

SOUTH WEST COLLEGE GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of a meeting of the **Staffing Committee**
held on Wednesday 8 December 2021 at 9.00 am
via Microsoft Teams

PRESENT: Mr Colin Lewis (Interim Chief Executive)
Mrs Patricia McCaffrey
Mrs Gillian McDowell (Committee Chair)
Mrs Monica McGeary (*from item 6.3.1*)
Mr Michael Skuce

IN ATTENDANCE: Dr Jill Cush, Deputy Chief Executive
Mrs Carol Anne Deeny, Acting Head of Human Resources
Mrs Fiona McCauley, Secretary to the Governing Body
Mr Ciaran McManus, Assistant Chief Executive, Industry
Partnerships & Centres for Excellence (*Item 7.0 only*)
Dr Nicholas O'Shiel, Chair of the Governing Body

1.0 APOLOGIES

It was noted that all members were present.

2.0 CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS

No conflict of interest declarations were made.

3.0 SAFEGUARDING

No safeguarding matters were raised.

4.0 MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 04 Minutes of the Staffing Committee meeting held on Wednesday 29 September 2021.

There were no matters arising.

5.0 KEY STRATEGIC ISSUES

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 05.01 Key Strategic Issues
- Paper 05.02 Key Strategic Issues Management Update.

Mr Lewis began by acknowledging his appreciation to Mrs Deeny for undertaking the role of Acting Head of Human Resources during the absence of the Head of Human Resources. With reference to paper 05.02, he noted his assumption that the management update on the Committee's key strategic issues had been read by members and proceeded to provide further updates by exception.

5.1 Covid-19 Recovery & Resilience

Mr Lewis reported that whilst an increase in Covid-19 transmission rates has been evidenced generally, a similar trend has not been evidenced within the College community. He provided assurances that all mitigations continue to be robustly applied and that no plans are in place to deviate from current teaching models.

5.2 Review of Culture & Structure

Mr Lewis explained that discussions with DfE's Permanent Secretary and other senior officials have led to a proposal to develop a transformation programme for the College and listed the potential strands of this programme. He commented on his concerns regarding the adequacy of the resourcing of the College's business support services and on the importance of undertaking a review of these areas.

5.3 Erne Project

Mr Lewis reflected on the success of the development of the Erne Campus to date and advised that adequate resources must be made available to ensure that the anticipated benefits are realized.

6.0 MANAGEMENT REPORT

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 06 Management Report
- Paper 06.01 Health, Safety and Wellbeing Report
- Paper 06.02 Equality Update
- Paper 06.03 Black FE Leaders Sector Group - Summary Report
- Paper 06.04 2020-21 Equality Progress Report
- Paper 06.05 Staff Resource Report
- Paper 06.06 Fixed-Term Contracts Report
- Paper 06.07 Sickness Absence Report
- Paper 06.08 Sector Absence Stats Benchmarking (confidential).

6.1 Health, Safety & Wellbeing

Ref: Management Report Section 1.0 and Paper 06.01

Mrs Deeny re-iterated the comments made by Mr Lewis regarding Covid-19 transmission rates and mitigations and added that an increase in demand for Lateral Flow Testing devices is anticipated in light of the government's introduction of a requirement for a Covid-19 vaccine passport or a negative lateral flow test to access hospitality venues.

She went on to report on the uptake of the College's flu vaccination programme, advise that resilience workshops for staff have been organised and explain that crisis interventions have been provided by Inspire to support students and staff through two difficult events.

6.2 Equality

Ref: Management Report Section 2.0 and Papers 06.02, 06.03 & 06.04

Mrs Deeny provided an overview of the contents of the 2020-21 Equality Progress Report which demonstrates the College's commitment to its equality and good relations responsibilities and sought approval for its submission to the Equality Commission. She also apprised the meeting of the recent sectoral meetings held with

the Black FE Leaders Group with a view to establishing an affiliation to support the aims of the group.

AGREED: that a recommendation is made to the Governing Body to approve the 2020-21 Equality Progress Report for submission to the Equality Commission.

6.3 Human Resources

6.3.1 Appointments

Ref: Management Report Section 3.1 and Paper 06.05

Mrs Deeny quantified the number of staff appointments made since the September 2021 committee meeting and commented on the associated workload.

AGREED: that the appointments listed in paper 06.05 be ratified by the Chair of the Governing Body on behalf of the Governing Body.

Mrs McGeary joined the meeting at this juncture.

6.3.2 Staff Requests

Ref: Management Report Section 3.1 and Paper 06.05

Mrs Deeny provided background information on the staff requests listed in paper 06.05 and sought approval for an additional staff request for a Project Researcher for the Ecosurety Project for a six month period.

In response to questions, the Committee was made aware of the circumstances of the vacancies in the MIS / Data Services Manager and Technical Services Manager positions and was advised that backfill is required for a two year period in both cases. Members then discussed the difficulty in attracting candidates due to workload demands within some posts, the temporary nature of many positions and a lack of engagement in related social media adverts. The Committee also discussed the challenges in recruiting to technical areas and suggested that support options are explored which may allow the Technical Services Manager to remain in his post. Mr Lewis undertook to raise the implications on resourcing of DfE's requirement for more frequent data returns with the Principals' group and DfE and Dr Cush undertook to work with the Human Resources team to develop a procedure for identifying posts which may be offered on a permanent basis.

