

Minutes of the Business Development, Employer Engagement and Recruitment committee  
held on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> October 2020

Present: Tim Thurston (Chair)  
Pradeep Bhardwaj, Peter Boucher, Carole Kitching, Rob Wheeler

With: Charlotte Mannion  
Chris Baish, Vice Principal Business Development and Employer Engagement  
Tracy Scaife, Head of Governance

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies for absence – the Chair welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the committee. Each member of the committee introduced themselves giving their background, how they felt they could contribute to the committee and what they hoped to achieve as a member of the committee. No apologies were received.

2. Disclosures of interest – none received.

3. Introduction and overview of provision – presentation (inc. risk management update and 16-19 recruitment, apprenticeship and partnership updates)

It was noted that the presentation on an introduction and overview of provision (item 4 on the agenda) will also cover items 3 (risk management) and item 5 (16-19 recruitment, apprenticeships and partnerships updates).

The Vice-Principal Business Development and Employer Engagement outlined the content of his presentation giving an introduction to and an overview of business development, employer engagement and recruitment. He added that marketing and recruitment is a new responsibility for him. The scope and scale of business development, marketing and recruitment were noted. The area contributes for circa £40 million of the college budget, the majority of which relates to partnerships. Business development generally relates to the college offer i.e. apprenticeships, training while employer engagement relates to employers supporting students through work experience, projects, mock interviews etc. The college has a team that brokers deals on these with employers. The strengths and areas for improvement relating to employer engagement were further noted. There are KPIs and an update on progress against the employer engagement strategy will be presented to the meeting of the committee in February 2021.

With regard to apprenticeships it was noted that the majority – circa 80% - 90% - are within the Swindon area with the remaining 10% – 20% in the wider Wiltshire area.

Partnership provision is both within the Swindon area and outside including CECOS and David Game College in London.

It was noted that the bigger employers tend to prefer one provider for all their training needs which is why many go to corporate providers such as QA rather than traditional education providers. The

college should consider working with different partners i.e. the Institute of Coding in Bath. With the Institute of Technology (IoT) coming online shortly it is more important to have a broader view.

### Marketing and Recruitment -

Marketing and recruitment is an integral part of the success of the college. The Schools Liaison team engage with students and employers and have good relationships with the schools that they can gain access to however difficulties have been experienced with gaining access to some schools, particularly those that have their own sixth form provision. Staff are qualified to give careers advice and guidance and interview students to help them find the best way forward for them.

Recruitment for the current academic year is lower than hoped. The school year 11 population figures for the past 5 academic years and projections for next year were noted. The figures show a dip in the 2017/18 academic year but they are slowly increasing towards 2020/21 however college recruitment numbers and predictions do not follow that trend. Extra competition from school sixth forms has an impact. Disappointingly school sixth forms were not part of the area review exercise conducted recently. Most schools in the area are now part of multi-academy trusts and focus on 'A' level qualifications rather than vocational qualifications however some are now offering soft vocational courses such as health and social care. Teachers at the college are all dual qualified so a greater choice can be offered to students. Great Western Academy also has a sixth form and is recruiting for the second year. The vast majority of students are recruited from the Swindon area with few from outside. County figures are available and will be circulated to the committee.

The college has a strong marketing team but utilisation of social media and other marketing areas need to be utilised better. Social media tends to be used in a static way rather than being fully utilised with video, animation etc. While marketing is important it is also important to get the core story of the college right. Until that is positioned correctly the college cannot compete.

It is important for the college to regain market share. The college and its marketing must focus on the college unique selling points (USP), promote the advantages of the college over school sixth forms and use campaigns rather than spot advertising. There is a need for innovation in the marketing team to push this forward and there is a proposal to recruit a lead for employer and HE marketing. There are a range of points where marketing surveys are done with young people but more intelligence is needed on what platforms young people engage with. The Principal advised that prior to the merger New College engaged Chalkstream Ltd to carry out some research on why students chose which college. A full report was received and the Principal agreed to provide some feedback for the committee. Engagement has been started with students who are not engaging (NEETS). College teams have been focussing on getting students in to the college before the latest start date and is now looking at late start courses commencing November or January as a way to mitigate the 8% reduction in enrolment. The college is engaging in a softer way with those students who have concerns about coming in to the college.

It is felt that as we are now the only college in Swindon the college can be more competitive. It is also important for the current situation to be acknowledged throughout the college and for all staff to promote the college and the courses on offer. The merger provides an ideal opportunity to market the college in a different way.

