

Minutes of a meeting of the Resources, Integration and Change committee
held on Tuesday 30th November 2021

Present: Jim Webster (Chair)
Peter Boucher, Simon Cove, John Dernie, Rob Wheeler

With: Stephen Horrobin, Deputy Principal Finance and Resources
Julian Tucker, Finance Team (Interim)
Jean Inker, Interim Human Resources Consultant (minutes 105 – 108 only)
Tracy Scaife, Head of Governance

105. Apologies for absence – received from Carole Kitching.

106. Disclosure of Interests – received from Rob Wheeler with regard to his employment with Nationwide Building Society who the college invests with.

107. Minutes of the last meeting held on 28th September 2021 – agreed as a correct record subject to the date on the top of the minutes being amended to 28th September 2021.

Matters arising raised as follows -

(a) Minute 89 (a) 69 Management accounts: P9 – it was noted that there was an action for the Deputy Principal Finance and Resources with regard to separating partnerships out in the management accounts however this has not been done. The action remains in place and it is asked that this be done in future management accounts.

ACTION: *SH to show partnerships separately within future management accounts.*

108. Human Resources report – report by Interim Human Resources (HR) Consultant.

The Interim HR Consultant advised the meeting that she is aware that some of the information may have already been received via the Principal's report to Corporation. However there is still a lot of the report content that has not already been reported to governors.

She proceeded to outline the main points within the report.

With regard to professional development, the most important area to complete is mandatory training, particularly the training relating to the Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE). There is still work needed to ensure that all staff complete this training. Currently there are approximately 200 staff who have yet to undertake this training. Some of these are new starters. The target is to have at least a further 100 staff completing this training by February 2022. All training is tracked through the HR department.

With regard to pay negotiations, it is thought that UCU will submit a further request for a pay award for this year.

There has been some resistance from the unions to engage in the consultation process for the harmonisation of pay and conditions. The recruitment policy is well advanced. A comprehensive set of policies have been shared with the unions and some basic feedback has been received. Further feedback is expected in the new year. With regard to harmonisation, the Corporation has agreed that pay scales and conditions across the two campuses be harmonised. The unions are still not

happy to move forward until some minor issues have been agreed. There are also some operational issues that need to be dealt with. It was further noted that there were some academic staff at the North Star campus who had different terms and conditions and these also need to be sorted and processed through the payroll and HR systems. A way forward on this has now been agreed but the unions are going through the process in great detail and the exercise is taking time. It is anticipated that the harmonisation of pay will be completed in February 2022 and will be backdated as previously agreed to August 2021. New harmonised contracts cannot be issued yet, this is likely to be the end of March/beginning of April 2022.

With regard to the public disclosure policy it was noted that this is owned by the HR department.

The number of resignations being received continues to be an issue and as at 26th November the college had a total of 38 vacancies. There is currently a backlog of approximately 6-8 weeks for the return of DBS checks and this is impacting recruitment. Risk assessments have been carried out and measures put in place to minimise risk to enable some staff to start without receipt of their DBS check.

Employee relations issues were noted.

With regard to the recent staff survey, the Principal will be giving an update to the Corporation meeting on 7th December. Some good feedback has been received from the focus groups via the external facilitator and it is thought that people are enthusiastic about participating. However participation from academic staff has been lower than hoped.

The facilitator working on the staff survey has reported back that the feedback will enable her to put together a good action plan. Some of the feedback is not a surprise but it includes some positive but also some that needs to be firmed up and actioned.

With regard to why academic staff have not engaged in the process, there are possibly two reasons for this – timetables taking priority and the fact that the college is fairly well unionised. A meeting was held by the facilitator with UCU and the academic staff were very well represented at that meeting. Therefore, the assumption is that the academic staff felt that the union was representing them. However it is surprising that they did not want to vent feelings personally. It should be noted that the facilitator went out of her way to accommodate the academic staff through timing of meetings etc.

With regard to staff turnover, it was noted that it is difficult to see how this is progressing over time when only one date point is presented. There is concern that the situation is getting worse, caused by resignations although there are also some redundancies. The college has been through a period of turmoil and it is not unusual for organisations to lose people at the time of a merger. Some staff may feel that they do not want to be on board with the merged organisation and it is just their time to move on. Whilst it does not always hurt to lose those staff, there is the downside of also losing some staff that you do not want to. An additional factor is that the Covid pandemic has caused people to change the way they think about their work/life balance.

People are now often seeking hybrid versions of work. They are becoming used to working at home and look for roles that accommodate that.

