



EASTON COLLEGE CORPORATION

Minutes of the Meeting held on Friday 24 July 2009

Present: Mr R Baines, Mrs F Baugh, Mrs V Bowyer, Mr J Burrage, Mrs C Fussey, Mr M Gamble (Chairman), Mr J Hunter, Mr D Lawrence (Principal), Mr I Mawson, Mrs J Moss, Professor J Turner, Mr N Wallace.

In Attendance: Mr C Bound (Vice Principal Curriculum), Mrs C Sadler (Vice Principal Finance and Resources), Mr T Cawkwell (Clerk), Mr G Lambert (Director of Finance), Mr C Nix (Assistant Principal Resources) and Mr D Bale (Assistant Principal HE & Student Services).

1 Welcome and Apologies for Absence

The Chairman welcomed Governors to the meeting and thanked staff for their input to the training done in the morning on the new funding arrangements for the College, and on Ofsted inspections. Governors agreed that the tour of the site had been very encouraging.

Apologies for absence were received from Mr J Burford, Ms S Dinneen, Mr M Livermore, Mr B Miners, Mr M Pant, Mr D Ramsay.

2 Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 March 2009

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2009 were approved and signed as a true record by the Chairman.

3 Confidential minutes

a) It was agreed to retain the confidentiality on the minute regarding approaches to Otley College, and to review this in July 2010.

b) It was agreed to wait until the contracts were completed and final account signed off before lifting the confidentiality of minutes regarding the appointment of contractors (from 13 August 2008) and the negotiation on tenders (from 7 November 2008).

4 Declarations of Interest

No interests relevant to business on the agenda were declared.

5 Self Assessment Questionnaire

The Clerk reminded Members of the need to complete the SAQ circulated earlier and to return it to him.

6 **Governors' Council**

The Clerk drew the attention of Governors to circulars received regarding the newly formed Governors' Council.

7 **Matters Arising**

(a) **Minute 13 CRB checks for Governors**

The Clerk reported that these had all been carried out except for Martyn Livermore. It was hoped that this could be sorted out shortly. **Action: Clerk**

8 **Principal's Report**

The Principal made the following points:

i) The higher level of funding in the **2009/10 contract** was in no small part due to overachievement with regard to student numbers in the current year. The increase in adult numbers was unusual compared to most other colleges locally.

ii) The Principal summarised the joint proposal to develop a joint **School of Contemporary Agriculture** run in partnership with UEA. This was a particularly exciting and important development. A memorandum of understanding with UEA was being prepared. John Turner said that the University was equally enthusiastic, and would draw support from the research councils.

Robin Baines commented that this was not achievable by the College on its own, yet it was what the industry and the region needed. At the March awayday Howard Petch had talked about the opportunities and challenges opening up for agriculture and it was good that Norfolk was facing up to them. The Principal said that the effort needed to bring it off would be substantial and that this was not a short-term project.

Veronica Bowyer asked whether links with other countries could be built in. John Turner said that training of people able to assist the development of agriculture in poorer countries could be part of the School's work. Initial plans should be modest and build from there. The Principal referred to UEA's links with India and the fact that Easton did have some overseas students.

The Chairman asked about the timetable. John Turner explained that it was important to get the sub-partners (e.g. Rothamsted, John Innes Centre) signed up first and move on from there. Mr Gamble said that he would talk to Morley as well.

It was proposed by Robin Baines, seconded by James Hunter and agreed to support this proposal.

iii) Discussion took place regarding **Otley College** and it was agreed that this should be treated as a confidential minute.

iv) Regarding **developments in Thetford**. The proposal to develop the new "Forum" 14-19 centre in partnership with West Suffolk College, the two schools and Norfolk Children's Services was progressing with the three local authorities involved underwriting the costs of the initial planning work. The County Council cabinet has ranked the creation of two new centres in Thetford very highly. As governors had considered before, there was a

more fundamental need to reform education in Thetford, with the College continuing to play an active role in the necessary review and development of solutions. As previously discussed there would be a strong case for developing a more integrated system of education in Thetford and the first steps to achieving this could be through the transfer of the two existing high schools to 'academy' status and link them formally to the 14-19 provision under one management and a Thetford Educational Trust. The College is being asked to be a co-sponsor in an application to move the two schools to academy status in partnership with West Suffolk College, Norfolk County Council and Wymondham College. Wymondham College would be the lead sponsor. The question of including primary schools was being discussed, and it was desirable for all education in Thetford to be covered by the Trust arrangement in the longer term. This would be a long-term commitment for the College but the Principal felt it was important for us to play our part in dealing with an area with significant educational and social challenges and to improve our recruitment from the Thetford area as part of our Equality and Diversity commitment. The next steps would be to make a formal commitment to the DCSF and the timescale for this would need formal consideration of the proposed statement of intent at the Corporation meeting in October. If the proposal was accepted it was likely the new academies would be in place from the 2010/11 academic year. The College would have an ongoing role on the Trust Board.

