



Special FE Corporation Minutes

Meeting held on Thursday 28th May 2020 at 5.30pm
via Zoom

Governors: Sam Beel (Staff Governor and Course Leader IT and Media), Stuart Blackett, Subhash Chaudhary, Phil Cook (Chief Executive and Group Principal), Louise Davies, Martin Gray, Russ McCallion, Rob Mitchell, Richard Poundford, James Ruddock (Staff Governor and Group Student Recruitment Manager), Dot Smith, Aman Toor (Student Governor), Anne Vickers, Mark White (Chair), Norma Wilburn and Gary Wright.

Officials: Phil Hastie (Group Executive Director Planning and Infrastructure), Kay Taylor (Group Director of HR), Sarah Thompson (Clerk to the Corporation) and Sam Young (Governance Support Officer).

Apologies: Ethan Harper and Kirk Siderman-Wolter

The Chair started the meeting at 5.30 pm and welcomed Martin Gray and Anne Vickers to their first meeting of the Etc. FE Corporation.

20/36 Agenda Item 1 – Governor Workshop Notes

Governors **received** the notes from a Governors' Workshop held on 23rd April 2020.

20/37 Agenda Item 2 – Resumption of Face to Face Teaching

The Chief Executive outlined the context and principles on which Etc. had approached the plans for resumption of face to face teaching; the paper from the Group Executive Director Planning and Infrastructure laid out the execution of those principles. Department for Education (DfE) guidance had now confirmed the resumption of some face to face teaching in Further Education (FE) colleges from Monday 15th June. The Etc. guidelines developed with senior managers set a framework for the group but allowed for differentiation across sites and at departmental level rather than a 'command and control' model.

The Group Executive Director Planning and Infrastructure added that the DfE guidance continued to change regularly with the main focus on school settings; there had also been inconsistencies in, for example, reopening dates. The Association of Colleges' (AoC's) working group on the re-opening of colleges, of which he was a member, had been an invaluable network. Since March, all sites, apart from Skills Academy, had been maintained as if operating normally. He outlined that on-site delivery for learners would be prioritised to those requiring intervention and support plus NETA commercial activity

initially focused on 'licence to practice' courses. An updated version of the Strategic Risk Register in relation to COVID-19 would be considered at the Audit Committee meeting on 11th June.

The Chair highlighted that DfE guidance issued on 14th May had set out 'key considerations' for colleges and, in particular, that the governing body was responsible for approving the plan for increased numbers of learners attending and ensuring that an associated risk plan was in place.

In terms of staff health and wellbeing, the Group Director of HR confirmed that this was a key focus of the Great Place to Work (GPTW) strategy and that working from home had been a different experience for each individual member of staff. There had been positive feedback from the recent short staff survey but, over the coming weeks, staff would need reassurance on what their working environment would look like as some returned to work on site. Staff continued to receive regular communications from the Chief Executive and Group Executive Director Planning and Infrastructure and regular HR communications had outlined health and wellbeing support for staff.

The Chair opened discussion to governors; key themes raised and responded to by the Chief Executive, Group Executive Director Planning and Infrastructure and Group Director of HR were:

- *What would the student experience be on return to face to face learning and, in particular, how would the needs of vulnerable learners and teenagers who can exhibit risky behaviours be addressed?* Expectations would be communicated to learners through Heads of Department, Programme Area Leads and lecturers and, in terms of vulnerable learner groups, it might not yet be appropriate for, for example, some High Needs learners to return whilst social distancing measures needed to be in place. Small groups of learners would be invited into sites at specific times, met by a designated member of staff at an agreed entrance and be supervised throughout. Student Services were considering suitable approaches for students to access their services on site that did not involve students coming to them.
- *Was there anything specific to note in terms of unions' reactions?* The Group Director of HR had been in regular communication with unions, through informal meetings and sending them updates on Etc.'s plans. Engagement had been welcomed by the unions and no particular issues had been raised. The Chief Executive and Group Director of HR would both be attending a Joint Consultative and Negotiation Committee (JCNC) meeting the following week. At a national level, there had been union involvement in the AoC reopening working group.
- *Would there be additional pressure on teaching staff with the need to adopt blended learning and potentially catering for groups split between learning from home and face to face teaching?* Detailed conversations at departmental and course level would determine changing teaching practices into 2020-21 taking

account of the needs of individual learners. New Teaching and Training and IT strategies and updated Working from Home (WfH) guidelines would be considered by the Senior Management Team (SMT) on 9th June and then Corporation on 2nd July. The IT Strategy and WfH guidelines would also be considered at the Finance and Employment Committee meeting on 18th June and the Teaching and Training Strategy would be considered by Standards Improvement Committee members prior to Corporation. The three strategies were interlinked and therefore needed to be considered together.

