

Preston's College

Minutes of the Board Meeting held 4th June 2020 at 4pm via Zoom

Present:

Mr J Boydell	Chair
Dr E Smith	Principal and Chief Executive
Mr E Bassa	
Mr S Browne	
Mr M Collard	
Mr S Edwards	
Ms J Garcia	
Mr M Driver	
Mr J Jepson	
Ms J Jones	
Dr J McMullin	
Cllr J Mein	(from Minute 2 to Minute 5)
Mr D Patel	(from Minute 2)
Mr T Readett	
Mr J Taylor	
Ms K Williams	

In attendance:

Mr S Nixon	Executive Director Resources
Ms M Haworth	Vice Principal Quality, Teaching, Learning and Learner Support
Mr M Noblett	Vice Principal - Curriculum Delivery and Planning
Mrs C Rayner	Clerk to the Board

Apologies:

Ms L Hornsby
Ms N Kirkbride

1. Welcome, apologies and declarations of interest

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

The Board noted that apologies had been received from Ms Kirkbride and that Ms Hornsby and Mr Patel planned to join the meeting later.

It was noted that a quorum was present.

It was noted that Mr Bassa had an interest in agenda item 4: Governance Matters.

2. Five Year Plan Revisited

The Principal and Chief Executive reported that earlier that day the College had been awarded the Association of Colleges' Support for Students Beacon Award for its support for ESOL learners.

On behalf of the Board, the Chair congratulated the College for this significant achievement.

The Board noted that, up until the pandemic, the College had been on target to meet the outcomes identified for Year 2 of the Five Year Strategic Plan. The Executive Leadership Team had reviewed and revised the Five Year Strategic Plan in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Principal and Chief Executive presented her report “Five Year Plan Revisited” and referred to:

- the Five Year Plan Deliverables Table at Appendix A which highlighted the revisions to the plan and areas at risk;
- the revised short term and long term outcomes;
- the revised Risk Register, at Appendix B, updated to reflect the impact of the coronavirus shutdown;
- the funding and income dashboard, at Appendix C, which summarised the impact of the coronavirus shutdown on a number of key measures;
- the potential impact of the pandemic on further education and employment;
- the positive response of staff and learners to the College’s move to a ‘digital learning and support organisation’ and the importance of the College capitalising on innovations in the delivery, process and communications;
- how the digital innovations and developments in blended learning would help the College achieve its mission;
- management focus on addressing short term actions including: the current learning provision, planning for the first three months of next academic term, budget revisions, ensuring safety of staff and learners imminently returning to College, enrolment of new learners and apprentices and ensuring the College played its part in initiatives to support the local community;
- development of a comprehensive Risk Assessment;
- consultations with unions to date.

The Principal and Chief Executive invited members to submit feedback on the proposed changes to the College’s mission, strategic objectives and short term and long term outcomes in light of the impact of the pandemic. It was noted that the changes were designed to reflect the College’s development of digital delivery and support and ensure the College could be responsive to the changed context post Brexit and COVID-19.

The Board discussed the report with management, and in response to questions, noted:

- how the College had supported learners who were digitally disadvantaged, including the loan of laptops with internet capabilities;
- whether the Education and Skills Funding Agency would change its criteria for determining financial health in light of the pandemic was to be confirmed;

- the completion of a detailed risk assessment before learners could return to the College site;
- the size of the College campus would be beneficial when implementing social distancing;
- engagement activities for new learners joining the College in September 2020;
- how teaching quality had been maintained during the shutdown;
- the estimated year end deficit and the position regarding bank covenants. However, it was noted that some savings related to the shutdown of College and the re-introduction of a small number of learners to College would increase some costs;
- how the College could offer reskilling opportunities post COVID-19;
- possible issues with sourcing Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) due to high demand internationally.

During the discussion members highlighted:

- developing self-motivation in learners as this was important to employers;
- given the option of remote/flexible working for many roles, there was evidence that some employers were now more prepared to recruit nationally rather than locally to access a wider talent pool for roles;
- increased remote working was likely impact decisions companies made regarding their estates;
- the positive improvements to the culture of the College in recent years had been achieved by management's encouragement of co-operation and teamwork and the importance of maintaining this culture virtually in the short to medium term;
- the importance of the College's advertising its digital offer to prospective students.

The Chair asked members to submit further comments to the Clerk on the proposed changes to the College's mission and strategic objectives and revised short term and long term outcomes.

Resolved: The Board noted a report on the revised Five Year Strategic Plan.

Action: Members to submit further feedback on the report to the Clerk.

3. Planning for College Re-opening

Mr Nixon, Executive Director Resources, presented his report on plans for re-opening the College to staff and learners.

