

**THE FURTHER EDUCATION CORPORATION OF MIDDLESBROUGH COLLEGE  
CONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE  
21 FEBRUARY 2024**

**PRESENT:** M McClintock (Chair and CG), P Lynn (CG), R Davies (CG), L Wood (CG), Z Lewis (Principal).

Student Reps: Y Hussain and L Thomas.

Officers: Z Foster (Head of Governance), J Laidlaw (HE Quality, Data and Policy Manager), L McKenna (HE Quality, Recruitment and Student Support Manager), B Robinson (Deputy Principal), O Rodley (Vice Principal), and P Stone (Director of Higher Education).

**KEY:** CG – College Governor

**1. Apologies for Absence – none.**

Introductions were made for new Committee member L Woods and new student reps Y Hussain and L Thomas. L McKenna and J Laidlaw were also welcomed.

**2. Declarations of Interest**

It was noted that R Davies' daughter was Head of Marketing and PR at the Open University.

**3. Unconfirmed Minutes of 15 February 2023 – were approved as a correct record.**

**4. Matters Arising not on the Agenda**

M McClintock asked for an update in relation to the 20 new HE staff who had joined at the start of the year. P Stone confirmed that they had been fully supported by both the HE office and their team members.

**5. Principal's Verbal Overview and Risk Summary**

Z Lewis outlined the following as key considerations for the meeting: Staff (number one risk); qualification reform at L3 and potential effect on progression to HE programmes; Lifelong Learner Loan entitlement (which may give more flexibility in the future); Policy shifts (e.g. Year Zero courses); and the new TEF criteria which disadvantages many HE courses the College runs.

There was a verbal update on the Open University (OU) validations conditions and how this might be addressed.

**6. Higher Education Update**

M McClintock outlined the split of the agenda which would primarily focus on two areas i) current (including student voice) and ii) strategic (recruitment, landscape etc).

**06.1 Current Issues**

P Stone gave an overview of the main current issues including recruitment (which has slightly exceeded its target); staffing (specifically the high number of new staff and associated challenges and benefits, and staff development); and B3 data challenges in relation to progression despite providing relevant student destination outcomes.

**06.2 Student Voice**

L Thomas and Y Hussain were introduced to the Committee (HE Representatives). Both student reps gave a comprehensive and positive overview of their experiences throughout their time at the College be that through the courses, other students and the support of tutors. Minor areas of improvement were raised including electrical vehicle charging.

Discussion included: the benefits of the flexible approach to many of the courses for the wide-ranging number of HE students (which student reps confirmed was of significant value); the progression model

used within the College; lifelong learner loan; B3 data - lobbying and how this might be improved both through LSIP and sharing of good practice with other colleges who have found this easier and gained higher TEF status, and potential change/additions to data in relation to careers guidance and destinations; the Higher Technical qualification development; wider benefits of being at the College (including provision of laptops, childcare etc.); the effect of the possibility of stopping the benefit of 25% reduction on Council Tax for HE students by the LA (further clarification would be sought); the Student Union for HE students; and information on a pilot module for some courses to support progression.

M McClintock thanked the student representatives for their input into the detail of HE student experience at the College.

## 7. HE Strategy Report

P Stone detailed the declining trend across the sector and how the College had modestly bucked that trend citing the various activities which had taken place to support this increase (including marketing campaigns, school visits, monitoring). He outlined the university application situation generally with a shift of students applying later for UCAS (nationally and locally).

Discussion included: feedback on why students were applying later (several reasons including seeking higher apprenticeship route first); the issue of higher apprenticeship vacancies more widely (fewer); and the importance of strong careers guidance.

**07.1 Progress against HE Strategy** was discussed including: future ambition to grow HE numbers and how attainable this was; ensuring that the provision was meeting the needs of employers with feedback suggesting it was (particularly the two year plus top up model) and the aim to increase employer engagement through a variety of means (including employer boards) starting with the next HE Conference where this was a main focus; Access to HE viability, including challenges and remodelling of the programme nationally for September and competition with University Foundation programmes and an increased market for online versions; the viability of a mixed offer (online, academic, vocational); the improvements of the NSS student score (other than SU); and how the Student Union was used within the College (and how this differed from universities) and how this could be adapted to make it higher profile for those students who wished to use it.

### 07.2 HE Fees Update

P Stone gave the background highlighting that fees had not been amended since 2019 despite increases in costs within the provision over that time.

A full discussion ensued which considered: benchmarking with other Colleges (generally and locally) and the complexities of this; the reasoning for the fees policy currently set; potentially greater number of funding support mechanisms such as bursaries where appropriate should there be future increases; and the timing of any changes with the Committee **agreeing** that now would not be appropriate due to the significant number of pressures people were already under.

The student reps were asked whether the level of course fees affected their choice of HE provider. Both said it had no impact at all and they were more concerned with getting the right course and level of support. Student reps did suggest that eliciting student views on the potential impact of any revisions would be important.

It was **confirmed** that any increase in fees would be for 2025-2026 but for this to take effect decisions would have to be approved by summer 2024.

It was **agreed** that this would be introduced to governors during the summer term with any planning shared amongst the Committee if required.

## 8. Terms of Reference and Related Matters

M McClintock outlined that the role of the Committee in relation to academic standards/governance and the role of the Academic Board may need further consideration particularly in light of the recent Open University revalidation which raised this.

Discussion included: the appropriate timing of reviewing the role of the Committee and Board with agreement that this be summer at the earliest with any agreed changes to the structure for 2024-2025; the

possibility of a set up where the Academic Board fed into the HE Committee on a more regular basis (be this via two or three meetings of the Committee); how Curriculum and Standards Committee would fit in as HE was within most provision areas across the College so a strategic overview in that Committee would be useful (including ensuring that the Chair of Curriculum and Standards be an ex-officio member of the HE Committee); and the quality assurance system (which was provision based with HE in most of the provision areas).

It was **agreed** that this required some more detailed thinking particularly as curriculum planning was ongoing currently. The Committee **agreed** that a proposal would be drafted for consideration at the May Strategy Day which would include any governance changes and any fees policy proposals. **Action** – that the proposals be shared with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee in advance of the Strategy Day.

**9. Committee Review of Top Risks**

It was agreed that these remained as per item 5.

**10. Date of Next Meeting**

To be confirmed once a proposal for the governance model had been determined (though it was likely to keep a February meeting in as part of the cycle).

**11. Any other Urgent Business**

None taken

*The meeting closed at 2.25pm*