



EASTON COLLEGE CORPORATION

Minutes of the Meeting held on Friday 4 December 2009

Present: Mr R Baines, Mrs F Baugh, Mrs V Bowyer, Mr J Burrage, Ms S Dinneen, Mrs C Fussey, Mr M Gamble (Chairman), Mr J Hunter, Mr D Lawrence (Principal), Mr I Mawson, Ms S Miller, Mrs J Moss, Mr M Pant, Mr D Ramsay, Mr N Wallace.

In Attendance: Mr C Bound (Vice Principal Curriculum), Mr T Cawkwell (Clerk), Mrs C Sadler (Vice Principal Finance and Resources) and Mr G Lambert.

1 Apologies for Absence and Welcome

Apologies for absence were received from Mr D Lacey, Mr M Livermore, Prof. J Turner and J Williams. The Chairman welcomed Sadie Miller to her first meeting in place of David Keywood who had had to stand down as a result of going onto a Train to Gain course.

2 Appointment of Chairman

It was proposed by Iain Mawson, seconded by Julia Moss and agreed to appoint Mike Gamble as chairman.

3 Declarations of interest

There were no interests to declare.

4 Minutes of the Meeting held on 16 October 2009

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 October 2009 were approved and signed as a true record by the Chairman.

5 Matters arising

a) **Thetford Academy (minute 8)** This proposal had now been submitted to the Secretary of State for Education to await his approval. The Principal reported that he had had a positive meeting with school staff in Thetford.

b) **Courses for Student Governors (minute 13)** The Clerk reported that he had only found an event for student governors in the FE sector in January in Birmingham. Since this was so difficult and expensive to reach from Norwich, it was agreed to look for an event in London, or to ask ACER to put one on. **Action: Clerk/Principal**

c) **Food hub** The Principal reported that not all the issues relating to this project had been resolved. He expected negotiations to be completed within the parameters set by the Corporation.

The Chairman commented that in his view the last meeting of the Corporation had been the best he had attended for its concentration on strategic matters with contributions being made by all Governors.

6 Matters arising from previous minutes

- a) **Amendment to minute 10 of meeting held on 24 July 2009** It was noted that £3.6 million had been drawn down as a long-term loan rather than £6.2 million as reported at the 24 July meeting of the Corporation. It was agreed to approve this change to the minutes.
- b) **Audit Risk Assessment and Strategic Internal Audit Plan for 2009/10 to 2011/12** It was agreed to receive and approve these documents which had been recommended to the Corporation for approval at the meeting of the Audit Committee on 12 June 2009.

- 7 **Chairman's Report** Mike Gamble said that his attendance at the Landex conference in November had been a useful opportunity to meet other chairmen and principals, and that overall the conference had been of a high quality.

He referred also to the letter from Norfolk County Council outlining the arrangements they were making for the transfer of responsibility for 16 to 19 education and training from the LSC to the County Council. The Principal said that the County Council was relatively well-prepared for these new arrangements and since the funding formula will operate nationally, there should not be a risk of money being lost to the College. His concern at this stage was to make sure that they paid over the funding on the correct day of each month. Sandra Dinneen reported that at a regional level, Norfolk appeared to be relatively stronger on the FE/County Council relationship than in other counties.

8 Principal's Report

Master planning A Parish Meeting would be held with Easton residents shortly in order to share proposals on future housing development in the village. The Food Hub proposal was creating concern in the parish, and the Principal was anxious to get matters discussed openly. A more public profile was being given to the campaign by residents of Marlingford against the proposals by Marlingford Estate to increase mineral extraction. Sandra Dinneen said that the South Norfolk Council would be responding to residents' concerns on Monday week, the details of which will be on the SNC website.

Joint School of Agriculture The Principal had met with John Turner, but progress was slow at this stage. A joint project board between the College and the University was needed, and the project needed to be led by someone with the right credibility. A paper has gone to the Morley Foundation and others to raise money to second an appropriate academic from the University or another suitable partner. The project fitted well with EEDA's 2022 vision for Food and Farming which focussed on the importance of research and development in the region, and of improving academic skills.

University and College Union (UCU) pay dispute The UCU were in dispute with those colleges (the majority) who did not apply the UCU pay claim (that was rejected by AOC earlier in the year). College staff were likely to be balloted before Christmas. The Principal expected to apply his normal approach to any action that resulted: provided students received the teaching that the individuals were contracted to deliver, then no pay would be deducted.

9 Otley College

A confidential update was given on the negotiations with Otley College.

10 College Strategic Plan

In order to avoid a lengthy meeting such as had occurred in July, the Principal said that in future the plan would be dealt with at meetings of the Corporation in stages over the year. Document D set out the arrangements for the review. The Curriculum Strategy would be considered as a whole rather than as a series of separate strategies. Such an arrangement would spread strategic discussion over the year.

