it.

(d) Update on Capital project

At this point, and following ES's request, JC gave a brief update on progress on the Science Centre. Notes taken during this item were considered to be confidential and would be recorded separately from the published Minutes.

PT arrived at this point

6. **Committee business**Audit Committee

ES led this item, referring to documents circulated prior to the meeting. The following points were noted:

- as the Committee had met two months ago this report would have been presented at the December meeting (which had been cancelled);
- the Risk Management Self-Assessment Report had been completed and copies were made available to members;
- amongst areas for improvement identified was the proposal to Minute future finance and funding meetings held on Friday mornings, which hitherto had not been formally recorded. Other risks that had been included were those associated with the Science Centre Capital Project;
- the Internal Audit Annual Report was an unqualified, clean audit with *substantial assurance* recorded across all areas;
- the Financial Statements, Accounts Summary and Management Letter had been an extremely positive report with no unresolved recommendations or disagreements;
- the College's staff costs, which were considered to be higher than average against others in the sector. Benchmark figures may soon be made available for other aspects of the staffing analysis, such as absence data;
- there had been some additional funding from the LSC to increase energy efficiency and the impact of savings had been requested in a future report;
- the College remained Category A financial status;
- the Internal Audit strategy for the next 5 years, drawn up by the new Internal Auditors, had been presented and agreed in terms of timing and number of days;
- there had been two minor amendments to the Audit Committee Terms of Reference. These were confirmation that there would be 5 members on the Audit Committee and that it would meet termly. A copy of the revised TOR had been copied to Governors;
- the Annual Audit Committee's Report to the Board was discussed and recommended to the Board.

BB

In the absence of any questions or comments the Reports presented were accepted by the Board.

**RESOLVED**

**that** the Internal Audit Annual Report for 2008-2009 was accepted by the Board;  
**that** the Financial Statements, Accounts Summary and Management Letter were accepted by the Board;  
**that** the Internal Audit strategy for 2009-2014 was accepted by the Board;  
**that** the Audit Committee's Annual Report to the Corporation was accepted by the Board; and  
**that** the revised Terms of Reference for the Audit Committee were adopted by the Board.

***Finance & General Purposes Committee***

In the absence of the Chair of Finance, IHi led this item referring to papers circulated prior to the meeting. The following comments were noted:

- there had been two sets of Minutes from the meeting, one of which was deemed to be Confidential as it referred to discussion of progress on the Science Centre;
- the College ended the financial year with an operating surplus, a positive cash variance and had retained its Category A financial status;
- various grants had been received throughout the year;
- the Committee recognised that although the College had maintained good reserves and high cash balances, in light of the Capital Project this could change;
- investment in Charity Bonds had become an issue over recent weeks whereby it had proved difficult to place funds in the usual way and members of the Committee had been unavailable to sanction the College's proposed action. A new Treasury Management Policy had been proposed that would prevent a recurrence of this situation;
- all issues regarding the Science Centre had now been separated out and were discussed by the Capital Project Steering Group. The project was moving rapidly and urgent decisions were required. It was, therefore, not possible to keep the Board up to date at all times, but Governors were reminded that they had agreed to delegate decision-making powers to the Steering Group to avoid missed opportunities.

JH asked if lower interest rates represented a significant loss of income for the College. IHi responded that significant sums were invested in Charity Bonds for longer periods, at a 1% - 3% interest rate. Daily interest rates were much lower. BB added that £1M had been placed on an unbreakable Charity Bond at 2.3% interest, whereas interest on a Charity Bond was in the region of 6% before the credit crunch;

BB added that the impact of this on the Capital Project was unclear at the moment. At a peer-referencing group BB had attended recently 2.4% was considered to be a reasonable interest rate at the present time. The difference would be that only unbreakable deals attracted this level of interest and would prevent maximising the College's cashflow.

JH thanked all members of the Finance Committee and Steering Group for their efforts on the College's behalf.

***Personnel Committee***

JH led this item referring to papers circulated prior to the meeting. The following points were noted:

- when the meeting took place the *Best Companies' Award* process was just beginning. This had been updated earlier in the meeting;
- the *Staffing Report* had been the main agenda item at the meeting and a copy had been provided for all Governors;
- a limited amount of benchmark data was currently accessible for Colleges, but this could improve. The College could therefore only compare its own performance from one year to the next;
- attention was drawn to the increased number of applications and higher recruitment of non-white personnel. This was encouraging, but it was stressed that the over-riding criteria when appointing new staff was to choose the best possible applicant and this was reflected in the College's continued success;
- overall gender distribution was not unusual but this had changed over the last few years at Senior Postholder level, moving from mainly female to male;
- absence rates were exceptional, for a College of this size, at less than 2% across teaching and support staff. ES agreed that the figures were remarkably low and were to be commended;
- there had been an update on the 2009 pay award which had been agreed at 2.45% for teaching and support staff and this would be paid in November salaries.

