

**THE FURTHER EDUCATION CORPORATION OF MIDDLESBROUGH COLLEGE
CONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE
10 DECEMBER 2024**

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

Officers: Z Foster (Head of Governance), L McKenna (Deputy Director – University Centre), B Robinson (Deputy Principal), O Rodley (Vice Principal), and P Stone (Director of Higher Education).

KEY: CG – College Governor

1. Apologies for Absence – J Laidlaw, both student reps - N Winn and E Fryett.

It was **agreed** that the detail of the meeting would be shared with student reps by P Stone/L McKenna.

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 21 February 2024 – were approved as a correct record.

4. Matters Arising not on the Agenda

It was confirmed that student (and reps) had been consulted re the changes to the HE Governance model.

P Stone gave a positive update on the changes in action notably the revised Academic Board meetings, a report of which would be on the agenda for the next meeting.

5. Principal's Verbal Overview and Risk Summary

Z Lewis outlined the following as key considerations for the meeting:

- Awarding Degree Powers - the OfS had informed colleges that there would be a delay of new awarding powers until next summer at the earliest. The HE department would keep working on this in the background for the time being to ensure the College was ready if and when required.
- Enrolment – this was lower than predicted which was having an knock on effect on class sizes. Within the Financial Plan, as a result of the increase to fees next year, the income trajectory was largely the same. Whether all institutions can apply the fee increase from 2025 is in question as it could represent a breach of CMA guidance. Z Lewis outlined the potential effects for the College (and wider FE sector) should fees be capped (including the potential withdrawal of Universities from delivering foundation years)
- Staff Pressures including succession planning.
- Student progress – with fewer T Level students progressing onto the Higher Technical qualifications (more preferring degree courses).

6. Business Planning Update

P Stone gave an overview of enrolment and the impact on the department which included:

- The three year forecast outlined a flat line. The 9% shortage for funded student recruitment for the College was replicated across the country
- Within the College 5 out of 10 departments did not meet their target with the remaining 5 exceeding their targets
- There was a progression impact on the choices made by T Level students this year and there had been immediate adaptations to the information shared with T Level students for the forthcoming year
- Due to the increase in fees from 2025-26 academic year the financial impact of enrolment had been mitigated

P Stone then detailed the key factors affecting the variances within enrolment for the Committee.

Discussion and questions included: use of employer networks/forums to increase visibility of HE particularly in light of Higher Apprenticeships and use of Apprenticeship Levy and in the future the modular funding system (not yet in operation); current widespread advertising within the Tees Valley part time courses guide; whether the flexibility of HE courses was sufficient for current needs of future students (including the small number of evening run courses) with L McKenna giving an update in relation to two programmes which were currently considering such variations (Health and Care and Engineering); clarification on the reasons for the declining numbers last year (the first year this had occurred) including detail on visa related issues; detail of the 5 areas which had not recruited to target and

the proposed consideration annually through Academic Board to assist course recruitment was kept on track where possible; early positive indications on applications for the forthcoming year which were significantly up; whether individual careers interviews were given for Level 3/T Level students to promote HE (it being confirmed that this was part of the careers curriculum).

Action for P Stone to reconsider projected drop out rate figure in the report.

M McClintock summarised the actions from the discussion to be picked up in reports for April meeting:

- More detail on actions from the College on how it would maintain and enhance the application pipeline going forward
- Of the small percentage of students who came in externally to the College (i.e. not through progression), areas of potential areas of development which could be explored and an update on that (e.g. possible extension of evening classes, future potential; any relevant gaps in the market etc).

7. Student Voice

P Stone outlined the reasoning for the last minute student rep absence.

He then detailed a very productive picture of regular student feedback. Key issues for students had focussed on carparking and café menu choices. They were very positive on teaching, course, support and guidance which had been supported by further positive comments from parents at graduation. The feedback was reinforced by the formal National Students Survey (NSS) which showed that 93% of students thought the quality of teaching and learning was excellent.

