

Board of Management Meeting
Friday 10th April 2020 at 1030 hours (via ZOOM)

Present A Kerr (Chair), A McKechnie, P Hughes, L Newlands, S Dillett, R Harkness, R Smith, S Duffy.

Apologies C McDowall, Y Johnston, L Glen, C McDowall, T Donnelly, C Gibb, P Hutchinson.

In Attendance Angela Martin, Angus Allan, Keith McAllister

1. Declarations of Members' Interests

Membership of The Lanarkshire Board was declared by A Kerr, A McKechnie, L Newlands, R Harkness and R Smith. Mr Kerr also declared his membership of the Board of the Scottish Funding Council.

2. Chair's Welcome

Mr Kerr opened the meeting thanking members for their attendance. He then outlined the schedule of special meetings agreed by the Board, the content and timing, to ensure appropriate governance and assurance over the period of Covid-19 situation.

He then thanked the Executive Team and the entire staff for their efforts in maintaining support to our students and continuing the work of the College.

3. Principal's Update

Ms McKechnie thanked members for their continued support, stressing the importance of this dialogue with the Board during these exceptional times. The Board was then provided with an update by Ms McKechnie on the following key areas: finance and risk, facilities, ICT, staff, students, exams and assessment and future-proofing the business.

Finance

Ensuring appropriate oversight of the financial position remains a key priority for the senior team. A more detailed paper on the current and projected financial position will be brought to the Board meeting on 24 April, including in relation to the SFC institutional allocations 2020-21, just announced this week.

Management Financial Forecast – 2019/20

A full review of the management financial forecast has been undertaken and will be presented to the Board on 24 April. The Funding Council has confirmed that the sector will be supported to meet the costs of increased pension contributions. This amounted to approximately £130K for SLC. Fee income has been reviewed conservatively, particularly in terms of activity via SDS and the local authority. The revised forecast will predict an expected deficit of £140K for the year. Members noted that this would be reviewed on an ongoing basis.

An expenditure code had been allocated to specifically record all Covid-19 related additional costs. This was an action from the Board meeting on 24th March 2020.

SFC Institutional Funding Allocation – 2020-21

SFC allocations were published on 7 April. NCL and SLC are to discuss proportionate allocations over the coming weeks. The total core credits for the two colleges (SLC and NCL) are the same as last year. There is, as yet, no allocation of ESF funds or credits; and no detail on the Flexible Workforce Development Fund.

SFC Covid-19 Mitigation

The SFC has decided to re-allocate student travel funding and childcare costs to discretionary funding, despite approaches being made to the SFC about the likely negative impact of this shift. There is a risk that this change in funding might impact on our most vulnerable students and all possible will be done to support them through this. This change also creates an increase in administrative burden on our student support team and we remain mindful of the workload of this section of our staff.

The Scottish Government announced on 8 April a new £5m student hardship fund, made up of an additional £2.2m from SAAS for HE students with the remainder being made up of the redirection of travel and childcare expenses within FE.

The Funding Council has given assurance of no detriment to credit delivery as a result of Covid-19. SLC is on target to deliver credit target and this achievement is indeed due to the hard work and determination of staff and continued engagement of our students.

Risk

We remain on track to deliver our planned credit target, despite lockdown before the end of the Easter term. The College remains focussed on controlling all costs, including staffing costs though we recognise the sensitivities associated with this. Consideration is also being given to where staff can be better utilised if their present roles are not viable in this virtual environment.

We have continued regular dialogue with the Trade Unions and the relationship remains positive. A weekly written report is distributed by the Principal and meetings scheduled as and when required.

That said, there are two issues of national dispute. The EIS is concerned about the continuation of remote teaching and learning and has asked their members to send out a student survey to ascertain the impact of Covid-19 on teaching from the perspective of the student cohort in relation to online learning, poverty and the attainment gap. Unison, along with Unite and GMB, has lodged a formal notification of a national collective dispute on annual leave. Our college will continue to operate flexibly, in line with the ACAS guidance and the national policy, and mindful of staff needs on an individual basis.

Members discussed the impact on our student cohort at the end of this period; what might lie ahead for those graduating and moving out into the world of employment; and how this would impact on their perception of their college experience. All agreed that colleges would have a fundamental role to play, alongside SDS, in providing advice and sign-posting for the onward path of our students; as well as a critical role in the response to a changed economic landscape post Covid-19.

Ms McKechnie recognised the potential impact on positive destinations and that there would be a role for the College in supporting further training for students as well as signposting to job opportunities and higher education. She added that the SLT were working on scenario planning which would be brought to the Board in due course. Regular engagement with College Principals across Scotland had identified the need for sector-wide scenario planning on the role of the sector to respond to economic shock; and she had also discussed with the Principal of NCL the scope for a regional response from the two colleges to support economic recovery.

The issue of mental well-being of staff during this lockdown period was raised. Ms McKechnie gave reassurance, outlining the many support mechanisms on offer and the new approach currently being investigated, The Big White Wall¹. The College remained very alert to the need for additional wellbeing support for both students and staff. A guidance note, previously agreed with the trade unions, had gone to staff outlining the limitations of homeworking and levels of expectation of them during this period of lockdown. Both the student and staff representatives affirmed that this had been well received and had eased many anxieties. They noted the value of the exercise classes currently being offered online.