Mr Nixon made reference to:

- changes to government guidance since the report was issued with new guidance that no learners should attend College until 15th June 2020;
- College working groups had been established to review College re-opening plans;
- positive meetings with unions to date to review College re-opening plans including a review of the draft risk assessment;
- the draft Re-opening Covid-19 Risk Assessment, at Appendix A, a working document which would continue to be reviewed and updated prior to discussion at the July Board meeting;
- review of which learners would most benefit from on-site learning, particularly those learners who required assessments for a licence to practice or needed to sit examinations;
- review of how to implement social distancing on campus, the introduction of signage and provision of PPE for some learners and staff depending on the nature of the activities undertaken;
- other considerations including learner access to public transport;
- for most learners, remote learning would continue to the end of the academic year;
- plan for support staff to gradually return to College where required.

The Board discussed the report with management, and in response to questions, noted:

- communications to learners to ensure they were aware of the government's recent announcement that face coverings must be worn on public transport from 15th June 2020;
- development plans for the start of the new term would include a mix of remote and on-site learning;
- the ongoing lease arrangements for the coronavirus test centre and the assumption the centre would remain on the College car park post July;
- contingency planning in case of a second wave in which case the College had the infrastructure in place to quickly revert back to remote learning;
- support for clinically vulnerable staff who would continue to work from home;
- contingency plans to ensure there were sufficient teaching staff on site if teachers needed to self isolate at short notice. Members noted that this was covered in the short term but would be more challenging from September;
- additional support for learners with an Education, Health and Care Plan (ECHP) during the pandemic;
- the Audit Committee would review the risk assessment at its next meeting.

During discussion, management undertook to explore the following suggestions from members:

- whilst the risk assessment was detailed and comprehensive whether it would be beneficial for a third party to also review;
- if the risk assessment was shared externally some context could be provided to the severity and likelihood scale used in the risk assessment matrix as it might alarm learners or staff. However, it was noted this was standard terminology for Health and Safety documentation;
- the return of a small number of learners in June would provide an opportunity to test the systems before more learners returned in September. It was suggested the videos could be made to share with new students to provide reassurance that it was safe to attend College. In particular, management noted a concern raised that learners might need additional reassurance given the location of the coronavirus test centre. Management confirmed that communications to learners would address this;
- to use best practice from international educational establishments ahead of the UK in their experience of the pandemic; particularly where had returned to on-site learning;
- best practice from businesses could also be valuable. e.g. hands-free door handles, and e-learning safety packs. The Board noted that the College was already reviewing best practice shared by Leyland Trucks.

The Board noted the report on Planning for College Re-opening and endorsed the approach outlined, including the associated risk assessment. The Chair asked members to continue to email further feedback on the plans.

Resolved: The Board noted the report on Planning for College Re-opening and endorsed the approach outlined, including the associated risk assessment that discharged the legal responsibilities of the Board.

Actions:

Management to:

- review reference to the risk assessment matrix prior to publication;
- explore suggestions from members.

Members to continue to submit feedback and questions to the Clerk after the meeting.

4. Governance Matters

a) Board and Committee Membership

The Clerk presented her report on Governance Matters, dated June 2020. She reported that Mr Bassa would complete his third term of office on 8th July 2020 and asked the Board to extend this term by one day so that Mr Bassa could be invited to attend the Board meeting on 9th July 2020, subject to his availability.

The Board approved the extension of Mr Bassa's term of office by one day. In case Mr Bassa, was unable to attend in July, the Chair recorded his thanks to Mr Bassa on behalf of the Board for his contribution to the College over the last 12 years. The Principal and Chief Executive also paid tribute to Mr Bassa for his support and contribution.

Mr Bassa thanked members for their comments and confirmed he planned to attend the July Board meeting, subject to work commitments.

b) Government guidance on the phased wider opening of colleges

The Clerk referred members to links in her report to government guidance on the phased wider opening of colleges and in particular to a link to the Government's Guidance on "*Maintaining education and skills training provision: further education providers*" which had been published on 14th May 2020 and updated on 29th May 2020. The Clerk referred to a suggestion in this guidance that boards consider establishing a coronavirus governance and leadership group. The Clerk explained that, following discussions with the Chair and Principal and Chief Executive, she proposed that the Board instead continued with the governance approach and meeting timetable agreed at its meeting on 30th April 2020, which included additional virtual Board meetings of the full Board to discuss developments as required, supplemented with email updates and written resolutions.

