

GOVERNING BODY

MINUTES

of the meeting of the Governing Body of Richmond Adult and Community College held at 6:30 pm
on Wednesday, 20th January 2010 at Clifden

- Present
- Mr Geoff Varrall, Chair
 - Ms Sally Field, Vice Chair *[items 4 to 7]*
 - Dr Tim Woolmer, Vice Chair
 - Ms Siân Bates MBE
 - Councillor Sally Cole *[items 1 to 6 (first part)]*
 - Ms Christina Conroy OBE, Principal & Chief Executive
 - Mr Kevin Finnigan
 - Ms Louise Fluker
 - Mr Robin Jowit OBE
 - Mr T. C. Lim
 - Mr Manoj Nanda
 - Ms Cindy Rampersaud *[items 2 to 7]*
 - Mr Sebastian Scotney
 - Dr Michael Sevitt
 - Mr David Sidonio
 - Ms Helen Szyra
 - Mr Chris Williams
- Apologies
- Ms Rohini Bhattacharya
 - Mr Sylvester Olutayo
 - Ms Judith Spencer-Gregson, Interim Director of Finance & Information Services
- In attendance
- Ms Gabrielle Flint, Vice Principal (Curriculum & Quality)
 - Ms Judith Potter, Vice Principal (Finance & Corporate Services)
 - Mr Paul Coveney, Clerk to the Governing Body and College Secretary

Part 1 Non Confidential

1. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting on 17th December 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

2. **MATTERS ARISING**

- Item 4: the Vice Principal (Finance & Corporate Services) reported that the solicitors' letters re bad debt had been sent to ITCL and Kiara at the end of November, for reply within 30 days: she had yet to receive confirmation from the College's solicitors whether any replies had been received.
- Item 9: the Clerk reported that the Governor workshops relating to the College's employment procedures had yet to be arranged: he would be attending a staff workshop on 3rd February, after which it would be possible to devise a programme for a Governors' event, and establish the time required. He would then hope to offer Governors a choice of dates and times.

3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were none.

4. **CHAIR'S ACTION**

The Governing Body, in considering the Chair's Action in signing the College Higher Education strategy, asked whether this provided opportunities for the College. The Vice Principal (Curriculum & Quality) replied that it was possible that, with the large Government HE funding cuts, there would be such opportunity, as the College could offer relatively low-cost provision.

The Governing Body approved the Chair's Action in signing the College's Higher Education strategy.

5. EQUALITY & DIVERSITY

The Principal reported that the College had established an Equality & Diversity Committee, and that (following Governing Body approval of the Equality & Diversity policy on 17th December 2009), that Committee had produced drafts of Equality Schemes for disability, race and gender. However, it had become clear that these separate schemes failed to address issues identified in the SAR in relation to younger learners and learners facing economic disadvantage, and also (because of inconsistency in the interpretation of the different schemes), it would be difficult for the College to produce a single coherent Equality & Diversity action plan. It was common practice in the FE sector (and in HE) to produce a Single Equality Scheme, and the College proposed that it should do so, for submission in draft to the Employment & Organisational Development Committee, and then, after due consultation with staff and students, to the Governing Body on 30th March 2010 with an action plan. The Governing Body asked whether there was a standard Single Equality Scheme which the College could adopt, to which the Principal replied that there were differences according to location (relating, for instance, to economic disadvantage): legislative requirements were always the same, but schemes and action plans varied considerably because of local needs.

The Governing Body approved the proposal for the College to produce a Single Equality Scheme and action plan.

6. COLLEGE SELF ASSESSMENT REPORT 2008/09

On behalf of the Governing Body, the Chair thanked the Quality & Curriculum Committee for its work in scrutinising the SAR. For the benefit of new Governors in particular, he requested an explanation of the purposes of the SAR, and how it was developed.