He then went on to explain that the HR Strategy 2009-12 would normally go to the Personnel Committee before going to the Corporation, but the meetings of the committee were out of sequence which was why it was coming direct to the Corporation. He explained the strategic goals in this area and said that good practice in HR would help to set a standard across the College. Sandra Dinneen commented that the strategy was clear and well laid out, and she liked the way it started with the outcomes. It was proposed by David Ramsay, seconded by Sandra Dinneen, and agreed to approve the strategy.

The Principal went on to explain the Single Equality Scheme and Action Plan which had come via the Equality and Diversity Group. The document now met OFSTED requirements and he went through the key areas of the document. It was proposed by Neil Wallace, seconded by David Ramsay, and agreed to approve the document.

On the Property Strategy, this will be dealt with later in the academic year, and it would require a substantial review as the College was just in the final stages of completing the current strategy through the capital programme.

11 Curriculum and Standards Committee: minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2009

Fran Baugh reported on the meeting, and said that the minutes were largely self-explanatory. On the Institutional Review carried out by UEA, a full report would be made to the March Corporation following the meeting of the committee in February. The UEA Institutional Review panel had met with students from the College who were enthusiastic about the institution, and the staff had been very positive about the current programmes. However there were concerns about the HE management structure, and she noted the difficulty of developing an HE ethos in an FE College. It was noted that the Head of Student Services now had a wider remit, and that the College had specific areas to refine and approve. It was agreed to receive the minutes.

12 College Self-Assessment Report

In introducing this item, Fran Baugh said there had been a lot of in-depth questioning in the C & S Committee on the assessment, and the conclusion reached that the report had been too cautious as a result of which amendments had been made. It was noted that the College had not fared so well in both the national student survey and the internal Student Perception of College, so it was not grade 1 yet. Mr Bound added that the SAR covered the whole college, and went through the headline success rates. As part of the new Ofsted Framework current limiting factors were i) safeguarding and ii) equality and diversity. So far very few inspections had taken place under the new framework, so colleges were uncertain as to how to deal with these areas. On the Landex benchmarks, Easton performs very well and the main concerns were about the student voice. The last Students' Perception of College

survey had not been very good but was now a year out of date and significant progress had been made since then.

Mr Bound made the following points:

- Success rates for the 16 to 18 group were outstanding, but those for 19 plus had dropped (but only concerned 29 students). However because of the funding arrangements, there were problems with retaining students of this age.
- It was planned to improve the recording of achievements for those students taking training courses at the college. The data tables on page 5 showed for the most part increases on the benchmarks. There were some grade twos and threes, but there were also grade ones, and the College would be concentrating on raising the grade two areas to grade one. The Chairman noted that sport and public services at grade three was a key area for the college to consider. Mr Bound pointed out that the rapid turnover in staff in these subjects had been a source of difficulty, but he was pleased with the retention rates so far this year on these courses. It was noted that the provision for animal and equine study had improved markedly.
- The equality and diversity data (page 10) dealt with students who receive learning support, and with those from ethnic minorities. No differences were currently discernible between the groups, and more work was to be done in this area.
- The position on safeguarding was summarised on page 12. On internet security, the 14 to 16 group on the site had access to the internet only through the College system which could be filtered to restrict access to essential web sites.
- It was reported that students were using the Learner Voice e-mail, but Caroline Fussey hoped that more would do so. She said that the queries she had received so far had demonstrated the value of having this email address. Sadie Miller said that most students felt they were not told when things were happening, so confusion was bound to result. Mrs Fussey said that the Learner Voice channel of communication would be fully explained at the student conference being held on 13 January. The Chairman looked forward to hearing more about this event at the next meeting.
- On safeguarding, managers had visited other colleges, and it was true to say that they were still trying to get a feel as to how to handle his area. The Principal referred to the risk of a poor inspection grade deriving from overoptimistic self-assessment by the College.
- All data was now online, and tutors were encouraged to get a full understanding of it.
- The flowchart which was tabled showed how rigorous the process of self-assessment had now become.

It was proposed by Veronica Bowyer, seconded by Iain Mawson, and agreed by all to approve the document. The Chairman offered congratulations to Mr Bound and the staff for their work in preparing the self-assessment.

13 Report of Vice Principal Finance and Resources

On the *treasury management* position, Mr Sadler said that £3 million of short-term loan had now been drawn down in addition to the £3.6 million long-term loan, plus a £600,000 short-term interest-free loan from the Lawn Tennis Association. £1 million of the Revolving Credit Facility had been cancelled, leading to lower non-utilisation costs, while at the same time ensuring there was enough in reserves to cover short-term borrowing.

