



EASTON COLLEGE CORPORATION

Minutes of the Meeting held on Friday 13 March 2009 at Park Farm Hotel, Hethersett

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, Mr B Miners, Mrs J Moss, Mr M Pant, Mr D Ramsay, Professor J Turner, Mr N Wallace.

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

1 Apologies for Absence and welcome to new Members

The Chairman welcomed Governors to the meeting of the Corporation which for the first time was part of a Governors' Strategic Development Conference. Apologies for absence were received from Mr J Burford and Mr M Livermore.

2 Declarations of Interest

The Chairman said that he was still acting for the Glen Lodge Golf Club in its negotiations with the RNAA. Iain Mawson said that he acted for the RNAA. The Principal explained that he had recently joined the board of the Childrens' and Young Persons' Trust.

3 Minutes of the Meeting held on 8 January 2009

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 January 2009 were noted as omitting item 4 in the numbering of the minutes, then approved and signed as a true record by the Chairman.

4 Matters Arising

(a) Governors' pages on the intranet

The Principal reported that it was intended to create these pages when IT staffing allowed.

(b) Confidential minute from the meeting of 10 March 2006

It was noted that this minute should stay confidential.

5 Principal's Report

The Principal reported that the term had been a very busy one as a result of the increased number of students and of the construction projects, not assisted by a three-week closure of local roads. He then went through various items in his report.

Student numbers These were at the edge of what the College could cope with, and further funding was now vital. He was hopeful that significant extra money would be available next year, and the College had decided to recruit no more adult learners this year without extra funding. There had been an 80% increase in students at Foundation level which had impacted on Assisted Learner Support (ALS) costs.

UEA Discussions with the University were proving fruitful, and EEDA were keen on closer links. Brian Miners asked whether horticulture was a research area with the UEA that could help to raise the profile of the subject at the College. The Principal responded that in doing this it would be necessary to give it a distinctive flavour. There was a new Director of Innovation at EEDA and he was hopeful that this might produce funding for research. John Turner added that besides the University and the College, the Food Research Institute and the John Innes Centre were involved and that the 'In Crops' project would cover both horticulture and agriculture. Brian Miners commented that although the Horticulture Development Council raised a levy on all growers to pay for research, not enough funding was coming through. While work was continuing on the medicinal and nutritional side, this was not the case on the ornamental side of horticulture, and if the UK was to compete with the Dutch, it needed to redevelop a research base in this area. It was hoped that Brian would be replaced in due course by someone from Flora Nova which was a leading local horticultural firm. Robin Baines reminded Governors that funding for research and development from the government would be very tight in the future, and so all opportunities to link with commercial companies should be pursued. John Turner said that the In Crops project had appointed five business managers with a responsibility to develop links with industry and between academic institutes through Knowledge Transfer Partnerships. Robin Baines hoped that something like this would be an opportunity to bring different parties together with a common research aim.

He then went on to make a larger point in response to the Principal's report. It was important that with all this new activity at the College it did not lose sight of its core activities and should ensure that proper routine is maintained. This meant that the College should be strong enough to say no to new opportunities that might affect the existing quality of service. The Principal responded that he was in full agreement with this point. He said that the two Vice Principals were closely involved in maintaining quality, but in the larger picture key choices had to be made. To adjust to new situations, the College needed to be making the right management decisions; for example, the introduction of a Programme Area Managers Team was transforming teaching at the college. He only regretted the pressure created by the LSC's current position on funding.

6 Report of Vice Principal Curriculum

Improving the College's grading Mr Bound said that the College's immediate challenge was to get from a good grade to an outstanding one at the Ofsted inspection. He was encouraged that the College was on course for this by the mid-term reviews: many of the student numbers were above their target level; grades in lesson observation were above benchmarks; an area of concern was the November Student Perception Survey where some results had been more negative than desirable, largely as a result of the College being up to capacity – he hoped that the next survey in April would produce more positive results; the three teaching areas that had received grade 3 were receiving a root-and-branch review in

partnership with the teams concerned; he also referred to the value of reviews by Landex and by peer colleges.

