

EASTON COLLEGE CORPORATION

Minutes of the Meeting held on Friday 19 October 2007

Present: Mr M Andrews, Sir Nicholas Bacon (Chairman), Mr R Baines, Mrs F Baugh, Mrs V Bowyer, Mr J Burford, Mr J Burrage, Mr M Gamble, Mr B Grindrod, Mr D Lawrence (Principal), Mr P Medhurst, Mr B Miners, Mrs J Moss, Mr S Pearson, Mr G Rivers, Mrs J Strudwick, Mr D Young.

In Attendance: Mr J Hunter, Mr I Mawson, Mrs P Bell (Deputy Principal), Mr T Cawkwell (Clerk), Mr G Lambert (Director of Finance), Mr C Nix (Director of Resources), Mr G Brough (LSC Executive Director for Norfolk).

Before the meeting, presentations were made to Sir Nicholas Bacon, the outgoing chairman, and to Peter Medhurst and Douglas Young who were standing down as Members at the end of November.

- 1 Welcome and Apologies for Absence** The Chairman opened the meeting by welcoming Jonathan Burford, James Hunter, Iain Mawson, and Sean Pearson as new members. Mr Hunter and Mr Mawson were attending as observers, as their membership formally began on 1st December 2007. Mr Burford and Mr Pearson were to be confirmed as two new student Members.

Apologies had been received from David Ramsay and Julian Hepburn, and from Christina Sadler. Since Mr Hepburn's membership was coming to an end on 30th November, it was agreed that the Chairman and Principal should write to thank him for his services.

Action: Principal

- 2 Presentation by Graham Brough, LSC Executive Director for Norfolk**

Mr Brough from the Norfolk Office of the LSC (one of six partnership teams in the East of England) explained that he was making a presentation to all colleges in the county

Mr Brough's main points were as follows:

- Participation in learning after 16 years of age in Norfolk was currently the lowest in the country. However Norfolk was catching up very quickly as a result of the work done by FE and Sixth Form Colleges.
- Easton College has grown the most of the six colleges in Norfolk.

- The need to compete for government resources is likely to increase in the future, and it was important that colleges did not opt out of this process.
- LSC saw the college's capital plans as important.

In the discussion that followed, Members focused on the merits of competition versus collaboration. Now that large providers were operating in the region, there was concern that the failure of their operations would lead to colleges having to pick up the pieces. It was important that private-sector trainers did not have an unfair advantage in entering into a competitive process.

To a question about how ambitions might be raised in Norfolk, Mr Brough said he thought that the College was doing the right things. Its increased flexibility is transforming results, and that its capital programme was testament to the energy which would be needed to raise ambitions.

In thanking Mr Brough for his presentation, the Chairman made the plea that when a policy is put in place, it is left alone for colleges to operate without too much interference.

3 Appointment of student governors

The Corporation was now obliged to have two Members from the student body. Mr Jonathan Burford (doing land-based studies) and Mr Sean Pearson (doing sport studies) had been nominated from the Student Council. It was agreed to confirm these appointments.

4 Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 July 2007

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2007 were approved and signed as a true record by the Chairman.

5 Matters Arising

(a) Minute 3a Public access to Corporation agendas and minutes

The Clerk explained that copy had been prepared for the College website but its inclusion there was awaiting an overhaul of the site as a whole. In the meantime, the posting of agendas and minutes on the College intranet was proceeding satisfactorily. After a brief discussion, it was concluded that it would be comparatively simple to upload the proposed copy to the present website and that this should be done in time for the next meeting of the Corporation. This would not preclude the undertaking of an overhaul of the whole site in the future, when the question of posting minutes on the site could be considered further.

(b) Minute 13 Circulation of minutes of Academic Board

It was confirmed that minutes of the meeting of the Academic Board held on 12 July 2007 had been circulated to Members.

(c) Minute 17a List of Members with terms of office

The list of Members with their terms of office was noted. Mrs Bowyer asked about the position when her term of office finished on 30 November. The chairman explained that the report from the Search and Governance Committee to the Corporation in July should have issued a formal invitation to Mrs Bowyer to continue. He apologised for this oversight. Mrs Bowyer said that she would be very pleased to do another term.

It was noted that Mr Ramsay was in the same position, and it was agreed that the Clerk should liaise with all Members by e-mail to seek approval for these two Members continuing. **Action: Clerk**

(d) Minute 17b Timing of Corporation meetings in 2008

A Member had requested that the Corporation meetings in 2008 be moved to 9.30 a.m. so that they did not clash with other meetings. The point was made that the July meeting would then be followed by a training session rather than holding it beforehand. The chairman questioned whether this was desirable, and it was agreed to hold the meeting on Friday 7 March at 9.30 a.m. but to leave a decision on the July meeting open for the time being.