Development work in Thetford had taken considerable management effort in the last twelve months, but recruitment from Thetford will have doubled if current enquiries turn into enrolments and there was a lot of goodwill towards the College. The Principal proposed that the College move forward with the formal expression of interest and this was agreed unanimously.

v) The Principal tabled the Key Performance Indicators agreed between him and the Chairman as part of his recent annual performance appraisal.

9 Report of Vice Principal Curriculum

Mr Bound made the following points:

- He was engaged in writing the self-assessment for the College.
- Retention for FE in 2008/9 was now 94%.
- The prize day in the Sports Hall (26 June) had gone well.
- Numbers for FE in 2009/10 were promising but HE was a concern: while 99 offers had been made, a majority of these would be UCAS applications so there would be strong competition from other HE institutions. The position would be known at the end of August.
- There was the possibility of an Ofsted inspection in the autumn.
- The Integrated Quality and Enhancement (IQER) of Higher Education provision in March 2010 would not involve Governors.

The Chairman noted that Mr Bound had now completed a full year at the College and he had had the pleasure of signing off his probationary period. He complimented him on the positive contribution he had made to the life and work of the College.

10 Report of Vice Principal Finance and Resources

Mrs Sadler made the following points:

- £6.2 million had been drawn down as a long-term loan and the money was being well used. The capital work was on target and within budget.

- The graph on staff sickness suggested that staff motivation was good. Mrs Fussey noted the high calibre of people being recruited for vacancies. The appointment of a professional HR manager had made a real difference to recruitment and personnel matters in general.
- The outstanding vacancies of 16 were largely on the teaching staff, and interviews were planned over the next fortnight to fill these.

11 College Strategic Plan

It was noted that the College was obliged to consider this each year. The Principal then went through the various components of the plan and extra documents were tabled.

- i) The statement of the **long-term vision** for the College (page 4) was endorsed.
- ii) The statement of **strategic goals** (pages 7 to 9) had been changed in so much as they had been reduced from nine to six. The Principal said it was important for the staff to understand and support these, and that the Corporation needed to approve them. Neil Wallace commented that, while he had no quarrel with the statement, he regretted that somehow the dynamic nature of the College's activity including involvement with the UEA, among other initiatives, was not transmitted through the words used.
- iii) On **mission and vision** (page 6), James Hunter felt that the phrase 'professional specialist College' did not capture where it sat in the hierarchy. He felt that the nature of the College's specialisms and of the industries it serves should be spelt out. Caroline Fussey said the document could be more explicit about the learner voice. Veronica Bowyer asked whether more could be said about the College's commitment to equality and diversity. She also added that the adjective 'proud' in the mission statement felt too bland and did not naturally convey the need for enthusiasm about the College. The Principal responded by saying that pride in the institution was an important measure of commitment for staff, students and community, but he would reflect on these points and if appropriate seek to reword these sections appropriately. He added that it might be valuable to say something about community involvement as well. **Action: Principal**
- iv) Reference was made to the need to engage **Student Governors** more. Mr Bale reported that at the last meeting of the Student Council, two students had volunteered to be Governors in the coming year, one male and one female. The Clerk said that he would be happy to give them some induction in September, and this was agreed. **Action: Clerk**
- v) **Marketing Strategy** Mr Bale said there was now a change of focus as the college recruited from a wider and deeper catchment. Growth was being seen across the whole county and from outside the county, and the College needed to ensure that what it offered was successfully delivered. Governors endorsed the strategy.
- vi) **ILT Strategy** It was noted that this was now a crucial part of the College operations, and it was agreed to approve this.
- vii) **Emergency Plan** Iain Mawson asked about the impact of swine flu. The Principal said that instructions had been given to staff, and the College accepted that there were going to be cases.
- viii) **Equality and Diversity Strategy** Mr Bale said that this was aimed at both staff and students. Sexual orientation and religion were to be added to the first bullet point, and

various amendments were being suggested by the staff. It was agreed to accept the strategy as a draft and Governors were encouraged to read it and email comments. It would be brought back to the Corporation at the October meeting, and would also go to the new Equality and Diversity Group. Veronica Bowyer expressed her concerns about longstanding staff falling behind in their understanding of this area.