The Vice Principal (Curriculum & Quality) explained that the SAR was a process by which Colleges (and schools) were required to judge themselves at the end of each year, in order to identify areas of strength (for consolidation) and areas for development (with specific remedial actions identified for the current year). The Principal added that the use of the SAR was threefold: it had to be posted (in draft by 31st December 2009, and as a final version approved by the Governing Body by 31st January 2010) to an electronic gateway from which it could be accessed by external agencies such as Ofsted and the LSC. This meant that many parts of the report were technically complex, and also explained why there was repetition between different parts of the report. Secondly, it was a valuable tool for management use – it had identified some areas as grade 3 (satisfactory), which were being actively targeted for improvement in 2009/10. Thirdly, it was used as a tool for reporting to College stakeholders, especially in the annual College Report, which was a more accessible document, but drew heavily on the contents of the SAR.

The Vice Principal (Curriculum & Quality) reported that the development of the SAR was a bottom-up process, and the whole College had been involved: every course was assessed both by students and teachers, and these assessments led to a programme, sector subject area and faculty analysis. The Vice Principal (Curriculum & Quality) and the Head of Quality then reviewed these analyses to identify strengths and areas for development, as well as for curriculum development planning, including identifying courses which should be discontinued. The base analysis was complemented by questionnaires seeking learner views on a number of matters, including College facilities, and changes in employment prospects as a result of attending the College. Last year, the College had introduced all College business support areas to the SAR, in addition to the curriculum areas. This had proved successful in developing closer links between business support and teaching and learning, and in obtaining valuable ideas to contribute to the improvement of teaching and learning. Ofsted started its inspection from the SAR, and the College used the areas for development to generate the QIP, progress against which was reported to the Quality & Curriculum Committee of the Governing Body.

The Vice Principal (Curriculum & Quality) advised the Governing Body that (as she had reported at the Governors' Development Event at Godalming), there was this year a new Ofsted Common Inspection Framework (CIF), which was similar to that used with schools. While this had made the SAR quite difficult to produce in terms of data collection, and resulted in a larger document than last year, it had had some benefit for the College: for instance the College had realised that it had greater learner engagement than many might have expected in a college of RACC's type, and learner response to questionnaires and other information requests had achieved high response rates. The College planned to develop this learner voice through more means of communication, including text.

The Vice Principal (Curriculum & Quality) recognised that the SAR could be difficult to read, and suggested that a casual reader would be well advised to start with the Introduction, and then concentrate on Aspects A, B and C.

The Governing Body recognised that the SAR was essential preparation for Ofsted inspection, as well as providing helpful information on the College's progress in terms of quality, and demonstrating the ability to be constructively self-critical.

The Governing Body asked how the College distinguished between the grades when making its assessment in each area, and whether the assessments were subjective. The Principal replied that there was a detailed Ofsted handbook which set out the criteria, in a similar way to a marking scheme for examinations. There was inevitably a subjective element in assessment: last year the College had graded itself as good overall, but Ofsted had raised this to outstanding following its review of the SAR for 2007/08. The Vice Principal (Curriculum & Quality) reminded that Governing Body that the College had (as reported at the Governors' Development Event) engaged two Ofsted-qualified consultants to help validate the College's assessment grading under the new CIF: much of the data that formed the basis of the assessments had been previously reported to Standing Committees of the Governing Body.

As Chair of the Quality & Curriculum Committee, Sally Field reported that the Committee had, on 14th January 2010, challenged and closely questioned areas where there appeared to be some uncertainty as to the grades awarded: in future years she would try to arrange for the minutes of the January Quality & Curriculum Committee meeting to be agreed in

Clerk

time to be circulated (at least electronically) to all Governors before the Governing Body considered the Sar at its January meeting.

The Governing Body noted the length of the SAR at 143 pages, and asked whether this would be the expected size of a SAR for a College of RACC's type. The Vice Principal (Curriculum & Quality) reported that she had looked at several other colleges' SARS, and they were generally large documents, especially for colleges, like RACC, who needed to address a wide-ranging curriculum (15 Sector Subject Areas for RACC) and diverse learner populations.