Facilities

The building is closed except for the essential maintenance required on two half-days per week. We are protecting staff by ensuring the building is closed for a minimum of four consecutive days between openings; no more than six staff being allowed on campus at any one time; adherence to rules around social distancing, wearing of gloves and sanitising of areas as required. Advice had been taken to ensure the safety of the building and all required legislative maintenance was being carried out. All non-essential systems had been minimised or closed down: air-conditioning, lighting, gas heating.

ICT

The College is heavily reliant on ICT systems and the support team have been outstanding in achieving the transition to virtual working. Extensive use of Teams, on-line learning platforms have seen the IT skills of all staff improve in a very short period. Cyber security is being closely monitored.

Staff

Staff absence rates are very low. The overall mood of the staff is generally very positive. Staff had pulled together to solve problems and maintain delivery to students where possible. Support services had adapted over a very short period to maintain all systems and provide all key services. Staff engagement is high, facilitated via on-line platforms, including meeting for

¹ <https://www.bigwhitewall.com/>

virtual lunch/coffee, etc. Across all faculties, the inventiveness of staff continued to impress: teaching videos posted on social media, virtual hairdressing class with students working on manikin heads, virtual coffee mornings and exercise classes.

Support teams are also busy and engaged across the college. Some staff, due to the nature of their roles are under-utilised and consideration is being given to other skills these staff may have that could be used elsewhere across the College. Offers for on-line training had been circulated by our HR team and information on volunteering had been distributed to all staff. We recognise the need for all staff to continue to engage.

Members once again praised staff on the hard work and determination to enable the College to meet the needs of its students and stakeholders.

Students

Engagement levels, particularly for theory classes, is generally high and reflects the hard work of the teaching staff. It has not, however, been possible to continue with some practical classes. Current engagement figures are: Faculty of Business – 70-80%, Faculty of Care – 80-90% and Faculty of Construction – 60-75%.

The contract for The Rural Academy at Lanark had now been completed and the lease of the building discontinued as of 31st March 2020.

Digital poverty remains very much in our sights. A number of students had laptops issued prior to the lockdown. The introduction of social distancing made further distribution impossible however laptops will be made available as soon rules are relaxed.

Members enquired if the College knew the number of students unable to engage due to digital poverty. Ms McKechnie stated that each faculty had the numbers for students who had alerted them to digital poverty issues. That said, the vast majority of students did have access to a smart phone, which although not ideal for learning purposes, did still allow them to engage via Microsoft Teams.

At this point Mr Kerr asked Ms Newlands to give an update on behalf of the Student Association. Ms Newlands stated that the interaction with students to this point continued to be extremely positive. Students were happy with the support and information being provided and the work being delivered to enable them to continue to engage. The SA has been in frequent contact with the most vulnerable students and have set a clear message that there is always someone there to chat to or seek advice from. Ms Newlands stressed that we could not underestimate the impact the changes to student funding in the areas of childcare and travel would have and she fully anticipated a high level of communication from worried students in the coming days.

Members thanked Ms Newlands and the members of her Executive Committee for all the work in supporting students. It was then noted that the election process for the new Student President and Vice President had gone live on 6 April 2020 and that the Board would be kept abreast of the progress and outcomes.

Civic Response

Encouragement had been given to staff and students to volunteer if possible. A sweep of the College was carried out to pack up all available PPE for distribution to organisations in need of supplies. Care packages had been made up to be delivered to Care Homes. Delivery of protective equipment and toiletries has been made to: Kilbryde Hospice, Enable Scotland, Hairmyres and a number of care homes across Lanarkshire. This was well received and generated positive social media coverage. Mr Kerr thanked SLC for the contributions of PPE to Enable which had been greatly needed. Members were pleased to hear of this civic response.

Exam Diet and Assessment

Dialogue continued with SQA and the College has representation on key working groups to support the process of providing guidance on assessment. The Quality Unit is working on changes to processes and developing guidance for lecturers. We expect that other awarding bodies will follow the SQA approach.

Future-proofing the Business

It is essential that the College continues to remain open for virtual business. There has been a significant increase in our social media presence and all staff have been encouraged to contribute. At present this is focussed primarily on August recruitment though we are also telling the stories of our current approach to learning and teaching. As at 1 April, applications were down by 4% and offers up by 17% overall (Full-time 15% and Part-time 48%). A number of applications are however waiting to be processed due to the early limitations of remote working and number of paper applications still being received. Schools recruitment continues with close liaison with South Lanarkshire Council. We have confirmed with East Renfrewshire Council that it will not be possible to deliver courses in Eastwood Park in August 2020. We have agreed to return to this later in the academic year.

Weekly meetings continued with the Principals' Group and with the Principal of NCL to discuss the sector and regional direction. The SLT had begun work on scenario planning and this would form the agenda of a meeting after the Easter break. A paper will be presented to the Board in due course.

Mr Kerr thanked Ms McKechnie for the detailed update and Ms Newlands for her comments on behalf of the Student Association. This level of communication is essential to maintain good governance during these difficult times. Members noted all the points detailed in the report and congratulated Ms McKechnie and the entire College staff on their continued efforts.

There being no further competent business, Mr Kerr thanked members for their attendance and contributions.