ix) **Procurement Strategy** Mrs Sadler explained that this had been done before the credit crunch and sought to make efficiencies for the future. In answer to a question from John Turner, she said that a LSC pilot project had endorsed procurement procedures at the College, and the Internal Audit had also looked for value for money in this area. It was agreed to approve the strategy.

x) **Employer Engagement Strategy** An executive summary was tabled. Mr Bound went through various points in it. This area used to be confined to work-based learning, but its principles were now operating throughout the whole of the College. Very constructive work with a group of landbased employers had led to the development of a new apprenticeship scheme. In answer to a question from Mr Burrage he said that new software allowed the College to record job vacancies from employers as well as all training and education that individual employers were engaged in with the College. This should be a benefit to students. Neil Wallace said that agriculture and horticulture were not specifically mentioned, to which Mr Bound responded that the strategy was an overarching one, and the operational details referred to these areas.

xi) **HE Strategy** It was noted that this strategy was key to the IQER inspection in March 2010. Governors endorsed the strategy.

xii) **Property Strategy** It was noted that this would need review over the next year to reflect the completion of the current capital programme. A revised strategy would be brought via the Finance and Enterprises Committee to the July meeting 2010.

It was then agreed to approve the Strategic Plan as a whole subject to the ongoing development issues outlined above.

12 Capital Project

a) **Update on progress** Mr Nix explained that building work was on target for completion, and should be on budget as well. The tennis centre would have an unspent contingency and there were building snags to be resolved. The Jubilee Building was on programme and there were no financial concerns at present. The equine building should be finished by early September rather than the end of August. The chairman offered the congratulations and thanks of the Corporation to Mr Nix and his team for what had been achieved so far.

b) **All-weather pitch** The Principal said that positive responses had been received from Governors and that the contract had now been let. Neil Wallace had made various points about the income forecasts to which the College had responded and Mr Wallace said that he now felt reassured. Apart from the facility being attractive to potential students, the new pitch should provide savings where students currently have to go off-site in certain circumstances. Mr Nix said that if income was down, costs would be as well. The budget of £2000 for marketing applied to the all-weather pitch only and would be part of a total marketing of the new college facilities.

It was agreed to confirm the decision to proceed with the all-weather pitch.

c) **Eastern road** The Principal said that this development overlapped with discussions about the Greater Norwich Plan. The College had agreed that any residue of gravel royalties from the quarry would go into the building of the road, which would be a double benefit. The details of how to complete the road were being sorted out.

It was then formally proposed by the Principal, seconded by John Turner, to exchange potential future royalties from gravel extraction for the indefinite right of access on this Eastern road adding to the £200,000 already set aside by the RNAA. It was then proposed that any further cost shortfall be met from the £194,000 remaining in the £200,000 golf budget. This was agreed by the Corporation, and the abstention of Iain Mawson on the grounds that he was the RNAA's auditor was noted.

d) **Western road** The development of the Western road will be part of the discussion about the Greater Norwich Plan. The Chairman commented that the verges on the road down to the model farm needed reinstating and it might be helpful to widen the road for the future, leading to savings in the long term. The Principal said the point was noted and it might be appropriate to raise this in discussion with the Highways Authority.

13 **Curriculum and Standards Committee**

The draft minutes of the meeting of the Curriculum & Standards Committee held on 11 June 2009 were received, and Fran Baugh went through various points, noting an especially long discussion on ways of improving the Student Satisfaction Survey.

14 **Audit Committee**

a) The **draft minutes** of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 12 June 2009 were received, and Neil Wallace explained various points in them.

b) The **Risk Management Plan for 2009/10** had been circulated and it was agreed to approve this.

c) The **Health and Safety Report for 2007/8** had been circulated. It was noted that the College had a good record in this area so far, and it was agreed to approve the report.

15 **Annual Budget 2009/10**

Mr Lambert explained that the Corporation needed to approve the annual budget before 31 July 2009, adding that it was extracted from the three-year financial plan which had now been prepared, and noting the projection of a modest operating surplus of £26,000. Depreciation costs and interest payable were making a particular impact.

Julia Moss asked about the College's pension liabilities. Mr Lambert explained that the valuation of the pension scheme was not known until the middle of September. £250,000 had been allowed in the final forecast, but there was an element of speculation in this.