In considering the Summary of Lesson Observation Grades, the Governing Body asked why the percentage of grade 1 observations was lower than last year. The Vice Principal (Curriculum & Quality) replied that this reflected the change in learner groups being taught, coupled with a move by the College to more challenging lesson observations, using advanced practitioners as observers: the College was trying to be stringent and objective, and avoid the phenomenon known as "grade 1 complacency". The Governing Body suggested that these considerations should be explained in a footnote to the table.

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The Vice Principal (Curriculum & Quality) made a presentation summarising the SAR. She identified "enabling IT" as a strength in the quality of provision. The Governing Body asked how this could be, when there were known difficulties with the College's IT infrastructure. The Vice Principal (Curriculum & Quality) replied that the College had used an LSC grant to introduce major improvements to the IT support for disadvantaged learners: these included large interactive whiteboards, and innovative tills in the College shop, which was staffed by LLDD learners. She reported that many of the identified areas for development resulted from the new CIF, which had required the College to examine some areas in more detail than in previous years. For example, "contribution to the community" was regarded as good, although much of the evidence was anecdotal: the College needed to develop ways in which to collect hard evidence in this area.

The Governing Body considered whether grade 1 was the reasonable assessment for "leadership and management", and noted that this had been the subject of detailed scrutiny by the Quality & Curriculum Committee, which had recognised that the issues with Employer Responsive provision had arisen in 2007/08, rather than in the period of the current SAR. As Chair of the Quality & Curriculum Committee, Sally Field reminded the Governing Body that the College had lowered its self assessment for 2007/08 to grade 2 (good), but that this had been revised by Ofsted to grade 1 (outstanding): the Committee had considered that grade 1 was appropriate for 2008/09, and if this were to be downgraded by Ofsted, then the College would have the right of appeal.

The Governing Body noted that Safeguarding and Equality & Diversity (potentially limiting grades) were both assessed as grade 2, to which the Principal reported that the College had a clear plan to achieve grade 1 in both areas by the end of 2009/10. The Vice Principal (Curriculum & Quality) added that it was difficult to know the actual weighting of individual criteria: the CIF was new, and it was at the lower ends of achievement that the limiting grades were expected to have an effect on the overall assessment.

The Governing Body noted that, according to Ofsted, 64% of colleges had been assessed as good or outstanding in 2007/08, and that the College should avoid under-assessing itself just as much as over-assessing itself. The Principal added that the College planned to bring the limiting grades to grade 1, and to take a radical approach in those areas assessed as grade 3, in order to return to an overall grade 1

assessment next year.

The Governing Body commended and thanked the College management and staff for the quality and honesty of the SAR, especially in the context of the demanding new CIF.

Subject to the small change suggested above, the Governing Body approved the College Self Assessment Report 2008/09.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

7.1 The Clerk reported that he had, the previous Monday, attended an AoC London Governors feedback event relating to the Schofield review of Governance and Strategic Leadership in English Further Education. He informed the Governing Body that AoC and LSIS were consulting FE Corporations as to the findings and recommendations of the report: the consultation period closed on 31st March 2010. The review was a large report and contained 15 recommendations, of which 13 were of relevance to RACC. He proposed that he should produce a short summary of the report for distribution to all Governors. He would then receive Governor feedback, and produce a paper for consideration by the Search & Governance Committee to approve for submission to the AoC and LSIS.

The Governing Body approved the proposed approach to developing its feedback to the AoC and LSIS on the Schofield report.

7.2 The Clerk informed the Governing Body that Tenon, whom it had reappointed as the College's internal auditors on 17th December 2009, had since merged with RSM Bentley Jennison. Since the latter were not the College's financial statements and regularity auditors, there was no conflict of interest.

7.3 The Clerk informed the Governing Body that there had been a recent change to the College's Instrument & Articles of Government: this was purely technical in nature, and replaced all references to the LSC by equivalent references to the Chief Executive of Skills Funding. The changes would come into effect on 1st April 2010.

7.4 In response to a question as to the College's current trading position, the Principal replied that the College had hit most of its targets for 2009/10, and the details would, as usual, be reported to the Governing Body in March.

This part of the meeting ended at 8:05 pm

CHAIR