**RESOLVED:**

**that** the Staffing Report was accepted by the Board.

Quality Committee

RL led this item, referring to papers circulated prior to the meeting. The following points were noted:

- there had been two meetings of this Committee since the last Board meeting, both of which had focused on the College's Self-Assessment Report (SAR);

Meeting held on 25 November

- the Draft SAR had been presented and discussed in detail. This had been subsequently amended for presentation at the meeting in January and Governors had received a copy of the latest version;
- the annual review of the College's AGM had taken place and various issues had been discussed. It had been agreed that October was the best time to hold the event, following the summer examination results, which showed the College in a very positive light. The AGM had been filmed for the first time and excerpts would be included on the College's Governance website;
- the remainder of the meeting had been a discussion of the SAR which had been divided into 4 separate sections representing (A) the main document, (B) Key Questions, (C) Quality Improvement Action Plans and (D) Success rates and College Targets. The latter had been the main focus of the January meeting.

Meeting held on 19 January

At this point, RL explained that PR was the author of the massive and time-consuming document presented to the Board. Following a revision of the whole self-assessment process, this year's documentation was more user-friendly and had been well received by staff. Speaking as a member of SMT and Chair of the Quality Committee, RL assured Governors that they could have complete confidence in the College's quality systems. Self-assessment was embedded in the culture and staff were united in their aim to continually make improvements to ensure that the College was the best it could possibly be. RL invited PR to present the SAR and the following points were noted:

- the main thrust of the document was self-assessment making the SAR the single, most critical quality assurance and quality improvement tool in the College. Work began in the first term of the academic year, involving every member of staff, who was asked to review the previous year's performance and set targets for the coming year;
- the whole-College SAR was supported by a SAR and Action Plans for every individual course and activity within the College, stored mainly in electronic form and uploaded onto the LSC Gateway;
- Star Chamber meetings were held annually between Course Leaders, Heads of Managed Area (HOMAs) and Senior Postholders, the outcomes of which were contained in Section A of the SAR. This part of the Report outlined performance in the previous academic year and presented an extremely positive picture which was reflected in the Ofsted Inspection Report and examination results;
- Section A included a summary of College performance and a list of grades awarded in each curriculum area and for every individual course within it;
- the section on "*Capacity to Improve*" (graded 1: *Outstanding*) listed not only achievements but also ways in which performance could be improved. One Department had been graded 3 (out of a possible 4 grades) and rigorous measures had been put into place to ensure improvement would take place. The need to improve performance at AS and in some Applied courses, following disappointing results this year, had been recognised;
- success rates were the second highest ever in the College's history, the highest being in 2007. The target for next year was to ensure results rose again to the College's best ever;
- the CVA report had been published after the SAR had been completed, which showed the College to be in the top 5% nationally. This year the College achieved the best ever ALPS and ALIS results – in the top 10% for ALPS and ALIS (teaching and learning) making a significant difference for young people. This success was reflected throughout the document;
- Section B was based on Ofsted's 5 Key Questions and consisted of a report by the Senior Managers on how quality of provision was assured;
- Section C contained Action Plans for every area of College activity, including targets to illustrate how quality would be improved in the coming year and the steps being taken by the Senior Management Team to ensure this improvement;
- the overall College Success Rates document had been produced by PR and Pam McIlroy and presented a retrospective summary of the last three years' performance;
- the targets set for 2008 – 2009 had been drawn up to ensure that the College improved in areas where performance was disappointing and maintained performance in areas where achievement had been high;
- the College had worked closely with a former Ofsted Inspector to review, streamline and simplify paperwork to make the self-assessment process easier to follow. Any ideas Governors may have regarding how to make further improvements to the process would be welcomed.

JH thanked PR for the presentation of the SAR, which Governors agreed was a very comprehensive document which reflected well on PR and all members of the College staff. The process itself was extremely rigorous, as JH had discovered first-hand having been involved in Star Chamber meetings. PR had produced a well-written, comprehensive, sharp and focused Report.

