

Preston's College

Minutes of the Search and Governance Committee meeting held on 6th October 2016 at 5:30pm at Preston's College.

Present:

Mr M Mallam (Chair)

Mr E Bassa
Mr P Kennedy
Dr E H Smith

In Attendance:

Mr S Fell (Clerk to the Corporation)
Mr P McMellon (Assistant to Clerk)

18. Apologies

Apologies had been received from Mr J Boydell.

19. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

20. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Resolved: That the Minutes of the Search and Governance Committee meeting held on 13th July 2016 be agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

21. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

22. Governing Body Membership

(i) Current Vacancies

The Committee noted an update on the position with regard to the vacancy which had arisen on the resignation of Mr Paul Williams. It was noted that contact would shortly be made with a possible candidate and it was agreed that, if that candidate appeared to meet the Committee's preferences, a formal meeting of the Committee should be convened to interview the person. If this avenue proved to be unproductive, it was agreed that a letter to local accountancy firms should be drafted for the Chair of Board's signature.

The Committee had also noted that, in line with the recent Higher Education Review (HER) Report, consideration needed to be given to the provision of representation of HE students in the College's governance arrangements. It was felt that this requirement would be most efficiently be met by allocation of a co-opted place for a HE student representative on the Board's Quality & Standards Committee.

RESOLVED : That the Board be recommended to approve the addition of a Co-opted Member (HE Students) place on the Quality & Standards Committee.

The Principal/Chief Executive confirmed that College Management would now proceed with the identification of a suitable HE student for appointment to the Co-opted Member vacancy for 2016/17.

REDACTED

(ii) Impending Terms of Office Expiries

It was noted that the current (probationary) one-year terms of office of Mr J Wilson, Mrs L Butler and Mr M Driver would expire in the Autumn Term.

RESOLVED : That the Board be recommended to confirm the successful completion of probationary years and the further appointments of Mr J Wilson, Mrs L Butler and Mr M Driver, each for an additional three years.

(iii) Skills Audit

It was agreed that there should be an update of the record of skills and experience of current Board Members. The Committee examined the existing pro-forma used for the annual skills audit. Consideration was also given to alternative approaches used elsewhere. It was agreed that the current format remained fit for purpose although a re-wording of the introductory paragraph should emphasise that experience as well as skills/qualifications should be taken into account.

RESOLVED : That the Clerk should proceed with a Skills Audit update.

(iv) Other checks and returns

It was agreed that completion of a 'Confirmation of continuing eligibility' form should be requested from each Board Member.

Consideration was also given to the collation of data on equality/diversity in the College's governance, in line with the College's Equality & Diversity Policy. The value of such data was discussed at some length, including in the context of the need for skills/experience as discussed above. Despite some degree of imbalance in some E&D categories at Board level, the College continued to serve successfully a wide, diverse number of students with a full range of diversity characteristics.

RESOLVED : That the Clerk should include (a) Continuing Eligibility and (b) Equality & Diversity Characteristics pro-forma in the request for annual completion of returns by all Board Members.

It was agreed that the E&D Characteristics pro-forma should be adapted so as to be in line with the equivalent pro-forma used by the College for staff and students.

23. Review of Governance (including Self Assessment)

The Committee examined the draft Review of Governance report, noting that this document would contribute to the College's overall Self Assessment Report on 2015/16. It was noted that much of the commentary was derived from the questionnaires completed at the end of the academic year by individual Board Members.

With regard to the issues in the 'Matters identified for action in 2016/17' section', the Committee considered in detail the background and planned actions for each of the 7 items.

(i) Compliance with the Code of Good Governance

It was agreed that the Clerk should continue to monitor compliance, advising the Board when/where adjustments were called for.

(ii) Preparation for Area Review

Dealing with this matter was already well in hand, with the Transition Advisory Group now operating.

(iii) Review of Committees memberships

Adjustments to the membership sizes were calculated to deal with the problems of iniquoracy encountered in 2015/16.

(iv) Streamline meetings documentation

It was agreed that streamlining measures should now include a move to the use of only an agenda front sheet and a covering executive summary for each substantive item in agenda production. The various appendices and supporting documentation would be attached electronically. This would ensure that all additional information was still available to Board Members, but a significant reduction in the production of printed documentation would ensue.

The Chair also requested that a review of the format of the current executive summary template should be undertaken.

Finally, the Chair requested that the feasibility of live links on the Agenda front sheet should be explored and implemented if possible.

(v) *Meetings attendance levels*

It was clearly regrettable that meetings attendance levels had fallen below those of the previous year and, at 72% were below the reported average level (80%) for the sector. A number of factors, including the need for additional (and sometimes relatively shorter notice) meetings in 2015/16, had undoubtedly contributed to the drop. It was also recognised that the meetings attendance statistic alone failed to reflect the many other ways whereby individual Board Members made positive contributions to the leadership of the College.

The Chair commended the good practice applied by those Board Members who, on tendering apologies, nonetheless contributed views on agenda matters (ie., for the Chair to report as appropriate).

(vi) *Use of 'tracking' to show proposed changes to policies etc*

The Clerk would seek to ensure that all report-writers complied with this expectation.

(vii) *High levels of 'challenge' by Board Members*

The Chair suggested that there were already indications that this need was already being addressed, not least by the Chair of the Board, and clearly evident in the current request for further information and explanation on learner numbers recruitment.

The Committee felt that more training/briefing, both in general and on specific subjects (eg the funding methodologies), was a key to ensuring appropriate levels of challenge. The Principal/Chief Executive outlined her intentions with regard to the presentation of such training, including the use of the Strategic Planning days and including guidance/training on 'challenging' in general. A session covering funding methodologies would also be arranged. She did remind the Committee that attendance at such events would then be crucial.

RESOLVED : That the Board be recommended to accept the Review of Governance Report, and to endorse the Committee's views on the Matters identified for action in 2016/17'.

24. Business Planning Cycle 2016/17

The Committee examined the draft Business Planning Cycle document. In noting that the timings of meetings and contents of agendas reflected College Management's advice as well as the requirements of external agencies, it was agreed that the document covered all foreseeable business considerations.

RESOLVED: That the Board be recommended to approve the Business Planning Cycle for 2016/17.

25. Training/Briefing for Board Members

The Committee noted that the Safeguarding training event before the Board meeting on 22nd September 2016 had seen an excellent turn-out of Board members. In addition to the training matters discussed under the Review of Governance item (Minute 23(vii) above), it was also noted that the Clerk now actively drew the attention of Board members to the various training/briefing opportunities available to the sector/Board.

26. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee was Thursday, 9th February 2017 (5.30pm).