

**THE FURTHER EDUCATION CORPORATION OF MIDDLESBROUGH COLLEGE  
CONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EMPLOYER VOICE COMMITTEE  
22 JANUARY 2025**

**PRESENT:** S Lane (Chair) (CG), I Anwar (CG), D Lusardi (CG), (CG), Z Lewis (Principal/CEO), B Murphy (CG), M Wells (CG).

Officers: J Barwell (AP), P Blewitt (AP), J Cadwallender (DH of Registry), P Donnelly (AD), Z Foster (Head of Governance), R Gray (AP), N James (App Recruitment Manager), K Hawking (Head of Work Experience), G Potts (VP), B Robinson (Deputy Principal), O Rodley (VP), M Telling (Group Business Development Director), P Watt (AP), C Yule (AP).

**KEY:** CG College Governor VP Vice Principal AP – Assistant Principal  
AD Associate Director DH Deputy Head

1. **Apologies for Absence** – R Anderson and D Dodds. B Murphy would be leaving the meeting at 2.30pm.

Beverley Murphy and Mark Wells were welcomed to the Committee.

2. **Declarations of Interest** - none declared.

3. **Unconfirmed Minutes of 26 June 2024** – were approved as a correct record.

4. **Matters Arising** – most matters arising were already addressed/ within the reports for the meeting.  
**04.1 Employer Feedback Areas for Improvement Action Plan** – all actions within the plan were now complete.

**5. The College Client Management (CRM) Approach Overview**

G Potts gave a comprehensive presentation on how the College was looking after its employers and how the benefits to and from employers could be maximized. He spent time detailing the segmentation approach; how the College was developing its understanding of employer needs to create a customised offer and outlined the dedicated account teams working with employers. The importance of regular communications was also highlighted and the specific expectations depending upon the different categories, including the development of feedback systems to ensure continuous improvement. Additional benefits/value added services to enhance the employer experience and develop longer term relationships were also detailed. Finally, the performance tracking mechanisms being developed stemming from the CRM system were outlined.

Governors queried whether employers knew which category they were in (not currently) and the benefits of sharing this was discussed; how the CRM data was being built up/cleansing and future possibility of comparing with a third party data set; identification of 'inbound' and 'outbound' clients, and tracking and relevant marketing related to this; CRM training for employer facing team and plans to roll out to wider College staff; the value of annual training needs analysis with employers; the customised offer for each of the categories of employer; feedback mechanisms; detail of some of the value added areas (e.g. with Thirteen Group); how an employer could become a platinum employer and how this might be recognised in the future; the complexities currently with full atomisation of the system; signposting to support businesses; and potential to develop employers to higher levels of categories in the future.

The Committee acknowledged the huge progress with the CRM system over the past six months.

**6. Employer Voice – how we collect it**

G Potts appraised the Committee of the current ways the College employed to collect Employer Voice feedback, with the plan to have all feedback recorded on the CRM system going forward.

R Gray also detailed the Microsoft form feedback which had launched in January for employers at the end of the BELPS/similar programmes, the outcomes of which would be fed back at the next meeting.

The Committee discussed what else the College could do including: meeting students for Industrial placements before they start their placements to help with the social aspect of settling in; the social skill benefit of work placements themselves; the possible benefit of a revolving Chair for advisory boards to ensure better representation; the varying approaches to the advisory boards; and network building value of the advisory boards and possible LinkedIn groups.

Actions:

- For M Wells and K Hawking to meet re work placement visits

- For S Lane (and other committee members if they so wish) to drop into other advisory boards over the year
- Engineering Advisory Board/other Advisory Boards to revolve Chair between College and employers

## 7. Apprenticeship Recruitment – Sign up and Onboarding Process – how could we remove waste?

P Donnelly detailed the initial employer meeting for the Committee drawing particular attention to the full training needs analysis which formed a pivotal part of the revamped process, which would also include reviewing the SLAs.

Questions and discussion included: clarification that it would be the apprenticeship recruitment team who would check that the employer can provide the complexity of tasks for L3 students (and if uncertain would liaise with the delivery team); how job role/duties should support the standard and assistance for employers to understand this; how any gaps can be filled including through the IAG, discussions with the delivery team and standard delivery plans (templates of which were being finalised); and use of the CRM to store data in a single space.

Candidate Recruitment Process – the process was detailed for the Committee including the use of the in-house compliance team who cross check all starts and mandatory sign-ups (with the hope that this could be moved to an electronic signature system in the future).

Sign up Process – after a general overview of the process, it was confirmed that the College did as much as possible for and with the employer to ensure both compliance and efficiency.

The Committee discussed the varying sign up timelines for the different cohorts and how this might be streamlined including ensuring a comprehensive training plan which detailed any gaps, day release, communications etc.