The Chair highlighted the importance of the full Board retaining oversight of COVID-19 related developments. The Board agreed to continue with the governance timetable and arrangements approved on 30th April 2020.

c) Governance meetings until July 2020

The Board discussed a proposal to continue to hold governance meetings via Zoom until the end of the 2019/20 academic year. The Board discussed:

- the use of Zoom for Board and committee meetings had been successful to date;
- whether, from a leadership and perception perspective, it was important for governors to attend governance meetings on the College campus if some staff and students were expected to return;
- that for practical or health reasons, some governors might not be able to attend physical meetings in the short term and a teleconferencing option should continue to be available;
- members working away from home could also join physical governor meetings by teleconference which had successfully worked at a HE Sub-Committee meeting which had taken place before lockdown.

Following discussion, it was agreed to continue to hold governance meetings via teleconferencing in the short term and move to a hybrid solution, with the option of attending physically or via teleconference, as soon as it was considered safe and practical to do so.

d) Update on governor recruitment and the development of the Senior Post Holder Remuneration Committee

The Clerk gave an update on governor recruitment and the development of the Senior Post Holder Remuneration Committee. She reported that, as discussed at the previous meeting, the Board would be asked to approve the recommendations of the Search and Governance Committee in writing in order to meet deadlines.

Resolved: The Board:

- **approved the extension of the term of office of Mr Bassa by one day;**
- **noted the update on governance guidance on the phased wider opening of colleges and agreed to continue with the governance approach and meeting timetable agreed at its meeting on 30th April 2020;**
- **agreed to continue to hold governance meetings via teleconferencing in the short term but to move to hybrid meetings as soon as it was safe and practical to do so.**

5. Higher Education Update

Ms Haworth, Vice Principal Quality, Teaching, Learning and Learner Support presented her Higher Education Update report which outlined the current external factors impacting on the College's Higher Education provision and in particular the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ms Haworth made reference to:

- the external context of Higher Education provision within Further Education and the difficulties with predicting how the pandemic would affect HE numbers;
- the Student Loans Company (SLC) would profile the termly tuition fee payments to all providers to 50/0/50 (from the current 25/25/50) in the academic year 2020/21. This would increase payments to providers upfront, without the student incurring additional interest on their loans, or an increased liability if they withdraw;
- the government had announced plans for temporary and limited student number controls for domestic and EU students at English providers for the academic year 2020/21 to ensure a fair, structured distribution of students across providers;
- international students would be able to study in the UK in the academic year 2020/21. Higher Education providers would have flexibility in accommodating applicants' circumstances where possible. However, there were growing concerns in the Higher Education sector that the number of international students would be significantly lower than many university recruitment targets;
- the Office for Students (OfS), had implemented a temporary condition of registration, requiring English Higher Education providers to refrain from conduct which could have a material negative effect on the interests of students or the stability or integrity of the sector. This included using admissions tactics, such as the inappropriate use of unconditional offers, which put undue pressure on students or conduct with a view to gaining an unfair commercial advantage over other providers. Prior to this condition a number of College students had been given verbal unconditional offers for 2020/21;
- the OfS had also suspended all enhanced monitoring requirements currently in place for individual providers under F3. These included the requirement to publish an Access and Participation statement during the COVID pandemic period under the A2 Condition: Access and Participation statement. However, the College had submitted its Access and Participation statement to the OfS;

- the OFS had also suspended ongoing condition F1: transparency information the requirement to submit transparency information;
- during the pandemic, the Universities and awarding organisation Pearson were working to ensure that students were not delayed or impeded by the COVID-19 situation. The Universities had evoked 'Extraordinary Circumstances', to enable changes to be made to assessments and have adopted a 'No Detriment Policy', to ensure that students affected by COVID-19 were not disadvantaged whilst at the same time retaining the academic standing of the Universities. The Extenuating Circumstances processes at both UCLAN and Derby had also been streamlined for students who had been impacted by COVID-19;
- the College's 5 year partnership review with the University of Derby, Quality team had been rescheduled for October 2020 and would be conducted remotely;
- Higher Apprenticeship provision would move to standards from the 1st August 2020. The College was exploring the possibility of changing the awarding organisation for some of its Engineering provision and the rationale for this;
- the significant increase in the College's digital capabilities had quickly enabled students, business activities and enrolments to continue during the shutdown. The College had loaned laptops and dongles to students where required;
- on-line teaching had been received positively by students. The College would continue to embrace blended learning approaches to pedagogy for all students including its higher skills offer; and that virtual learning in some capacity will be a part of its curriculum delivery models for the foreseeable future;
- additional support provided for students from welfare, health and wellbeing perspectives including support for adult students from College counselling services;
- the OfS had issued guidance on student and consumer protection and the College must ensure it continued to offer a quality provision remotely and it offered what it could practically deliver.

Resolved: The Board noted the Higher Education Update report.

6. Any other business

There was no other business on this occasion.

7. Date of next meeting

It was noted that the next Board meeting would be held on Thursday 9th July 2020.

The meeting closed at 6.45pm.