The Chair thanked the Interim HR consultant for joining the meeting.

109. Risk management update – received and noted.

The meeting noted the additional risks of failing achievement and falling recruitment. Both of these add additional funding risk and reputational risk. The predicted achievement data is not close enough to the actual achievement data due to issues with the management of data and processes. The Principal advised that this is being looked at. Unfortunately there is no way of knowing if this is purely a local issue or a national issue as no national data is being produced for the 2020/21 academic year.

110. Management accounts – period 2 – received and noted.

It was noted that income is down by circa £150k. The revised cashflow balance at year-end was noted. There is an intention to repay £1million of the current bank loan. Expenditure will be incurred with the provision of a new animal management centre. Cash balances are high ahead of spend.

It was noted that the external auditors – Mazars – were very thorough when looking a going concern during their end of year audit exercise.

111. Financial Regulations – received and noted.

The Deputy Principal advised that the Financial Regulations have been given a complete overhaul and are now split into different sections to make them more accessible. The main changes relate to delegated authorities and the procurement policy. Additionally, a number of policies have been removed as it is not appropriate for them to be included in the document.

With regard to supplier payments it was noted that the policy that says that the college will pay promptly but is only meeting the target two-thirds of the time. It was further noted that there are many issues that impact on this and there are no ramifications from not meeting the deadline contained within the policy. It is however a legal requirement and every effort must be made to meet the stated deadline.

It appears that there is a disconnect with actions relating to travel and subsistence claims and consideration needs to be given to possibly changing the system.

Conflict of interests features in Part 3 Procurement but it is not well defined anywhere. The meeting asked for clarification to be inserted in to the document explaining what a conflict of interest is.

The wording with regard to the new supplier request form on page 14 would benefit from being clearer.

RESOLUTION: that subject to the amendments with regard to conflict of interests and new supplier request form the Corporation be recommended to approve the Financial Regulations.

112. FHP software implementation update – report by the Deputy Principal Finance and Resources and the IT Project Co-ordinator received and noted.

With regard to the Web Recruitment Model the committee asked if it was critical to proceed with this at the current time and questioned how important it is given the long delays in implementing it.

The Deputy Principal Finance and Resources advised that it had cost a considerable amount of money and would bring many benefits and does need to be implemented.

With regard to Core Systems – Open Accounts it was noted that there are project risks. The Deputy Principal Finance and Resources and the Director of Resources and Projects do have a vision for this but it is not formally written down.

The eBIS (purchase-to-pay system) should go live on the 1st January 2022.

It was suggested that an upbeat communications plan describing the benefits of these improvements and updates to our systems could be usefully employed to lift morale at the college.

It was noted that the delays in implementing the finance system were due largely to the company refusing to come in to the college to carry out training.

113. Institute of Technology (IoT) update – report by Deputy Principal Finance and Resources and IoT Project Manager received and noted.

It was further noted that the completion date has been further delayed and is now 4th April 2022.

Concerns were raised with regard to employer and student engagement. The meeting was advised that the IoT Sub Group have changed the focus of their agendas from the building works to these areas. It is recognised that employer engagement needs improving. There are some staffing issues in certain subject areas and it is possible that there might be a need to consider sub-contracting in these areas. Recruitment is low against targets, particularly for apprenticeships. It is hoped that once the building is completed and the IoT can be fully showcased that recruitment will improve. It is recognised that there is a lot of work to be done to make the IoT a success. The University of Gloucester have not delivered the number of students that they promised – circa 300. The relationship with them needs to be reset. Promotion of the IoT is also an area that needs significant improvement. The Managing Director of the IoT left recently and a replacement needs to be found quickly. Nationwide Building Society have offered to assist with finding someone for the role. At the present time the IoT is only attracting small employers in the area and the large employers in Swindon and Wiltshire need to be brought on board.

114. Any other business – none raised.

115. Date of next meeting – Tuesday 25th January 2022 at 4.00pm

116. Confidential minutes of meeting held 28th September 2021 and matters arising – confidential minutes refer.

117. Cleaning services – confidential minutes refer.

118. Audit Completion Report and Management Representation Letter – confidential minutes refer.

119. Annual Report and Financial Statements year ended 31st July 2021 – confidential minutes refer.

120. Integration update (including people and organisation, course integration/innovation, marketing of the college, operational systems – confidential minutes refer.

121. Savings plan – confidential minutes refer.

122. Pay award – confidential minutes refer.