It was proposed by Iain Mawson, seconded by Robin Baines and agreed to approve the annual budget for 2009/10.

16 Finance and Enterprises Committee

The minutes of the meeting of the Finance and Enterprises Committee held on 8 May 2009, the draft minutes of the meeting held on 9 July 2009, the management accounts for the period ending 31 May 2009, and the 3-year financial plans for the period 2009/2010 to 2011/2012 were received.

a) **Minutes** Iain Mawson referred to various points in the minutes. Regarding the proposed wording in the Memorandum of Understanding between the College and ECF Ltd (minute 3a of the meeting held on 9 July 2009) it was noted that KPMG have approved the proposed wording, and the Corporation agreed to adopt it. This was unanimously agreed. Mr Mawson referred also to the decision to disapply the Deed of Covenant relating to ECL Ltd.

b) **Management Accounts for the period ending 31 May 2009** Mr Lambert said that the accounts were showing an operating surplus of £358,000 and he explained about the accounting treatment of capital grants on the new buildings.

c) **3-year Financial Plans** Mr Lambert said that these plans follow the LSC format, and went through various points in the document. The Principal added that the assumption of no growth in funded student numbers is a very prudent one, and that the college should be able to improve on this. On Table 4 (Ratio Analysis), Julia Moss asked about the administration costs outlined in line 7d. Mrs Sadler said that these referred to the cost of an administration staff, but that it should be noted that the NRBAS costs were matched by income.

The Corporation approved the plans, and Mr Mawson said that Mr Lambert was to be commended on producing these figures.

d) **Future of Trading Companies** Iain Mawson explained to Governors what the Committee had agreed in terms of the way forward for the trading subsidiaries, which was outlined in Document G6. The Corporation approved these arrangements.

e) **Procurement Strategy 2008-11** It was noted that this had already been dealt with under the Strategic Plan.

17 Equality and Diversity Group

Veronica Bowyer and Neil Wallace agreed to be the Governor appointments to this group. Mrs Bowyer said that she was unable to attend meetings on a Friday.

With the departure of Veronica Bowyer and Julia Moss it was noted that the Corporation ceased to be quorate for the remaining items on the agenda.

18 Remuneration Committee

The draft minutes of the Remuneration Committee meeting held on 9 July 2009 were received, and the confidential minute on the salaries of the Principal, Vice Principals and the Clerk would be sent to non-staff Governors by post. These were noted.

19 Search and Governance Committee

a) **Minutes** The draft minutes of the meeting of the Search and Governance Committee held on 9 July 2009 were received.

b) Revisions to Terms of Reference for Audit Committee The Clerk explained the minor revisions made to the terms of reference for the Audit Committee as a result of a report from the Internal Auditors, and the regularisation of reference to external auditors and financial statement auditors. Mr Sadler said that in fact these needed to be carefully differentiated and she offered to advise further on this.

Action: Vice Principal Finance / Clerk

c) Appointments to the Corporation The Chairman explained that the CV for Dominic Lacey, Chief Executive of Flora Nova, was still awaited and would be circulated to members as soon as possible. It was hoped to invite him to the October meeting of the Corporation. **Action: Principal/Clerk**

20 Revisions to Intranet

Software called Sharepoint was being used to achieve better navigation on the intranet and allow document sharing for named individuals. It was hoped to go live with this in September, as the College would like to have it ready for the Ofsted inspection. A demonstration would be given to Governors at the October meeting.

21 Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Corporation would take place on Friday 16 October at 1.30 p.m. Fran Baugh commented that Fridays were not a good day for her with regard to meetings.

22 Any Other Business

The Principal referred to plans to develop a food hub near to the College. This would involve swapping land next to the A47 with a plot near Marlingford. The hub would be a high-profile centre for Norfolk food, and include an auction facility and premises for incubator businesses. He had been asked to join a board to develop this project, and he was negotiating to improve the details of the land offer. The benefit to the College was that the hub tied into the Greater Norwich Plan, and Robin Baines said that it would also assist the proposed School of Contemporary Agriculture. The Principal explained that Ian Alston was driving this project and therefore it would be taken forward in a realistic way. Mr Alston was using the same advisers as the College in order to ensure consistency with the College's (and partners') submissions to the Greater Norwich Development Plan and to reduce costs where possible.

Governors noted and supported the Principal's approach to these developments.

23 Confidential Items

No items of business were deemed to be confidential other than those regarding the approach to Otley College and the salary details recorded in the confidential minutes of the Remuneration Committee held on 9 July 2009.