

**CHELMSFORD COLLEGE
QUALITY AND LEARNERS COMMITTEE
12 May 2020 – 2.10 pm**

PRESENT: Sarah Noble (Chair)
Susan Hughes
Christian Norman
Elaine Oddie
Andy Sparks (Principal)
Barbara Vohmann

IN ATTENDANCE:

Caroline Williams (Deputy Principal)
Debs Hurst (Vice Principal, Finance & Corporate Services)
Rob Millea FCA (Clerk to the Corporation)
Joanne Harrington (Assistant Clerk)

The Principal and other Members of the College Management Team, plus the Clerk, were present in the Dovedale Fountain Lodge Room FO.4 and the other attendees including the Assistant Clerk, accessed the Meeting by internet. This was necessary due to the COVID 19 situation and social distancing requirements imposed by Government.

662. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for Absence were received from Seena Shah and Thomas Pipe (Student Governor).

663. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS AND CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS

Barbara Vohmann declared her interest as a staff member at Anglia Ruskin University. The Clerk declared his interest as Company Secretary of Essex Shared Services Limited.

Elaine Oddie and Andy Sparks declared their interests as Directors of Essex Shared Services Limited. Andy Sparks also declared his interest as acting Chair and Director of ACER Limited (dormant).

Debs Hurst informed the Committee that she continues in her role as a Member Representative on the Essex LGPS Advisory Board.

No other declarations made.

No confidential items were notified.

664. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of Urgent Business.

665. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 25 FEBRUARY 2020

The Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 25 February 2020 were **APPROVED** by the Committee, subject to two minor typographical amendments, and will be physically signed by the Chair in due course.

ACTION: CLERK

666. MATTERS ARISING

The Clerk provided a summary of Action Points from the last Meeting and current status.

The review of course profiles and curriculum offer are in progress and will reflect new means of working due to the COVID 19 virus issue.

The Deputy Principal made the point that the future curriculum is largely dependent on **how** it is to be delivered as well as **what** is to be delivered.

She also explained that the planning process is continuing as per the College's normal practice. Timetabling is going to be a major issue and it will have to reflect guidance from Government through the DfE regarding social distancing and movement of staff and learners around the campuses. This guidance is still awaited.

The College is in dialogue with other local Colleges as to local practice being followed.

Because of the uncertain future situation and the experience once the new academic year has begun, it is more than likely that revisions to timetabling and other aspects of delivery to learners will need to be reviewed on a regular basis – at least every four weeks.

The appointment of Governor Champions is held over for the time being.

Assessment for this year is covered in Minute **668** on examinations and assessment for this year, which have been considerably affected by the virus issue.

The Committee noted that Janet Maynard has resigned as a staff governor (academic) of the College (20 April 2020) and from this Committee. A casual vacancy therefore exists and it is hoped that a replacement will be

appointed by the Board in September in order to join this Committee for its next scheduled Meeting in November 2020.

667. ON-LINE LEARNING UPDATE

The Deputy Principal presented a Report covering the following aspects of the effects of the virus on College life:

- Response to the need to close the College campuses due to COVID 19 (which occurred on 20 March 2020)
- Provision for vulnerable learners
- Progress of learners accessing on-line learning
- Keeping learners safe

In general terms, the College has had to introduce a new approach to teaching, learning and assessment within a very short time scale.

Safeguarding of learners whilst studying remotely has been a paramount consideration. The College has also reflected best practice across Colleges in the East of England through continuing discussion channels with other professionals in the sector.

The Committee was also provided with newsletters on 'staying safe' for learners and, separately, for staff and a copy of the COVID 19 policy supplement to the College's main Safeguarding Policy.

The Report contained considerable detail as to the actions and measures taken by the College to respond to the four bullet points noted above.

Some key points of these actions included:

- Staff checking quality of their personal IT equipment
- Ensuring safe use of personal IT equipment in on-line learning
- Set of expectations published for academic staff when teaching and learning remotely
- Ensuring staff and learners have access to suitable IT hardware
- Microsoft Teams used by all College staff and this is being upgraded in order to see more people on screen – positive feedback
- Considering effects of new ways of teaching and learning for the next academic year, given continuing social distancing
- Safeguarding protocols for vulnerable learners not engaging
- Learners with EHC plans being routinely contacted
- Meeting DfE guidelines and advice, especially re vulnerable learners
- Opening the College daily to meet the needs of all vulnerable learners and children of key works plus those learners who feel they would benefit from attending College

- Safe distancing in place, thorough cleaning, food availability and other support offered
- Addressing real issues for learners studying skills-based qualifications which require skills competence as well as knowledge
- Helping Apprentices to make rapid progress with their 'off the job' learning, since large number of them have been furloughed by their employers

There has been a very positive response from learners with the on-line learning model and it is the College's view that more of this will be used in the future, no matter what the acceptable delivery model from Government appears to be.