Recruitment for 2009/10 This was good but challenging. Numbers were outstripping last year, and the National Diploma in sport was 80% over target, as was Animal Management, and these numbers were before internal progression had taken place. Overall, numbers were likely to increase by 22% across the board. The SMT had debated whether numbers would have to be capped in order to prevent an area of work out growing its resources or unbalancing the college provision.. Julia Moss asked whether evening and weekend courses could be a way round the problem. Mr Bound explained that only a small number of students were residential, with the majority having to travel to the College which made twilight and evening sessions difficult. Good contact was maintained with the County Transport Team, but early morning and evening is very difficult for the College in respect of transport, especially for the 16 to 18 group. He added that short courses tended to be run in the evenings and weekends. Two other points were made: as a result of the capital work, the College was reducing its financial buffer, which made responding to sudden increases in student numbers difficult to manage and therefore its operations less flexible; and in terms of capping the College had to keep in mind the governments September guarantee of a place in education for all post-16 pupils. Veronica Bowyer said that the report reflected the success of the College's work to overcome the low staying-on rate.

Role of Academic Board Mr Bound said that the College was monitoring quality fortnightly through the Academic Management Team which was making the meetings of the Academic Board superfluous. However the Board did involve a wider spread of staff, and it was therefore proposed to roll the Board up into the Quality Standards and Equal Opportunities Group which met twice a term. It was hoped in due course to include both teaching staff and students from the Student Council on this group. It was agreed to proceed with this proposal.

7 Report of Vice Principal Finance and Resources

Cash flow Payments on the construction project were currently in line with the cash flow, and the first borrowings were likely in April. The long-term loan would be taken out first, and then the revolving credit facility would be used.

Analysis of 2008/9 funding Mrs Sadler went through various figures in the table at appendix A, explaining adverse variances and the impact of the changes in student numbers. It was noted that the College was doing well on the FE side, but HE recruitment was not strong. The College need to get its recruitment cycle in this area in line with that of the universities.

Capital projects While days had been lost earlier in the year, the good weather was helping the contractors to catch up. Regarding the AiD for the third phase, a meeting had been held with the LSC and a further one was due in April. It was hoped that the College might know where it stood by July. The Chairman noted that planning permission would be needed for roads and the all-weather pitch, and Mrs Sadler said that the discussion with the LSC on the roads in particular had been very constructive.

Human resources She noted the positive contribution being made by the new HR manager, Liz Howard, and referred to the table on staff sickness, adding that the College was keen to benchmark these statistics against the land-based sector. Julia Moss said she felt the figures were good ones and showed staff commitment at all levels. Mrs Sadler said

that the data was held on a spreadsheet in order for the College to get a true picture in this area. Mahesh Pant asked whether stress was a factor in staff sickness. The Principal said the figures were particularly affected by the fact that two staff were on long-term sick leave, and that he did not believe that stress was a factor. The question here was about collecting the right data and working through problems with staff. Mr Bound commented that staff were very busy but that in his view stress levels were low; the College tried to provide the resources and time to deal with any problems of this nature.

8 Curriculum and Standards Committee

Fran Baugh reported on various items in the minutes of the meeting held on 19 February 2009. There had been a good discussion on the Student Perception of Courses Survey, and it was hoped to improve this further as a tool for the College. She noted that over-recruitment had been added to the risk register as a possible risk. Finally, she explained that the art course was to be closed down on the grounds that the College was in a poor position to make such provision, and that the course had not properly fitted in with the College's other work; Mr Bound had spoken to the students concerned who would be allowed to complete their course. Julia Moss hoped that the College could grow its education work in the area of sustainable development, and the Principal said that he was hopeful that this would be possible in the future.

9 Audit Committee

Neil Wallace reported on various items in the minutes of the meeting held on 2 February 2009. Internal auditors had been reappointed and the committee was recommending to the Corporation that KPMG were reappointed as external auditors. It was proposed by Neil Wallace, seconded by Brian Miners and agreed that this should be done.