**RESOLVED:**

**that** the Board fully endorsed the College's Self Assessment Report.

At this point RL drew attention to the Governance SAR, which formed part of the document previously presented, as follows:

- the Governance SAR was a particularly positive report which supported the fact that Governors were seen to be one of the strengths of the College. No weaknesses had been identified;
- the *Areas for Development* included (i) attendance at Committee and Board meetings, (ii) Governor training and (iii) the level of response to questionnaires and other documents for signature.
  - (i) the timing and frequency of meetings had been raised earlier in the meeting;
  - (ii) a suggestion had been put forward to include a short Briefing either immediately before or after each full Board meeting on topics identified by members and Governors were asked to consider this suggestion;
  - (iii) a target of 60% return on questionnaires and similar documents was proposed. BB added that the annual completion of forms such as the Declaration of Eligibility and Register of Interests required a 100% return to be kept on file. Those files were reviewed during the Internal Audit of Governance and Regularity Audit and incomplete records had been the only mention on this year's audited accounts.

**7. Updates****Monthly Management Accounts (MMAs)**

BB led this item referring to documents circulated prior to the meeting. The following points were noted:

- the MMAs reflected the financial year, as audited, whereby the College was in an operating surplus position. The forecasted outturn showed a slight surplus but it was hoped that this would improve;
- reference had been made earlier to the Charity Bond investment;
- additional funding of £50,000 had been received in respect of Beacon Innovation funding relating to expenditure against this. A separate budget had been set up for this and MW was responsible for driving this project forward. It was likely that the whole £50,000 would be spent;
- invoices had been sent to Oldham Borough Council in respect of support for the Capital Project and the NRF quarterly grant had been claimed and payment of both was expected soon;
- the 2008 pay award was agreed in November and all staff received their back-dated increase in November salaries. In addition, the Support Staff Standards Payment was made in December salaries. Both items of expenditure were in line with budget;
- a review of the Fixed Asset Register and disposal of assets had taken place recently which resulted in a review of insurance cover to ensure it was adequate. The IT & Premises Managers, together with the Finance Team, had written off £180,000 of assets that had been disposed of during the summer and this would be reflected in the Accounts;
- a Cashflow for the capital project would be produced monthly to show the current position. However, the project was only at the AiP stage at present and the cash position going forward was, as yet, uncertain.

**Health & Safety**

NB reported that MW had taken over most of the health and safety in the College, working with Lynn Smith, who had previously held that responsibility. There would be a meeting of the Health & Safety Executive Committee the following week.

**Student Association**

In the absence of both Students, NB reported that the Association had accomplished some good work over the last few months. Despite it being politically difficult, they had found a way to raise money for Gaza. JC added that the members of the Student Association had been involved in discussions with LSC's Area Director when he visited the College to observe Science and Maths provision. The students were outstanding and able to answer any and all of the challenging questions asked of them.

9. **Any other business****Freedom of Information Publication Scheme 2009**

JH led this item referring to papers circulated prior to the meeting. The following points were noted:

- a paper on the Freedom of Information Act, introduced in 2005, had previously been presented to the Board by Pam McIlroy, who was responsible for all FoI enquiries within the College;
- as a public body, the College was required to have a Publication Scheme and this had been revised recently. The document issued to all Governors, which required their approval, was an updated version of that Scheme;
- the Scheme remained a working document and would be subject to minor amendments or additions as necessary. It was pointed out that since its issue there had been two additions under Class 3 on page 3 – “*Student course review Policy*” and “*Classroom observation Policy*”.

**Data Protection**

JH drew attention to the following:

- individualised data sheets had been sent to all members of the Board prior to the meeting, which showed the personal information held, how it was stored and used and who had access to it;
- whilst the majority of documents relating to the College and its published policies could be requested by any member of the public, personal data held by an institution was not freely available and was covered by the Data Protection Act;
- Governors were asked to examine the data held by the College, make any necessary amendments and signify their acceptance to its storage, use and accessibility as outlined;
- completed forms were to be returned to the Clerk as soon as possible.

ES remarked the issue of Freedom of Information had been handled by the College in a way that had not been encountered in any other organisation. The fact that a FoI Officer had been identified and a Policy document produced was both unprecedented and highly commendable.

JH added that a model Publication Scheme had been in place for some time and several requests for information had already been made and responded to.

**RESOLVED**

***that*** the Board accepted the revised Publication Scheme for 2009.

10. **Remuneration Committee**

The record of discussion under this item, deemed to be confidential, would be held separately and excluded from the published Minutes.

11. **Date of next meeting**

The next scheduled meeting of the Board was Wednesday, 29 April, 2009 at 4.30 p.m. in Meeting Room 1.

The meeting closed at 5.45 p.m.