She referred to other matters in the report. Veronica Bowyer asked why Christopher Brown was listed twice in the *table of staff leavers*, but it was explained that these were two different people with the same name. This led to a discussion on the difficulty of recruiting

for agriculture and agricultural engineering. One job had been advertised four times, and the Principal said that this was a big national problem, for which currently the government had no strategy. The whole matter was very relevant to the proposals for a Joint School of Agriculture. Robin Baines asked about training newly recruited lecturers in-house. Although he could see the necessity, Mr Bound said that this would be difficult, since teaching agriculture was very different from working in the industry. 24 hours of contact time with students a week was demanding, and posed a real challenge to newcomers to create dynamic lessons. Mr Baines asked whether retired or semi-retired farmers could be used in this area. It was recognized that this was a possibility, as well as an internship approach, as was being explored at Reese Heath. The Principal endorsed the need to find a new way of looking at the problem.

James Hunter referred to the discussions at the strategic day held in March about international horizons for the College, whether through exchange visits or seconding arrangements. Mr Bound referred to the three staff attending from a lycée in Toulouse, an initiative which could be developed. Caroline Fussey said that the College was a victim of its own success on recruitment. The engineering intake had risen dramatically, and she wondered whether those completing this course could be trained then to become teachers in this subject. Sadie Miller added that sport students were taught to be teachers in sport, so this principle could be extended to other areas. The Principal said that quite a number of staff were self-trained, which showed that the College could achieve things in this area.

Capital Project Monitoring Mrs Sadler referred to appendix A of the document which showed progress on actual costs against budget for the capital project. At present there were no negative variances.

14 Financial Management and Control Evaluation

The LSC had extended the deadline for receiving the FMCE to after the meeting of the Corporation. The document had already been considered by the Audit Committee. It was agreed to approve and adopt the Financial Management and Control Evaluation.

15 Audit Committee

- a) **Minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2009** Neil Wallace referred to various items in the minutes.
- b) **Internal audit report for the year** He explained that the IA report had concluded that the management of the College was adequate and effective, and that there was nothing to report to the committee. It was agreed to approve the report.
- c) **Annual report on the work of the Audit Committee 2008/9** He said that the annual report was self-explanatory and showed no major concerns. It was agreed to approve the report and to authorize the chairman of the Audit Committee to sign it on the half of the Corporation.
- d) **Management Letter on the audit of the financial statements for the year ended 31 July 2009** It was noted that the Audit Committee had approved this and passed it on to the Finance and Enterprises Committee.
- e) **Health and Safety Report for 2008/9** Neil Wallace noted that the College was a comparatively high-risk teaching institution, because of the agriculture and equine courses,

but the committee felt that there were strong and well-monitored processes to cover health and safety. It was agreed to approve the report.

It was agreed to receive the minutes.

16 Finance and Enterprises Committee

- a) **Minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2009** Iain Mawson drew Governors' attention to various items in the minutes, making particular reference to the revision of the structure of the subsidiary companies which had taken place alongside all the other major developments in the College.
- b) **Management Letter on the audit of the financial statements for the year ended 31 July 2009** This had come to the Committee from the Audit Committee, and Mr Lambert explained various points in the Letter. He said that the College was now borrowing for the first time in its history, but this was all under control. He referred to the pension deficit, which was common across the public sector, as a result of people living longer and the volatility in the valuation of pension assets. The two low-priority observations listed on page 13 had since been dealt with by amending the financial regulations. In conclusion, there were no audit differences to report. Mrs Sadler said this was a credit to the attention to detail by the Director of Finance, and Governors congratulated him on his work. It was agreed to approve the Management Letter.
- c) **Members' report and financial statements for the year ended 31 July 2009** In considering the report for the year, the Chairman referred to the fact that the headline figure was the surplus despite everything going on at the College, and this was a credit to all the Senior Management Team. Veronica Bowyer referred to the list of Governors on committees on page 11. Mr Lambert explained that the report covered two years, and that he would also check whether a line had been omitted on the bottom of page 11. It was proposed by Iain Mawson, seconded by David Ramsay, and agreed to approve the report and financial statements for the year ended 31 July 2009. **Action: Director of Finance**
- d) **Management representation letter** It was proposed by Sandra Dinneen, seconded by James Hunter and agreed to approve the Management representation letter and to give authority to the Chairman of the Corporation to sign it.
- e) **Consolidated management accounts for the three months ending 31 October 2009**
- Mr Lambert said that the mid-year forecast would be prepared for the next meeting of the Corporation. It was agreed to approve the management accounts for the period to 31 October 2009.
- f) **Revised memorandum of understanding between ECL Ltd and the College** Apart from an amendment to one sentence, the memorandum was unchanged from last year. In answer to a question, Mr Lambert confirmed that there were no VAT problems with the company. It was agreed to approve the memorandum.

