



Shaping your future

Notes of the Richard Huish College Strategy Meeting

Part I

Held at Taunton Rugby Club

On Friday 21 January 2011 12.00 midday

Present:

Guy Adams	Chair	Present	Sue Popplewell	Staff Member	Present
Peter Avery	<i>Ex Officio</i> Member	Present	Oliver Price	Student Member	Present
Garry Charles	Member	Present	John Rudge	Member	Apologies
Jo Gill	Parent Member	Present	Jane Scott	Clerk to Corporation	Present
Ann Helsby	Member	Present	Rob Setchell	Staff Member	Present
Harry Hodgkin	Parent Member	Apologies	Gill Turner	Member	Present
Jill Jeffreys	Parent Member	Apologies	Mary Tighe	Member	Present
Hollie King	Member	Present	David Wood	Deputy Chair	Present
John Lockwood	Member	Present	Jonathan Langdon	Member	Present
Dominic Lynch	Member	Present	Lucy Yarde	Student Member	Apologies
John Abbott	Director: Curriculum and Quality	In attendance	Carole Melia	Director: Curriculum and Student Support	In attendance
Martyn Owen	Director: Curriculum and Operations	In attendance	Paul Smith	Director: Curriculum and Enrichment	In attendance
Paul Dampier	Director: Curriculum and Business Development	Apologies	Ruth Walmsley	Personnel Director	In attendance
Marc Webb	Director of Finance	In attendance	Chris Brossard	Director of Marketing	In attendance from 2.55 pm
Hana Duddridge	President, Student Council	In attendance by invitation	Simon Faull	Senior Adviser for Secondary Education, Somerset County Council	In attendance by invitation
Tim Duffen	Vice Principal: Resources	In attendance			

The meeting opened at 12.00 midday and was quorate throughout. The programme and papers for the meeting are appended to these notes. As the meeting was not a formal meeting of the Corporation with an agenda of items for consideration/decision, the following are notes of proceedings only.

The Principal and the Chair of Corporation welcomed governors, staff and guests to the planning meeting. The Regional Director of the Association of Colleges had been invited to chair the meeting, bringing significant extra input to the meeting through his considerable knowledge of both the College and the sector generally. It was noted that the College and the sector face a more challenging period than ever before in the history of sixth form colleges.

Work Force Planning for the Future: an employer's perspective

In receiving the presentation from one of the UK's leading five organisations engaged in waste, recycling and reprocessing, the following points of significance were noted in discussion:

- As a major player in its sector, Viridor struggles to recruit sufficient personnel with an appropriate skills level within the organisation. This includes all levels of workers, including technical, managers and unskilled workers. There is great potential to develop the opportunities offered by employment within the industry, with job security being a significant feature
- Whilst there is substantial long term investment in the waste management industry, the sector continues to suffer from a poor image generally, impacting on all aspects of training and recruitment. The industry is striving to rectify this imbalance
- Apprenticeships are seen as critical to both young people entering the industry, and existing employees, with significant potential to work closely with the education sector at all levels. The College noted that it has the facility to provide both local and satellite tailor-made training at all levels
- There is concern that many applicants/employees show a lack of basic numeracy and literacy skills
- It was recognised that there are a number of strategies which would be useful in assisting young people to move towards the working environment, and both Viridor and the College noted that there is potential in student sponsorship, work experience and mentoring and a willingness for these areas to be explored in more depth through close dialogue
- Whilst Viridor has to engage in a three year planning process, it also has to take a much longer term view, noting the skills gaps that will exist in a fifteen year planning period. The College must adopt a similar approach in trying to understand likely trends in addition to immediate needs

The New Adult Skills Landscape: the impact of recent funding and policy changes

The Skills Funding Agency noted the importance of its relationship with the College, and the significant contribution which the College makes in responding to the needs of the local community. An important element of Skills Funding Agency funding is the premise of 'progression' for learners.

- New funding/working arrangements should not be perceived as providing obstacles to the College achieving what it has already been achieving
- Funding priorities are changing, with the shared responsibilities for funding becoming the way forward - including the learner and the employer making contributions
- Development of workforce skills is fundamental to economic recovery
- Employer engagement is also fundamental to economic recovery, with employers having a responsibility to contribute to the costs of training
- Lifelong learning accounts are being introduced as an important means whereby skills of individuals can be progressively developed
- A 25% reduction in the adult skills budget means that the College will have to seek new ways of working, with the potential for collaboration and working in partnership with other colleges and training providers
- Apprenticeships are considered as intrinsic to ensuring the right workforce skills for economic recovery. The College must assess and respond to the needs of the unemployed, although only those on active benefit will qualify
- The availability of student loans at FE level will enable individual students to support themselves
- There is an attempt at aligning pre- and post-19 systems to try and simplify the funding system
- The College must ensure that it uses its funding at delivering what the local community needs

