

Minutes of the Strategy Meeting of the Corporation
held on Friday 6 March 2009
at the Mount Somerset Hotel
 (This meeting was rescheduled from 6 February 2009)

Action

Present:

Guy Adams	Chair, Foundation Member	Peter Avery	Principal
Jill Jeffreys	Parent Member	Paul Grant	Parent Member
John Peart	Student Member	Sue Popplewell	Staff Member
John Lockwood		Rob Setchell	Staff Member
Mary Tighe		Gill Turner	Foundation Member
David Wood	Foundation Member	Dominic Lynch	

In Attendance:

Jane Scott	Clerk to the Corporation	Tim Duffen	Vice Principal: Resources
James Staniforth	Vice Principal: 16-19 Studies	Martyn Owen	Faculty Director
John Abbott	Faculty Director	Chris Brossard	Director of Marketing
Paul Smith	Faculty Director	Steve Harrison	Assistant Principal
Ruth Walmsley	Personnel Director	Marc Webb	Director of Finance

The meeting opened at 1.49 pm and was quorate throughout.

PART 1: MEETING FORMALITIES**1. Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Shirlene Adam (Co-opted Member); Garry Charles; Hollie King; Matt Mears (Student Member); John Rudge; and Rosemary Viant.

Guy Adams formally welcomed members to the Strategy Meeting and thanked them for giving up their time to attend.

2. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of financial interest in the business of the meeting.

PART II: BUSINESS OF THE MEETING**1. Welcome and Introduction**

In setting the context of the meeting, the Principal noted that the College is facing a period of significant challenge and change. Such is the scale and pace of the issues affecting the sector generally, that the challenge is even greater than that at the time of Incorporation around 1992; at that time, the curriculum was not a significant part of the overall equation. Governors play a key role in these changing times, and it is necessary that they understand the changing landscape, the threats, and the opportunities afforded. Informed decisions will contribute to a positive way forward for the College. The College will be pleased to provide any governor with the information they require in order to develop their understanding of the changing environment.

2. The Challenge Ahead: local demographics, sixth form presumptions, the new Diplomas, and Apprenticeships

In consideration of demographic trends, members noted that the current local movement is a downward one, but which could be impacted on through migration and changes to the local environment, such as planned housing development, over the next period. Recent recruitment to the College mirrors the demographic achievement profile of students in the local area. However, in the coming period it will be necessary to ensure that prospective students receive the correct information in order to make properly informed choices about their options for study post-16. This is particularly important in the light of the choices they have in front of them, and changes taking place in educational provision both locally within Taunton Deane and in the wider catchment area of the College. The College currently recruits up to 50% of its students from outside the local catchment area. New sixth form presumptions may pose specific threats to recruitment at this College, and it is only through constant monitoring and appraisal of circumstances that the College will ensure that it fully understands the threats to its current position.

In respect of other sixth form presumptions in Taunton, the College is working with Heathfield School on development of provision in respect of dance/drama. Huish Episcopi school will be offering a limited curriculum post-16, working on the assumption that one hundred students per year will stay at the school. Richard Huish College currently recruits up to sixty students per annum from Huish Episcopi. Significant investment in Huish Episcopi will positively impact on science provision. Development of an Academy from the amalgamation of Saint Augustine's and Ladymead Schools will almost certainly provide post-16 provision, again impacting on the College.

Significant government investment in apprenticeships and the phased introduction of the new diplomas will contribute to the overall changes occurring in the curriculum at a national level. Existing curriculum provision is also scheduled for governmental review during the next period.

3. Meeting the Challenge: Evolving the Curriculum

The Corporation last gave significant review to College curriculum provision at its 2007 Strategy Meeting. Changes since that time mean that further significant review is necessary to ensure that the College continues to offer an optimal programme of study, responding to the needs of current students and longer term requirements for the continuing success of the College through recruitment of additional students. If the College is to embark upon a building programme to provide necessary state-of-the-art facilities for all students, it will be necessary to ensure that there is the requisite number of students to sustain the investment.

Target achievement at AS/A2 was possible in 2007-08, but similar achievement will be more difficult in 2008-09. Additionally, recruitment to AS/A2 courses will be impacted through changes at other schools in the local area. Retention from lower sixth to upper sixth has and may again also be significantly negatively impacted by results achieved at AS level.

In 2007, governors examined the International Baccalaureate (IB) programme in some detail. Since that time, it has proven nationally to be a niche qualification, not best suited to the needs of the Richard Huish College student. The breadth of study on offer at the College is in response to actual student need; the IB does not afford such breadth; take-up of IB provision would be minimal.

An increase in the number of AS/A2 level courses through provision of, say, photography and graphics courses will provide some additional students. Removal of limitations on course numbers will also go some way to increasing numbers, particularly relevant in the case of art and music courses.

The College has identified that provision of additional level two qualifications could potentially increase recruitment to the College at a significant level, complementing existing provision for students to undertake resit examinations in mathematics and English in order to meet College entrance criteria.