The Principal advised that there appears to be a disconnect with proposed school sixth forms being looked at in isolation rather than how they fit in with existing local provision. Governors voicing their opinions on proposals could be significant and add weight to the college position.

#### Impact of Covid-19 -

The impact of the current Covid-19 pandemic on recruitment also needs to be noted. The college has seen a reduction in the number of enrolments to level 2 courses, thought to be partly due to the central grading of GCSEs giving greater access to level 3 courses. However the college has not seen an increase in enrolment to level 3 courses. It is thought that more students are staying at their school sixth forms as some students and parents may perceive them to be smaller and possibly safer. The college needs to learn from any successes experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic and utilise those in the future.

The IoT focus will have to be employer led. Employers will have certain expectations that will have to be met to engage them to stop them from going to other organisations such as QA. The model IoT set up should also be considered, there is a lot to be learnt from other organisations.

#### Partnerships –

With regard to partnerships, it was noted that these account for a quarter of the merged college income. The college receives a management fee of between 12% and 20% for partnerships. Historically the former New College worked with a wide range of partners (42 subcontractors) but this has reduced since 2017 and the college now only partners with 12 subcontractors. The former Swindon College only partners for adult education. The income from partnerships for both North Star and Queens Drive are very similar. The partnership with CECOS will grow over the next two years and then stabilise. Both CECOS and David Game always deliver what is expected which helps to stabilise the bottom line. Any proposed engagement with new partners will be referred to the Corporation for approval.

#### Apprenticeships -

Many opportunities for apprenticeships have arisen from the merger. The two campuses offer complimentary apprenticeship programmes and although they have very different working processes the team for the merged college is coming together well and the college is in a position to offer apprenticeship programmes across all sectors. The merged college is on a par with Wiltshire College and looking at historical data both colleges fall within the top 3 providers for the majority of areas. The college does not do so well in the digital sector and this is an area that needs improving. Digital skills are challenging in further education nationally. Covid-19 has had an impact on apprenticeships with recruitment down by 20% - 30%, particularly in those programmes where it is not possible to work remotely. Ways to improve this are constantly under review.

#### Professional training and leisure –

With regard to professional training and leisure it was noted that there were previously two brands, Fast Forward at New College and Business First at Swindon College. The two brands will be consolidated and trade under the New College brand. The training provided by both is predominantly for individuals rather than employers. There has obviously been a massive swing to remote learning and an increase in Access to HE. Funding has been announced nationally by the government to enable

adults without a full L3 qualification to access training at L3. This will come into effect from April, and the qualifications available for funding will be based on skills that employers need. Further details about

qualifications in-scope and the method of awarding funding to colleges has not yet been released. This does represent an excellent opportunity for the college and for local skills, where Swindon is below average for the number of adults holding a L3 or L4 qualification.

Community learning delivers an income of circa £500k, provided off-site at a new location in Fleming Way, predominantly English Functional Skills and aimed at unemployed adults and those who would not access the main college.

**ACTIONS:**

*CB to present update on employer engagement strategy to February 2021 meeting;*

*CB to circulate 2019/20 Learner Numbers and Market Share for Queen's Drive and North Star Combined;*

*CB to present report on marketing and recruitment to next meeting;*

*CK to provide feedback from Chalkstream research.*

4. Cycle of business 2020/21 – received and noted.

The Head of Governance advised that the document is a working document and may well change through the year.

**RESOLUTION:** that the cycle of business for the Business Development, Employer Engagement and Recruitment committee be agreed.

5. Terms of Reference – received and noted.

It was noted that the Terms of Reference require the committee to appoint a Vice-Chair. The Chair asked for nominations for the position and Rob Wheeler was proposed and seconded. No further nominations were received.

**RESOLUTION:**

- (i) that the Terms of Reference for the Business Development, Employer Engagement and Recruitment committee be recommended to the Corporation for approval.
- (ii) that Rob Wheeler be appointed as the Vice-Chair of the committee for the 2020/21 academic year.

6. Any other business – raised as follows:

(a) Apprenticeships budget figure – the Vice Principal Business Development and Employer Engagement advised the meeting that the budget figure given for North Star has been amended to reflect Covid-19 and is now £3.4m meaning that the target has been achieved. The team are still working to the original budget target.

7. Date of next meeting – Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> February 2021 at 4.00pm