- *Suggestions from a governor's own workplace experience:*
 - *ensure that compassionate leave is applied consistently across all sites;*
 - *carefully consider arrangements in reception areas and at turnstiles – the guidance would minimise the number of visitors and turnstiles would be kept open, Perspex screens in reception areas would be considered;*
 - *possible investment in non-touch taps, for example – changing tap fittings was not being considered, however, plans were in place for doors to be left open where possible and devices installed to facilitate opening doors without using hands, in order to reduce contact with surfaces.*
- *Was there any consideration of a Chief Executive's webinar including live Q&A?* A system was already in place for regular email communication from the Chief Executive to all Etc. staff and from college principals and the NETA MD to staff based at their sites; the Chief Executive agreed to discuss the possibility of a live webinar with the Group Director of Marketing.
- *Were there any thoughts on external communications, e.g. letting communities in the two local authority areas know the college's approach?* Current external communications were predominantly centred on course offers, with communication on courses and reopening centred on those students directly involved. The Chief Executive would discuss the external communications approach with the Group Director of Marketing.
- *What would be the view on staff member's general use of PPE, especially face masks, should they wish?* PPE would be issued for specific incidents as detailed in the guidance. There were no plans to issue masks generally though there would be no objection to any staff or students doing so.
- *Had there been any consideration of the safe use of door release buttons at Redcar & Cleveland College?* As many doors as possible would be propped open; the Group Executive Director Planning and Infrastructure would follow this specific issue up with the Group Head of Estates.
- *Could promotion of, for example, the 30 day mental health challenges on social media help to support students' mental health?* The governor agreed to provide details to be passed on to Student Services for circulation.
- *Transport for students – would liaison with transport providers be at group level rather than course level? Were there any plans for a bike loan scheme?* The

Group Head of Student Services was leading on transport arrangements for students including alternative arrangements to replace the discrete service between SRC and Bede. Consideration was being given to increasing the provision of bike racks and staff could already access the cycle to work assistance scheme. Any loan scheme for students would mean cleaning and storage issues as well as cost implications; providing access to IT for students would probably have a higher priority in terms of resources.

- *Risk Register – should possible GDPR and fraud concerns regarding contact tracing be added, for example, concerns from students regarding phonecalls from contact tracers and the risks of downloading contact tracing apps?* The Group Executive Director Planning and Infrastructure agreed to follow this up with the Group Student Recruitment Manager.
- *What service impact could there be if a large number of staff were told to self-isolate for 14 days by contact tracers?* Those staff able to work from home could continue to do so during self-isolation; the crucial staffing area would be estates and cleaning and staff absence could potentially lead to closure of sites.
- *How were the risks of face to face learning being balanced with the risks to some vulnerable learners of being at home full-time?* Support has always been in place for vulnerable learners including the ability to access college buildings as needed.
- *With the growing clinical evidence of the adverse impact of COVID-19 on Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups, do specific risks for staff and/or students need to be considered?* The ethnicity of those staff (74) currently shielding had been considered, with only one from a BAME background; the Group Director of HR would keep this under consideration moving forward.
- *Had the estates capacity been considered (e.g. 30% of normal building occupancy) in light of social distancing? With barriers open, how would numbers be monitored and security maintained?* In terms of site capacity, each room had been assessed for maximum occupancy given the need for 4m² per person, and the number of groups allowed on site determined according to estates and cleaning staff numbers. In terms of security, receptions would be manned at all times and individual members of staff would be responsible for supervision of their student groups during their time on site.
- *How much guidance had been given to staff on what to do if a student showed COVID-19 symptoms?* The Group Executive Director would discuss ways of reinforcing information to staff with the Group Director of Marketing.
- *What was the process in place for staff to identify any gaps in the guidance?* Regular meetings of the Reopening working group were providing mechanisms for information feeding up as well as dissemination to staff.
- *Had insurance liability cover been assured?* The Group Executive Director Finance had been dealing with insurance issues and the Group Executive Director Planning and Infrastructure would follow this up with her.

The Chief Executive concluded by thanking governors for their questions, enquiries and affirmations and added that the meeting had been incredibly useful. He confirmed that the delegated model of management already in place had enabled managers to feel confident in taking the right decisions for the needs of their staff and students.

Governors **noted** the report and **agreed** the plan for the resumption of face to face teaching.

20/38 Agenda Item 3 – Any Other Business

There were no items of other business.

20/39 Agenda Item 4 – Date and time of next meeting

Thursday 2 July 2020, 5.30 pm

20/40 Agenda Item 5 - Approval of Documents for Public Inspection

It was **agreed** that the agenda and supporting documents of the current meeting be made available for public inspection. Minutes would be made available following approval and consideration at the next meeting.

20/41 Agenda Item 6 - Key Themes

- Agreement of the plan for resumption of face to face teaching

(The meeting ended at 6.55 pm)

Approved at a remote meeting

Date: 2nd July 2020