There is an identified cohort/profile of student applying to the College for whom acceptance is not possible because of failure to achieve appropriate success at GCSE.

Comparison with other successful sixth form colleges highlights the lack of provision at this College in respect of level 2 provision. Similar provision here would mean that potential students failing to achieve current entrance requirements would be offered the flexibility to come to the College and undertake a programme of study which would allow progress through to higher education from a lower starting point post-GCSE.

Programmes of study would be very much tailored to the individual needs of a student, encompassing level 2 study, enrichment subjects, and an appropriate mix of other work, including AS and study skills. Such a customised programme will be designed to progress over a three year period, with a student ultimately achieving at a level allowing access to higher education.

The full business and educational rationale for increased level 2 provision was supported by the following points:

- No additional staffing requirements
- Additional generation of income
- Possible to have new programmes of study in place at the start of the 2009-10 academic year
- There are already students identified in partner school for whom this type of programme would be eminently suitable
- It will strengthen the partnership with parents

Guy Adams proposed that provision of level 2 qualifications at the College be increased from September 2009 onwards. This was seconded by David Wood and agreed *nem con*.

4. Machinery of Government Changes and the New Sixth Form Sector

The recent Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning (ASCL) Bill sets out Government plans in respect of formation of a new sixth form sector. There is an implicit assumption that all current 93 sixth form colleges will move to join the new sector, with approximately 350 other FE colleges joining other sectors. The net result is that the new sixth form sector will be small; if the College joins the sector, it will be the single representative in Somerset. Administration of the sixth form sector will be delivered through the local authority, rather than direct between the College and funding agencies.

Pending further information and more working detail in respect of the ASCL Bill, members noted that a watching brief should be maintained in respect of this College's status and preferred sector. No immediate assumptions should be made in respect of registration with the sixth form sector pending full assessment of the implications for the longer term.

5. Meeting the Challenge: Evolving the 19+ Curriculum

The College retains less direct influence over the 19+ curriculum than the curriculum in respect of 16-19 students. Responding to local and national forces is a key element of success associated with this agenda.

Professional courses form the core business of the Faculty for Business and Professional Development, with progress routes for students assured at the College, particularly in respect of accountancy qualifications. LearnDirect has achieved high success rates, whilst Train to Gain activity has proven more difficult. Work Based Learning has experienced significant growth in 2008-09, but with significant top-slicing of income by a third party.

The College has already achieved considerable success in its partnership with the University of the West of England Foundation Degree. The College anticipates working with Plymouth Marjon from September 2009 and Heythrop College (University of London) from 2011 or 2012. The College will hold its first graduation ceremony during 2009.

Learning and Skills Council plans for the development of a Somerset University do not easily dovetail with provision already in existence in the area. It is unclear whether there will be a specifically designated building and title for the university.

The College will continue to review its provision and respond to opportunities available. This is particularly relevant in respect of Work Based Learning and Train to Gain opportunities.

Appointment of an Employer Responsiveness Manager has already resulted in significant improvements in activity, and it is anticipated that the benefits of additional funding and increased opportunity will be enjoyed in the longer term. Relaxation of Train to Gain rules will give individuals the option to undertake 'thin' programmes of study more tailored to individual requirement, rather than subscription to an unachievable 'thick' qualification. Opportunities for growth are in areas for which the College is equipped to provide courses; retail skills courses in particular will provide some exciting training opportunities.

Provision of accommodation at the College property at 48 South Road will provide an appropriate setting for activity associated with the Faculty for Business and Professional Development.

6. Report from the Finance and General Purposes Committee

The meeting noted that the project in respect of College property at 48 South Road had originally been planned as a two-phase one. The College had been in a position to consolidate its plans in respect of its requirements for teaching and administrative space, with the result that plans are now condensed into a single phase project. The meeting noted information in respect of voting to approve expenditure in the sum of £137 including VAT, up to a total of £160k including VAT with fixtures and fittings.

The Chair of Corporation had taken Chairman's action in respect of authorising the contract for works to commence, and the current meeting gave its formal approval to that action. This was proposed by Dominic Lynch, seconded by David Wood, and agreed *nem con*.

7. Formal Review of the Mission Statement

The meeting engaged in considerable discussion around the formulation of the mission statement, taking into account the decision of the current meeting to increase level 2 provision at the College and the significant impact which post-19 work has in attracting students/funding to the College. The meeting also noted the potential impact which creation of a new sixth form sector might have on the College and its status within the local community and its wider catchment area. Discussion about change included, *inter alia*, the change of 'workforce' and change to the specified age range.

Review of the mission statement was referred to the Search Committee in the first instance in order to progress the review in a coherent and informed manner and to fully engage all members of the Corporation.

Action: Clerk to Corporation to include review of the mission statement as an item of business at next meeting of the Search Committee

There was no other business.

The meeting closed at 6.03 pm.