It was agreed to receive the minutes, and in conclusion, the chairman of the Committee commended the finance department for their work.

17 Governance Matters

- a) **Report on meeting of Search and Governance Committee held on 4 December 2009**
The Chairman gave a verbal report on the meeting of the Search and Governance Committee held in the morning. It was noted that a number of Governors would be standing down in 2011, and Veronica Bowyer's resignation was noted with regret. The Chairman thanked her for all she had contributed to the work of the Corporation. A number of names had been considered for her replacement, and it was hoped that a suitable person could attend the March Corporation as an observer. David Ramsay was thanked for agreeing to take on the chairmanship of the Personnel Committee. In answer to a question, it was explained that David Bale was the College's child protection officer, with Caroline Fussey as his deputy.

The Chairman then explained that the Clerk was to retire on 31 March 2010 for personal reasons. Paston College were also looking for a new clerk, and so the idea of a joint appointment would be explored in January. The Principal would e-mail Governors following the discussion with Paston to explain what was being arranged. It was emphasised that the Clerk should be an independent appointment, and the Chairman commented that the College's governance was better for preserving this principle. At the same time the question of the position of clerk to the governing body of Otley needed to be considered as well.

With regard to staff governors, it was reported that John Burrage had been reappointed for a second term, following an election. He commented that the College now had 140 academic staff against 35 some years ago, and it was appreciated that the challenge was now to report back the work of the Corporation to all staff.

- b) **Membership of Corporation committees 2008/9** It was agreed to amend the list to remove Julia Moss from membership of the C & S Committee, which she now could not manage because of other commitments, and to confirm membership of the committees. The Chairman reminded members to indicate if they had any particular committee that they wished to serve on.
- c) **Training Plan 2010** The Chairman said that it was hoped to arrange a visit to Moulton College, since this would be particularly instructive. Consideration was also given to Governors undertaking lesson observation. This would be best done in March. The Principal said that he would consider the question of specific training on safeguarding, and would bring forward a recommendation for the next meeting. He also explained that Governor training on the new intranet would be valuable. **Action: Principal**

Julia Moss said how much she had appreciated the strategic session held in March, and wondered whether a reduced version, giving a whole Saturday to the College's business might be valuable. Iain Mawson said that he would value a presentation by heads of department to talk for 20 minutes or so on issues relating to their area. Both ideas were noted.

- d) **Appointment of two Governors to the Equality & Diversity Group** Neil Wallace had agreed to carry on and it was agreed to ask Martyn Livermore to be the second governor in view of his expertise on child protection. **Action: Clerk**

18 Risk Management

Mr Lambert reported that routine monitoring and control of risk management meant that all the risks were reviewed by the SMT each term. In addition to this, emerging issues were dealt with as they arose. As a result of this, contingency plans had been put in place to

cover significant absence as a result of swine flu. It was proposed by David Ramsay, seconded by Veronica Bowyer and agreed to adopt the Risk Management Report for 2008/9.

19 Dates of Meetings in 2010/11

The dates of meetings as outlined in Document O were approved, with the addition of a meeting of the Search and Governance Committee on Friday 26 February at 10.15 am.

20 Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Corporation would take place on 12 March 2010 with a timetable as follows:

- 9 to 11 am: lesson observation
- 11 to 1.30: meeting of Corporation
- 1.30: lunch

The Principal said that there was another building which would require an official opening, which he hoped to link to the launch of the School of Agriculture.

21 Any other business

- a) *Landex conference* James Hunter asked whether the College could host the conference. The Principal said that he had offered to do this, but there was a perception that Norwich was too far to travel.
- b) *Opening of equine centre* Members commented on the excellence of this event and how well it had been organised.
- c) *Attachment of Governors to particular faculties* Fran Baugh asked that this idea be revived, and it was agreed to consider how to do so on 12 March.
- d) *Training of teachers* Julia Moss said that Break had hosted a recent conference focusing on the shortage of social workers in child care. She wondered whether training in social pedagogy could be linked to the idea of training of teachers in agriculture. This would be a good way of involving EEDA in the work of the College.
- e) *Current workload* The Principal thanked colleagues for the work they had put in this term in ensuring that both the routine work of the College and the current projects were completed to a high standard.

22 Confidential Items of Business

It was agreed that discussions relating to Otley College were confidential.

In concluding the meeting, the Chairman thanked Governors for their attendance and wished them well for Christmas.