## 8. Sector Intelligence Sharing on current trends and Business Cycles

**Health** - B Murphy updated (ahead of leaving after Item 6) in respect of nursing generally where the national position was that applications had dropped off. Locally, Teesside University which usually ran 2 courses and cohorts (Sept and February) with 250 applications, was down in September with no February cohort running at all. Discussion took place on the significance of this in relation to employing from the local community and the overall perception of nursing as a career.

The specialisms of mental health and learning disabilities were discussed in light of significant increases in both with confirmation that these elements had been incorporated into programmes across all levels over the past 12 months.

The excellent progression route for nursing was detailed particularly at degree level and ways of considering mental health nursing (including adult retraining) were discussed more widely. **Agreed** that B Murphy would meet with A Waller Amos in relation to Access to HE prospectus input.

**Digital /local business** – I Anwar outlined the common holding pattern for local businesses till March in order to assess the impact of the NI and Living Wage increases. In relation to technology organisations, there was also the wider USA based considerations.

D Lusardi also outlined some nervousness amongst service based digital companies in respect of the challenges of NI and also AI. Conversely, product based businesses had strong plans for growth.

**Engineering** - M Wells drew particular attention to the green focus for organisations and associated upskilling of staff. In addition, there was the consideration of succession planning for an aging workforce. He cited bootcamps as being particularly effective in supporting some of these areas.

S Lane spoke of a worried perspective for Engineering and Manufacturing more widely in respect of investment decisions. Additionally, employment changes (not just NI), such as first day employment rights and issues such as redundancy, less training and apprenticeship investment were giving rise to greater uncertainty.

The impact of the national changes on family owned businesses was also discussed.

It was agreed that the April spending review would be critical for all organisations.

Z Lewis outlined the optimistic views that a recent focus group of construction and engineering students had presented which was contrary to the employer perspective.

## 9. VP Update

### 9.1 Overview of Apprenticeship Recruitment

M Telling updated the Committee on the challenges within the first quarter of the year which had resulted in lower recruitment, and of the latest status which was back in line with budget with a more positive Q2.

The Committee discussed: whether targets/predications were accurate and how the balance was maintained within standard September starts and roll on/roll off programmes; and the specifics in relation to September 2024 for Engineering and reduction of apprenticeships at short notice from larger companies and postponement of decisions by smaller organisations, all of which would be considered through the curriculum planning process.

## **9.2 Overview of Work Experience Placements**

K Hawking presented a positive position for 2<sup>nd</sup> year T Level students and gave an update on Tier 1 1<sup>st</sup> year students where placements were taking a little longer (but would be completed by February half term). She drew attention to new flexibilities from the DfE in relation to industry placement delivery guidance which would help achieve placement numbers (including more scope for hybrid placements and small team projects).

It was confirmed that placements could be all year round but agreed that there could be additional communications to ensure that all employers knew this.

Clarification was given in respect of sports and recreation decrease in numbers which was due to both fewer students and employer opportunities.

## **9.3 Strategic Employer Developments**

M Telling detailed developments which included the new CRM, the Engineering Scholarship Programme (which it was hoped could be extended), the Apprenticeships Awards and forthcoming events.

G Potts also highlighted the College's involvement in the Net Zero Teesside Scholarship.

It was confirmed that the Scholarship Programme could be recruited earlier going forward to enable companies to have students from September.

## **9.4 Adult Skills Innovation**

R Gray detailed areas of innovation in respect of provision of bespoke qualifications and bootcamps for employers in a changing landscape and highlighted two recent examples of success.

## **9.5 Emerging Themes from Employer Advisory Boards**

M Telling outlined the shared challenges in respect of NI and minimum wage for businesses (already discussed in the meeting). Additionally, he shared that Advisory Boards were generally pleased with the provision offer and engagement through the Boards was high. He also gave an update in respect of implementation of the LSIP Action Plan, with investment in green energy, construction and health facilities and equipment. Over coming months there would be further networking and employer led discussions to inform provision and support.

## **10. Governor Reflections and Board Membership**

Governors discussed any additional areas which might be discussed at the next meeting **agreeing** that clear KPIs (where possible) to support monitoring would be useful.

Governors were impressed with the level of progress, and it was confirmed that the ongoing development of the CRM was central to future planning and decision making.

Action by S Lane – to send an email to Committee members (as this time) ahead of the next meeting (after Easter) re any further reflections/areas of note.

Action by all Committee members – in addition to above, at any point to contact G Potts/S Lane in respect of any trends/emerging areas/changes

## **11. Time and Date of Next Meeting**

To be confirmed – June 2025

## **12. Any other Urgent Business**

None taken

*The meeting closed at 4pm*