10 Finance and Enterprises Committee

Iain Mawson reported on various items in the minutes of the meeting held on 27 February 2009. He referred to the discussions on the way forward for the trading companies and the Corporation confirmed its agreement to the delegation to the Finance and Enterprises Committee the power to take the necessary decision on this matter.

11 Management accounts for the period to 31 January 2009 and Mid-Year Forecast

Mr Lambert said that the figures set out in the documents along with the commentary were largely self-explanatory. On the mid-year forecast, a small operational surplus was expected before exceptional items were taken into account. These were twofold: firstly, work on the older building originally scheduled for demolition had not been capitalized, and therefore the maintenance work was being written off against revenue; the £22,000 in fees incurred prior to the Application in Principle were being written off in line with recommended treatment, and would be included as non-normal operating costs.

It was proposed by Iain Mawson, seconded by James Hunter and agreed to approve the management accounts for the period to 31 January 2009 and the mid-year forecast.

12 Capital Projects

Mrs Sadler explained the monitoring report on the capital project which showed that £3.7 million had been spent so far against a total budget of £21.408 million for all three stages,

but excluding the golf project. She then referred to the variances in fees and in costs listed on page 2. Negative variances had arisen as a result of figures in the contingency budget not being allocated to specific areas. She referred in particular to the invoice from Faber Maunsell which had covered various parts of the project. The company was being asked to resubmit with the figures broken down in order to allow for their proper coding.

13 Personnel Committee

Veronica Bowyer reported on various items in the minutes of the meeting held on 5 March 2009. She commended the new HR Manager, Liz Howard, for the work she had done in updating policies. The committee had gone through these carefully and raised a number of points for consideration. They had all been approved subject to these further details being checked.

The question had come up of whether Governors should undergo a criminal records check, and the Clerk had been asked to find out practice elsewhere. Iain Mawson commented that as a school governor he undergoes such a check, and Sandra Dinneen said that it was likely some of the Governors had already been checked through other routes. The Principal advised caution on the grounds that Governors were not in unsupervised contact with students, and the checking process involved a cost to the public purse. David Ramsay added that the question for the College was whether something could be used against them if Governors had not been checked.

It was agreed to implement a CRB check for all governors. Forms would be sent out to members via the Clerk in due course. **(Action: Clerk)**

Fran Baugh referred to the question of infectious diseases in the maternity policy and whether this covered both human to human infections and animal to human infections. Veronica Bowyer confirmed that it did.

Finally, it was noted that the staff appraisal system was in place and working well. This question had been raised by the internal auditors as part of their review of governance in 2008.

14 Calendar of meetings August 2009 to July 2010

A list of dates was received and approved as follows:

- Personnel: 24 September 2009
- Corporation: 16 October
- Curriculum and Standards: 5 November
- Audit: 9 November
- Finance and Enterprises: 20 November
- Corporation: 4 December
- Audit: 1 February 2010
- Curriculum and Standards: 19 February
- Finance and Enterprises: 26 February
- Personnel: 4 March
- Corporation: 12 March
- Finance and Enterprises: 7 May
- Curriculum and Standards: 10 June
- Audit: 11 June

- Remuneration: 8 July
- Search and Governance: 8 July
- Finance and Enterprises: 8 July
- Corporation: 23 July

15 Updating the register of Governors' interests

The Clerk asked Governors to review their entry in the register and countersign and date it. This was carried out.

16 Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Corporation would take place on 24 July at 2.00 p.m., to be preceded by training in the morning from 10.30/11.00 a.m.

Mr Bound said that this year the Prize Day was in two parts as a result of the College's current capacity problems: land-based awards would be made in the morning, and sport in the afternoon. An invitation would be sent to Governors in due course.

17 Digital circulation of papers to Governors

James Hunter made a plea that the availability of papers for Governors on the intranet be actively notified to Governors rather than for them to be expected to keep track of these on their own account. In alerting them, the Clerk could make a link in the e-mail.

18 Confidential Minute

There was a confidential item concerning the strategic development of land-based education in the Eastern Region.

In closing the meeting, the Chairman expressed the thanks of the Corporation for the work undertaken by the Principal and his PA Janet Campbell in preparing this Strategic Development Conference.