(e) Minute 17d Easton College and the 2012 Olympics

The Principal explained that the County Council had an officer devoted to encouraging sports activities in schools and colleges in connection with the 2012 Olympics, and there should be scope for the College to be involved in letting its facilities be used. The matter was being dealt with at the County Strategic Partnership, and little could be done outside of that.

Mr Lambert and Mr Nix joined the meeting at this point.

6 Principal's Report

The Principal expected the College's growth rate to be over target in 2007/8, and explained that this would not attract funding in this current year, but would help with funding in the year following. Although it was the government's policy to bring new providers into the field by opening this work to competitive tender, he felt this was not an appropriate way to do things.

The Principal's involvement with the County Strategic Partnership and in particular with the transport element of the 14-19 plan was noted.

Under Health & Safety, it was noted that the three RIDDOR incidents listed took place in a previous year and had been included by error.

7 Deputy Principal's Report

The report had been circulated and Mrs Bell made the following points:

- Work-based training was the College's only weak area of recruitment at present.
- The Golf Apprenticeship Programme and the Foundation Degree in Sustainable Technology were moving forward.
- The system of peer review with other colleges was useful. The College's SAR would go to the C & S Committee in November.
- The formation of a Student Council had led to the appointment of the two new Student Members. Sean Pearson chairs the Council, and Jonathan Burford is the student H & S representative.
- The awards ceremony for students doing the HNC/D programme had taken place in the morning. It was important that students did not undervalue the award of what was in effect a UEA degree.
- The College was leading on vocational learning for 14-year-olds. Paul Dunning was to leave at Christmas to be the County's 14-19 Senior Adviser with Children's Services. Although the College would be sorry to lose him, his appointment would be a helpful one to the College.

The Chairman raised the question of apprenticeships. Mrs Bell pointed out the difficulties of the Advanced Apprentice programme, which required working to NVQ level 3 plus key skills, and the necessity of holding down a job as well, without any increased allowances being available. The Principal added that the government was planning to deal with this in part by raising the school-leaving age to 18. Industry and commerce were finding it difficult to employ the totally unskilled. With regard to post-18 apprenticeships, Mrs Bell said that foundation degrees were meant to deal with this, but employers were largely unaware of the programme and to engage with it cost a significant amount of money. Mr Burrage confirmed the difficulties that agriculture students at the College found in doing the four units of the Agriculture Certificate while holding down jobs.

Mr Mawson asked about the position in replacing staff members. Mrs Bell said that it is now easier than it used to be, because a better calibre of staff was coming forward. People were consulting the job vacancies on the website, and were prepared to come from outside Norfolk.

8 Preview of Financial Results for the Year ended 31 July 2007

Mr Young explained that the F & E Committee had not met since the last meeting of the Corporation, and that the figures tabled were a preview of the likely results for the year ended 31 July 2007. Mr Lambert confirmed that the actual results should be closely in line with the figures given in the paper.

9 Capital Project Bid

The Principal introduced paper G by referring Members to the next steps listed in section 8. He had met with the LSC who were positive about the proposals, inviting the College to submit to the region an application in principle (AIP) which would then be forwarded to the national office. The opportunity was open to achieve full approval early on for the tennis and equine facilities, while building a further, more detailed capital bid for the remaining elements. The Principal requested that Members again consider the direction in which the College was going with the bid, and again confirm the options analysis from the Property Strategy. It would also be helpful if Members could confirm expenditure of £330,000 (which is below the £350,000 allocated) on preparation of phase 1 of the tennis facility, noting the College's analysis of the risks involved.

Mrs Baugh pointed out that section 2 of the paper (on page 4) was missing. The Principal apologised for this and explained that it covered the Equine & Animal Care facility. Discussions with the Chapelfield Veterinary Partnership were continuing, and he now felt it important that the equine facility be located at the College rather than the showground so that it was adjacent to the small-animal care centre and was seen as a core activity of the College. This had academic benefits, and, although the two elements that would be weakened by not locating the equine unit on the showground were the use of the facility for showground events and the show itself, and the use of showground infrastructure, the concept was no different to what had been planned for the Showground. Members were referred to Annex H in the Capital Bid paper for the proposed location on the College campus. Mrs Bowyer supported the principle of locating the two facilities together, as it made site management easier, and avoided staff and students on two different sites developing divided loyalties. The Principal added that it should not alter the College's relationship with the RNAA. In answer to a question from Mr Andrews he explained that location on the College site should not be a bar to usage of the facilities by RNAA.

Mr Andrews asked that in developing the new facilities, opportunity should be taken to improve the 'front door' of the site in order to present a good face to visitors. The Principal explained that Annex H showed that this could happen in the future and that it was currently accepted there was more than one entrance. The College was currently undertaking a review of signage and this would partly address this issue. A key feature of the masterplan was to push more extensive facilities (equine, tennis etc) to the periphery of the campus with more intensive facilities were being located centrally. He expected to use David Thompson as the design consultant to develop these ideas further. Where facilities were visible, they could be toned into the rest of the site, signing could be improved, and a college hub would be created around the area of the dell, very much as described

at the meeting in July. Mr Gamble said that the horticulture retail facility would need to be near the hub.