Governor questions

Susan Hughes asked if there have been any issues with luncheon vouchers – the Deputy Principal said they have worked fine as the College is not using the vouchers schools provide. Standard LVs are being used and these can be redeemed in more outlets and are not restricted in any way.

Sarah Noble asked about the volume of vulnerable learners and learners who are inactive and whether this is a problem area – the Deputy Principal said this is being monitored regularly (weekly) and learners are being contacted through email and telephone. Very few of these learners are attending College.

Generally, the Deputy Principal said that Curriculum Directors have started the journey of more on-line learning and this will not reverse. The feedback from learners, which is being closely monitored, has been very positive and staff have done well in engaging with so many learners.

Christian Norman commented that, through his experience, he felt the College's approach was excellent and congratulated the College on its successful efforts to engage with these vulnerable learners.

Sarah Noble asked if there has been any reduction in engagement of learners since lockdown began and the Deputy Principal said there was some reduction this week, especially within the skills curriculum areas which are more problematic as well as the work commitments of learners working in supermarkets. This experience is not uncommon in other Colleges locally.

The Principal said that across the FE sector some curriculum areas have started to decline and this could well continue. Colleges are awaiting announcements from Government on vocational skills where the practical side of the qualification is suffering.

Barbara Vohmann asked how different ongoing engagement is from the normal and the Principal said that it is clearly lower but seems to be around 65 or 70 percent, compared to less than 50% in schools. It is the case that some learners are at the end of their programme which accounts for some of the fall. In addition, there are no public examinations being set for which learners would normally be preparing.

Barbara Vohmann asked if staff are getting tired. The Deputy Principal agreed as the on-line model requires a lot of screen time and it is being closely monitored by managers, but it is difficult, especially when staff's physical locations at home are not always ideal for doing the job.

Barbara Vohmann asked if the College staff will have to work through the summer. The Deputy Principal was not yet sure on this as the College is waiting for guidance from Government especially regarding delivery of skills-based qualifications and assessing them. The AoC has reported that Ofqual are working to ensure delays in finalising qualifications will be minimal.

The Committee was very complimentary as to communications with staff, learners and governors through StaySafe publications and the Principal's weekly all staff briefings, both as to their content and the tone.

The Deputy Principal reported that student support staff have been very proactive with learners as a lot of learners did not have access to laptops at home and the learners have been very pleased with the College's initiative to provide laptops to all learners who require them.

The VP, FCS reported that there are only about 2/3 children in Nursery each day but is preparing to open more widely on 1 June.

In response to a question from Susan Hughes, the Deputy Principal responded that progressing learners may have some skills gaps which will have to be revisited in the new year but not over the summer. Issues for the summer are more likely for new learners, many of whom will not have engaged with education for five months by the time they start College in September. It will be difficult to assess the level of their prior attainment in order to place them on a suitable course.

The Deputy Principal was **THANKED** for her comprehensive Report. The updated position will be shared with the Board at their next Meeting on 2 July 2020, when, hopefully, the position regarding delivery to learners for 2020/21 will have become clearer.

668. EXAMINATIONS & ASSESSMENT

The Deputy Principal **PRESENTED** a Report on the considerable upheaval which the virus has caused to the management of assessment of learners across both GCSE and vocational and technical qualifications.

The Report explained the approach being rolled out nationally to respond to the closure of schools and colleges across the UK and noted that consultations are underway for each qualification type, the results of which will not be known until the end of this month.

Apprenticeships - Unfortunately, there are currently no proposals for the management of 'off the job', 'on the job' assessments or End Point Assessments (EPA) for apprentices.

General qualifications - GCSE grades will be calculated based on the assessment evidence produced up to the 20th March. College is required to calculate the grade that the learner would have been expected to achieve had they sat the examinations in the summer series. The College has begun the arduous process of calculating grades and placing hundreds of GCSE learners into rank order within each grade boundary and the paper explained how the College is dealing with this at the practical level.

The College practice mirrors that being used by Colleges in the East of England.

Vocational and technical qualifications - the situation with regard to vocational and technical qualifications is more complex. There are three methods of assessment currently being considered, namely: calculated grade, the same as general qualifications, adapted assessments and delayed assessment. The delayed and adapted assessments will provide the many learners progressing into specific fields that require them to have proven occupational or professional competence to be assessed differently or at a later date in order to achieve their licence to practice.

Progression into further or higher education is more straightforward and less affected, with teacher assessment being effective.

A single approach is not appropriate. Therefore, we await clarification once the consultation has concluded and the recommendations that flow from it are articulated.

As noted above, there are no formal proposals to address the regulation and management of qualifications for apprentices yet. Although the College can provide 'off the job' teaching on-line, these apprentices

additionally need 'on the job' training, which is not available at present. In many cases apprentices have been furloughed by their employers.

Governor Questions

Sarah Noble asked about the timetable for reporting of results. It is the case that it will be the first couple of weeks of June for GCSE and the ranking of learners by Colleges is very difficult especially when there is limited evidence available.