Governors confirmed a positive atmosphere whilst on walkthrough and/or at the graduation event which supported the positive and productive atmosphere and views of students about their course and studies.

B Robinson drew out further work to be developed in relation to student understanding of Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) going forward.

8. Teaching and Learning

P Stone gave an update including identification of good practice and areas of development. He detailed the high number of new staff within the department (20 in 2023-2024 and 10 in 2024-2025) which presented different challenges than for the established HE staff group. He detailed that the departmental approach (following the cross college approach but tailored for the HE teaching team) from learning walks to CPD was receiving positive feedback from staff and progress was being seen on subsequent learning walks as a result of CPD and support given.

Discussion and questions included: the potential correlation between new staff and outcomes and how this was being approached through CPD; feedback from learners which was modular evaluated and mirrored the results of the NSS; how the triangulation methods used informed progress and appropriate adaptations as required to ensure a high quality experience for students; and an update in relation to recruitment for J Laidlaw.

9. Research and Scholarly Activity and CPD

P Stone detailed the range of CPD activity that the HE faculty was undertaking which was a combination of centrally led training and faculty specific with a focus on fostering a culture of research activity. He outlined the work of the Research Interest Group (RIG) and of recent publications by staff.

L McKenna detailed the collaborative research session for January's CPD day which would develop progress further. P Stone outlined the purpose of the annual HE Conference in July which also highlights the research activity of staff throughout the year. He detailed the greater employer involvement for this year's conference which would look at ways to develop the soft skills for students.

10. Quality Assurance Cycle Update including KPIs/SAR

O Rodley gave an update within the QA cycle.

Discussion and questions included: the key KPIs to note including recruitment to full time starts; where TEF indicators were within KPIs and changes; how TEF Gold could be achieved in the future, which would require a greater increase within progression, including initial liaison and visits of those Colleges who had attained the grade; various aspects of the NSS including: comparisons with other TU partner institutions, improvements to Student Union response, academic support decrease within the survey (albeit this was still above the sector average), and greater communication in respect of the ability to contact teaching staff, the Committee concluding that the survey overall was very positive; external benchmarking more widely (beyond NSS) which was limited from OfS and

complicated in respect of B3 data (as focussed on individual not national levels) but which was part of the OU annual assessment more widely (and which would have necessitated improvements if insufficient).

O Rodley also highlighted the developing role of the Academic Board with the clear focus on quality and accountability.

Actions for next meeting by O Rodley/P Stone:

- Rag rate KPIs
- Separate out the B3 KPI data and rag rate for greater clarity and monitoring
- Visit Northern School of Arts
- Add QiP to the beginning of future reports (after Academic Board review)

In addition, it was **agreed** that an external audit or assessment would be beneficial at the appropriate time with P Stone detailing the offer by QAA which was currently available.

11. Regulation and Partnership

P Stone gave an update on the key factors of regulatory activity since the last meeting and confirmed compliance with the ongoing conditions of regulation.

He detailed some minor changes and informed the Committee that the reports from the Academic Board would be added for the next meeting.

12. Strategic Plan Update

The challenge of growth had been discussed fully within items 5 and 6.

13. Degree Awarding Powers

P Stone drew attention to the report which noted progress thus far. Whilst the process was still under review nationally, there was commitment from the College to progress this at such times as the process was reviewed/reopened. He reminded governors that this currently was at minimal risk as there had been no formal commitment lodged.

14. Committee Review of Top Risks

Whilst the risks remained as per the start of the meeting, the Committee discussed:

- succession planning in relation to J Laidlaw where an internal candidate - J Sharp had been successful with transitional arrangements currently in place
- it was hoped that by the April meeting there would be more information on OfS assessment plans (for Degree Awarding Powers) allowing for consideration of a suitable timeline

15. Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday 29 April 2025 at 1.30pm. **Agreed** to extend this by a half hour (1.30-4pm).

16. Any other Urgent Business

None taken

The meeting closed at 3.25pm