Mr Gamble then expressed his concern about the new plan for the equine facility and whether this would affect the attitude of the RNAA towards the golf facility: would they ask the College to make their own arrangements? This would need very careful handling. Mr Nix commented that the RNAA had difficulty in accommodating students on the Showground, so location on the College site would not necessarily be against their interest. Mr Burrage commented that the improved road access to the Longwater roundabout was likely to go through the Showground. The overall picture was a very complex one.

Regarding the tennis facility, the Principal explained that the LTA had agreed to grant aid this but with a lower loan facility than requested in the bid. He drew the attention of Members to the worst-case scenario outlined on page 5, and that the second phase was the one that reduced the return on this project. Planning permission is being sought for the whole facility.

Regarding the capital bid as a whole, the Principal emphasised that if no new buildings were constructed, then teaching provision for the College would be in trouble. The current level of space utilisation for college facilities (excluding practical facilities) was already at benchmark levels of general FE colleges rather than specialist colleges and without additional teaching facilities continued growth at current levels would be unsustainable in terms of teaching space. He was confident that the project as a whole could be achieved, and from the work so far the contribution rate from the LSC was around 52%. Preparing the full bids for the tennis and equine facilities by December would be challenging.

Following the receipt of the paper, the Principal's presentation, and the discussion following, Members expressed general agreement with the direction in which the bids were moving, and with the next steps outlined in the paper. It was agreed that the Capital Projects Sub-Group would be convened if necessary, although its membership will need adjusting to take account of the changes in Corporation membership. Members confirmed the following proposed actions:

- a) They reconfirmed the outcome of the options analysis as considered in the Property Strategy in July 2007.
- b) They confirmed the elements of the overall bid and expressed support for the continued development of the bid along the lines proposed subject to approval in December.
- c) They confirmed the Phase 1 Tennis Centre proposal noting the likely cost of £330,000 and the risk analysis.
- d) They confirmed that full applications should be developed if possible for the tennis centre and equestrian/animal care elements.
- e) They confirmed the appointment of advisers as necessary to take forward the capital bid up to the previously approved budget of £150,000.

Mr Lambert and Mr Nix left the meeting at this point.

10 Personnel Committee

Mrs Bowyer reported on the meeting of the Personnel Committee held on 27 September 2007, drawing Members attention to the plans to improve arrangements for staff consultation, and progress on the review of the College's personnel policies and procedures. It was agreed to receive the minutes.

11 Governance Matters

i) Self-Assessment exercise The Clerk introduced the paper by thanking Members for completing the questionnaire, and noting particularly the value of the comments made by Members. The Chairman queried whether all the questions were relevant and suggested that this be looked at for next year. Mr Medhurst felt that the answers in the tick boxes did not necessarily reflect what a Member wanted to say. Mr Rivers explained that he was the Member who had made the point about the need for more benchmarks to encourage continuous improvement, as the College should not be afraid of being self-critical as a way of avoiding complacency. The Principal made the point that the summary of performance needed to have year-on-year comparisons.

In order to take this forward, the Clerk offered to prepare a list of action points arising from the paper for consideration at the meeting of the Corporation in December.

ii) Attendance Report for 2006/7 It was noted that the regular absence of a single Member could distort the figures, but taking this into account, the Chairman commented that overall attendance was good when people had busy lives to lead. Those Members achieving a 100% attendance were to be congratulated.

12 Any Other Business

Mr Rivers commented on a recent visit he had made to the College with the Audit Commission, when inspectors were shown round. He commented that the College looked extremely busy and lively and gave, in his view, a very good impression.

13 Appointment of New Chairman The Clerk took the chair for this item. He explained that the matter had been discussed previously and that Members had invited Mr Gamble to consider taking on the role of chairman in place of Sir Nicholas Bacon. Mr Gamble indicated that he was willing to do this, and it was proposed by Mrs Moss, seconded by Mrs Bowyer, and agreed unanimously to appoint Mr Gamble as chairman. In response, Mr Gamble spoke of the difficulty

in following Sir Nicholas Bacon as chairman in view of all he had done for the College, but he looked forward to taking on the role and working with Members.

- 14 Appointment of Vice Chairman** With the departure of Mr Young, it was noted that a new Vice Chairman was required. Mr Gamble proposed that Mrs Baugh be appointed to the position and this was unanimously agreed.

15 Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Corporation would take place on Friday 14 December 2007 at 2 p.m.

16 Confidential Items

It was noted that the discussion relating to master planning was confidential.