- In discussion of the potential £500k minimum contract value, it was asserted that the College must ensure that it engages with other providers and other stakeholders to maximise from the growth of employer funding in particular. Examples such as the Probation Service and Job Centre Plus were cited. The flexibilities of the new funding system will help underpin new collaborative relationships
- The meeting was warned that the number of colleges falling into poor financial health will grow. It is essential that financial analysis of the next four year planning period underpins College plans
- The Skills Funding Agency will itself be subject to a reduction in its funding, meaning that there will be fewer staff to engage with the College in the target setting process
- Where there is a market failure, the Skills Funding Agency will intervene. However, with fewer providers there will be the potential for larger contracts. Mergers between colleges will no longer be assisted by a Skills Funding Agency budget for the process. Closer working between colleges, such as through the sharing of administrative costs, will secure savings
- Leadership and governance are critical in the long term planning process which should retain the needs of the local community as pivotal to the discussion

Recent Changes to 16-18 Funding: the implications for Richard Huish College

The Young Peoples' Learning Agency (YPLA) noted the importance of the College being proactive in addressing the planning needs of the next four-year period. An important element of planning considerations is the raising of the school leaving age.

- In the period ahead, local authorities will not be funding but shaping the quality of provision for young people in their area
- The link/relationship between the local authority and providers is important, but colleges and providers can decide what their curriculum offer will be
- The provider decision about the curriculum offer must be made in the knowledge that there is currently an oversupply of 16-18 places, and that funding has increased by 90% in the last few years, with only a 16% increase in the number of learners
- Apprenticeships in respect of 16-18s are being reduced by 2%
- All providers, including schools, will be affected by the changes to entitlement funding
- There will be no financial protection moving forward to 2013-2014
- It is critical that governors challenge and support the planning process

A higher education perspective on HE-FE partnerships in the current policy context and implications for strategic planning

- The higher education sector will not receive its funding information until March. There will also be a higher education White Paper at this time. The impact on student numbers will become known at this time
- The changing landscape of the education sector will mean that FE providers will become competitors in a new way. However, it is hoped that Richard Huish College will still wish to work in partnership with the University of the West of England, with the College an important site for higher education in Somerset and a valued small partner

Panel Discussion

- The panel was advised about the implications of the curtailment of the enrichment programme due to the cut in entitlement funding. In responding, the YPLA noted that funding is being re-balanced to release more funding to the disadvantaged. It is essential that the College reviews the overall package of what it offers, seeking alternative ways of doing things. Flexibility must be built-in to planning considerations. Universities and colleges must work in partnership to prepare young people for university; development of dialogue with College university links will be an important aspect of this process. The College must also look at all its activities collectively, profiting from any opportunities for one activity to subsidise another, such as through adult fee income subsidising 16-18 activity.

- In seeking guidance from the Panel about how partnerships can be sustained in a highly competitive environment, the SFA noted that the College must begin to work with other schools and to seek collaboration with other colleges and higher education institutions. The YPLA noted that a number of colleges are already acting as sponsors to academies and that this avenue must be investigated. Some colleges are already investigating shared services and this is an option which the College must pursue. It is critical that the College decides where it will position itself in the market.

The University of the West of England noted that it engages in a significant range of relationships, and that such relationships are equally important for the College. The College relationship with UWE is strong, in no small part due to the geographical location of the two institutions; they are not geographical competitors. There is no place for duplication of provision within a community, and opportunities to show leadership in the community must be seized. There has been some interest in the formation of university technical schools within Somerset, with some government funding set aside.

Whilst there has been some immediate provision in respect of capital funding, it is not anticipated that this will be sustained through the period of the spending review.
- The meeting sought guidance about how a failing college and its students might be supported financially. The SFA will try and identify those colleges at risk, but it was emphasised that there is no automatic financial assistance available. In the first instance, loan facilities may be offered, or merger investigated. If there is no satisfactory solution to ensure that the College moves out of financial hardship, the College will be closed and its students sent elsewhere. The SFA would wish to work closely with governing bodies to ensure that provision in local communities is maintained, particularly in rural areas.

The YPLA noted that the learners would be the first concern, trying to ensure continuity of provision. Protection of public money is also a priority. There is as yet no practical experience of a failing school sixth form, or key local provider.

The meeting was advised that the College must be self-critical in recognising what it does well and less well, and ensuring that this information is incorporated into planning now.
- The Panel was asked to give its view about whether the government might change its mind in respect of the curtailment of Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). The YPLA noted that there is as yet no clear decision about what kind of provision will take the place of EMA. The case of students who will not receive EMA for their second year of study is to be reviewed. The Panel was advised of the importance of young people knowing at an early juncture what the alternative arrangements to EMA will be. The Panel applauded the fact that the student voice had been heard, and hoped that new provision will address many of the issues created by the cessation of EMA.
- The College sought an assurance about the possibility for a continuing direct relationship with the SFA, rather than a relationship directed via the YPLA. There was an assurance that discussion is still in progress but that it is impossible to entirely separate the work of the two agencies - there has to be some overlap. In summary, it was noted that Richard Huish College's primary relationship will be with the YPLA, but that it is essential that the College continues to engage with the SFA.

In summary, the Principal advised members that work in progressing the Development Plan will continue with an added impetus at committee level during the following weeks, leading up to the second Strategy Meeting to be held on Friday 1 April 2011.

The meeting closed at 5.19 pm.