The whole Committee observed that, in the future, there could be a stigma over the class of 2020 as employers and others may not entirely trust the qualifications awarded. However, the education system is responding as best it can by grading qualifications, but it is well recognised that it is difficult. There is a lot of cross-checking and sampling being undertaken in order to validate awards.

Staff have a considerable challenge to rank learners for awards and the Deputy Principal said that the College is expecting problems with learners expressing unhappiness with their grades.

In response to Barbara Vohmann, the Deputy Principal said that the College is using a thorough sampling model to validate results and the two main areas are the prior attainment of learners and the previous achievement profile of the College for each subject and qualification type.

Looking to new learners, the College will interview them face to face in order to ensure their grades reflect their current level of attainment.

The Committee **NOTED** the Report.

669. LEARNER RECRUITMENT 2020/21

The Committee **RECEIVED** a Report from the Deputy Principal outlining the challenges presented by the lockdown in relation to handling learner applications for next academic year, including both new applicants and progressing learners.

A modified system has been developed based on an on-line approach to open events, careers guidance for prospective and progressing learners.

Accordingly, the College offers applications via the website, telephone conversations with curriculum team members and an extensive marketing campaign. Particular emphasis is being given to High Needs learners, focusing on their special needs and requirements.

The last set of data published on 22 April shows that overall applications for next year are 35 lower than this year with new applications higher and progressing learners lower. On investigation, it seems that this is because progression application forms are taking longer to be processed and approved.

Governor questions

Christian Norman enquired if the enrolment process might take longer. The Deputy Principal said it is a challenge but, as noted in the previous minute, the College is considering some face to face interviews as well as online enrolment, but it is a challenge.

Elaine Oddie asked about the expected number of learners next year. The Principal was hoping for broadly the same numbers as for 2019/20 but social distancing may mean the College cannot handle them all in the buildings as this will be a real challenge as to how the College can teach them.

Christian Norman observed that the possible increase in unemployment of young people due to the virus effects on the wider economy may mean higher demand for College courses but difficulty in accommodating those learners who wish to study as they cannot get employment.

The Principal said that the current numbers are looking in line with what the College would expect, and it is possible that the College could have a competitive edge if on-line learning model continues to work well as it does at Chelmsford College so far.

The College appears to have anecdotally acquired a good reputation for delivery during this difficult time and the Committee was delighted with the teamwork which has been a key feature of the staff involved in delivery.

The Committee **ASKED** that their thanks be conveyed to all staff.

Otherwise, the Committee **RECEIVED** the Report.

670. SUB-CONTRACTING ARRANGEMENTS 2019-20

The Committee **RECEIVED** a Report from Mark Emerson (Director of Information Services)

Our full AEB budget will be paid by the ESFA even if volumes not delivered.

The contract with Qube has gone well following the Board **APPROVAL** (on 7 February 2020) regarding a further £100K of subcontracting with theme (to a total of £200K for the 2019/20 year). Quality assurance processes relating to the work have been very successful. They will be paid in full for their contract even though it will not be delivered due to the lockdown because the ESFA is funding all of this income line.

The contract price relating to Aspire is being negotiated down from the original contract which was for lead generation, not direct sub-contracting. The intention is to agree a figure with them as to what the College would have paid related to what would have been delivered, in order to save our costs.

There are no other sub-contracting arrangements for 2019/20.

The Report was **NOTED**.

671. COMMITTEE MATTERS

Governor Visits (verbal)

The Clerk **REPORTED** that there had been no visits since those reported at the last Committee Meeting on 25 February 2020, due to the lockdown of the College in late March.

It is difficult to know when these visits can resume.

Meeting Dates and Schedule of Business 2020/21

The Clerk presented a Schedule of Business for next academic year for the Committee and this was **APPROVED** with the proviso that it may need amending once the new means of working for Colleges is finalised in line with Government advice.

672. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

In response to Susan Hughes, the Principal said that consideration of the College's strategic future is on hold given the current turbulent situation. All governors have been sent a copy of the FE Commissioner's Report in the meantime. It will be on the Agenda for the September Board Meeting and possibly a session at the October Development day.

ACTION: CLERK

The Principal said that it is the intention to honour the scheduled Governors' Meetings for the rest of this academic year (Budget Working Party and Audit on 23 June and Board on 2 July) either physically or

virtually and consultations will be undertaken with the Chair of the Corporation and the Chair of the Audit Committee in this regard.

The Chair of the Corporation observed that virtual Meetings work well up to a point but were not ideal when the subject matter requires considerable discussion and direct interaction of Members. Therefore, if a physical Meeting is possible, it will be arranged. The Committee agreed that maintenance of strong governance through these turbulent times is very important.

ACTION: CLERK

673. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 3 November 2020 at 2 pm

It was **AGREED** that a verbal update would be provided to the Committee in late summer prior to the Board Meeting in September.

ACTION: CLERK

There being no further business, the Meeting terminated at 3.35 pm.

Signed..... Date.....