AGREED: that the staff requests listed in paper 06.05 as well as that verbally reported above be approved by the Chair of the Governing Body on behalf of the Governing Body.

6.3.3 Resignations

Ref: Management Report Section 3.1 and Paper 06.05

The resignations listed in paper 06.05 were noted by the Committee.

6.3.4 Other Resourcing Issues

Ref: Management Report Section 3.1 and Paper 06.05

Mrs Deeny referenced the recommendations made in section 4 of the Staff Resource Report. She added that requests for an increase in hours to 36 hours per week had been also received by a member of the MIS team as well as a member of the Finance team and that approval of these requests would help to ease pressures in these areas.

Regarding the proposal listed to appoint an Acting Assistant Chief Executive (Learner Experience & Digital Transformation), Mr Lewis acknowledged the need for this post but explained that an appointment to this position may be premature in light of DfE's proposal to develop a transformation programme for the College. Dr O'Shiel commented on the positive engagement held with DfE and advised that it would be prudent to hold back on making an appointment to this position at this time.

AGREED: that the recommendations made in this section of the Staff Resource Report, as well as that verbally reported above, be noted / supported as appropriate, with the exception of the Acting Assistant Chief Executive (Learner Experience & Digital Transformation) proposal, which will not be recruited at this time.

6.3.5 Fixed Term Contracts

Ref: Management Report Section 3.1 and Paper 06.06

Mrs Deeny provided details on the rationale for each of the fixed-term contract recommendations made in paper 06.06.

AGREED: that the fixed term contracts proposals detailed paper 06.06 be ratified by the Chair of the Governing Body on behalf of the Governing Body.

6.3.6 Performance Management

Ref: Management Report Section 3.2 and Papers 06.07 & 06.08

Mrs Deeny drew attention to the 4.14% overall sickness absence rate for the College in the 2021/22 academic year to date. She observed that this represents an increase when compared to the same period in 2020/21 but noted that last year's rate had been exceptionally low due to the large number of staff working from home. She also referenced the sectoral sickness absence statistics for 2020/21 provided in paper 06.08. Mr Lewis commented on the College's good performance with regard to sickness absences and on the effectiveness of related policies.

In response to a question on absences due to work related stress, Mrs Deeny advised that three such absences had occurred, that a range of support options are available to staff suffering from stress and that suitable interventions are put in place to address the cause of work related stress in each reported case.

In response to a question on the variances in sickness absence rates within departments, Mrs Deeny explained that most absences are short-term and that a reminder has been issued to staff on the need for return to work interviews for absences in excess of three days. The Committee Chair requested that a report on return to work interviews is provided at the February 2022 committee meeting.

6.4 Other

Ref: Management Report Sections 4.0 & 5.0

The updates provided in the Management Report on workforce development, payroll and the sectoral recruitment and retention scheme were referenced.

7.0 RESOURCE PLANNING AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT IN THE CENTRES FOR EXCELLENCE

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 07 Resource Planning and Workforce Development in the Centres for Excellence.

Mr Ciaran McManus, Assistant Chief Executive (Industry Partnerships & Centres for Excellence) joined the meeting for this item.

Mr McManus began his presentation by referencing the declining enrolments to further education provision across the sector and went on to identify DfE's '10x Economy' strategy and emerging skills strategy as the key documents influencing the College's future provision and advise that these strategies have informed the College's new Industry Support Strategy. He detailed the indicative development priorities for each school and commented on the need to recruit and / or upskill staff to acquire the skills required to deliver on these priority areas. He acknowledged the benefits of collaborations with specialist partners to achieve this objective, listed the partnerships in place and spoke of the structured approach to workforce development adopted.

In response to a question on the introduction of a level 4 Certificate in Healthcare Practice course, Mr McManus provided information on the target students and anticipated start date and noted the potential to offer an Open University Nursing degree as a progression to this course. It was suggested that an alternative route to Nursing would be welcome but that the feasibility of the proposal would require close scrutiny given the capital and resource investment required.

In response to a question on the identification and approval for strategic projects, Mr McManus explained that strategic projects are developed on the basis of government strategy and recognized skills gaps. He added that internal analysis is undertaken before presentation to the Education, Quality & Performance Committee and the Governing Body.

Mr McManus was thanked for his presentation and withdrew from the meeting at this juncture.

8.0 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS

No further business was raised.

9.0 REVIEW OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 09 Outstanding Actions.

It was noted that the sectoral sickness absence statistics had been provided as requested. A revised list of outstanding actions is provided in Appendix A.

The meeting went into confidential session.

**CONFIRMED AND ADOPTED BY THE GOVERNING BODY AT A MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY
12 JANUARY 2022**

CHAIRMAN _____

DATE _____

SUMMARY OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

Meeting Date	Minute Ref	Action
08/12/2021	6.3.2	Mr Lewis undertook to raise the implications on resourcing of DfE's requirement for more frequent data returns with the Principals' group and DfE.
08/12/2021	6.3.2	Dr Cush undertook to work with the Human Resources team to develop a procedure for identifying posts which may be offered on a permanent basis.
08/12/2021	6.3.6	A report on return to work interviews to be provided at the February 2022 committee meeting.