



THE SIXTH FORM COLLEGE, COLCHESTER

Minutes of Corporation Meeting No. 125
5th January 2021
[Focussed Briefing]

[Remote Meeting held via Microsoft Teams]

Chair: K Finnigan

Members Present: I MacNaughton (Principal), M Atherton, R Wilson, J Owens,
P Loveard, S Carmel, N Gerrard, C Goldsworthy, J Johnson, S Okpattah,
D Morran, P Barker, J Leslie, S Codling.

In

Attendance: J Harker, S Williams, J Cadman, A Johnson, G Rayner, A Frost.

Clerk: T Johnson

125.1 Chair's Opening Remarks

The Chair thanked governors and senior managers for attending the extraordinary meeting, initially convened to discuss the ongoing impact of the Covid (19) pandemic and to consider future College arrangements post January 11th 2021. However, due to the Government announcement on January 4th 2021, that a 3rd National Lockdown was to commence on Wednesday January 6th, with students being required to stay home and be taught remotely at least until the February 2021 half term, there were now no immediate operational decisions to be made. Therefore, the original agenda had been cancelled in favour of convening a strategic briefing meeting.

The Chair led thanks, on behalf of all the members of the Corporation, to the staff of the College, for all their work and in particular the work required to be undertaken over the Christmas and New Year period, at short notice due to the changing government requirements.

125.2 Apologies for Absence

None.

125.3 Declarations of Interest

None

125.4 Strategic Briefing & Discussion

125.4.1 Governors received; the strategic briefing paper prepared by the Principal (prepared in advance of notification of national lockdown), a copy of the letter sent to students (and copied to parents/guardians and staff) dated January 5th 2021, the DfE guidance published January 4th 2021 outlining the lockdown framework and the Government guidance re the requirement for mass asymptomatic testing in schools and colleges, published 15th December 2020. ¹

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-asymptomatic-testing-in-schools-and-colleges> - Guidance revised 21.01.2021 following the PHE position statement on daily contact testing.

125.4.2 Governors expressed growing concern re the additional stress that the last minute, government announcements and the resulting and ever-changing guidance documentation added, to the stress that college staff were already under.

125.4.3 Coronavirus (Covid 19) Developing Situation: The Principal outlined the situation as it had developed since the last Corporation meeting held on 7th December. In the context, of the exponential growth in the recorded rates of infection and the emergence of a new variant of COVID-19 in December 2020, the Government, changes announced, on December 15th and 30th 2020, including the expectation of mass testing onsite, had required the College to undertake a significant amount work over the Christmas period, in order to plan the significant adjustments to previously planned arrangements for the period from 4th - 15th January 2021 (beginning of half term) and to make arrangements for the required onsite testing.²

On January 4th 2021, the Prime Minister informed the public that due to ‘the rapidly rising numbers of cases across the country and intense pressure on the NHS, we now need to use every lever at our disposal to reduce all contacts outside households wherever possible.’ A 3rd national lockdown commencing January 6th 2021 was instigated lasting at least until mid-February. The lockdown required everyone to ‘stay at home’ and face to face teaching was cancelled for the majority of pupils and students from January 6th. In addition, the Prime Minister informed the public that lockdown will not be lifted until a number of key public health criteria have been met including vaccinating the top 4 vulnerable groups of persons. Key points arising from the Prime Minister announcement;

- Vulnerable students and the children of critical workers, can still attend school or college, as they did in March to May. All other students will learn remotely until at least the February half term.
- Vocational exams and assessments scheduled to take place in January will go ahead as planned.
- Higher Education provision will remain online until mid-February for all except future critical worker courses.
- It will not be possible for exams to go ahead fairly this summer. The Secretary of State for Education will be asking Ofqual to consult rapidly on an approach for alternative arrangements that will allow students to progress fairly

Future uncertainties and issues and the impact on staff, students and the wider college community were discussed including;

125.4.4 January Examinations: Nationally, there are major concerns regarding the Government’s expectation that January BTEC examinations will continue as planned, despite national lockdown and colleges being closed to the majority of students. The College has relatively small numbers of students taking BTEC courses and is therefore confident that all necessary health & safety and measures have been identified and can be mitigated. Therefore, the January examinations will be going ahead. However, many FE providers with large numbers of students expecting to sit vocational examinations are not in the same position. It is known, that some Colleges (including at least 1 local college), have, despite the government announcement, decided to cancel examinations, due to fears for staff and student safety and/or lack of invigilators. It is now expected that the Government will make further announcements imminently.³ In response to governor questions regarding support for any students who do not feel it is ‘safe’ for

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/staggered-rollout-of-coronavirus-testing-for-secondary-schools-and-colleges>

³³ The Government announcement shortly after the meeting the Government announced that it would be for individual colleges to make the decision whether or not to cancel the January exams.

them to travel to and/or attend the College, to take their examination, the Principal assured governors that in such a situation, the College would do everything possible, to make sure students are not disadvantaged.

- 125.4.5 Summer 2021 Examinations: Despite the previous guarantees, made by the Secretary of State for Education, that summer exams would go ahead,⁴ (restated December 3rd 2020), the Prime Minister announced on January 4th 2021 that 'end-of-year exams would not take place as normal in the summer' and that the Department for Education will be 'working with Ofqual to consult rapidly to put in place alternative arrangements that will allow students to progress fairly'.

There will now be an anxious wait for students, parents and staff until further details of what assessment(s) will be established in their place are released. Governors suggested that it will be important that any solution does not add anymore stress to overburdened teachers and managers and that it would be a significant concern, in the context of the duty of care the Corporation holds as employer, if Colleges were for example, to be tasked with marking some form of externally set assessment given the enormous pressures and extra workload they are already under. Governors agreed that any delay in decisions around what arrangements are to be put in place would be unacceptable, and any solution must address the fundamental issue of fairness for those students who have been especially adversely impacted by the pandemic.

- 125.4.6 Online Learning: Departments are ready to move online and each class teacher will be informing student exactly what the online delivery arrangements will be. Moving forward, identifying and addressing the currently unquantifiable 'lost learning' and any underdeveloped academic study skills, as a result of the 2 Year disruption⁵ on the current year 12 (September 2020 intake) and Year 11 (September 2021 intake), will be a significant challenge for the College, moving forward. There will also be some impact on the current Year 10 who are in their penultimate GCSE year.

- 125.4.7 Performance Measures: The reliability and relatability of future benchmarking data, in the context that there will be 2 possibly 3 years of turbulent assessment arrangements will need to be considered. Although it is known that the government will not publish the 2019 - 2020 performance data, or use this data to hold colleges to account, for example through Ofsted inspections. The government has announced that colleges will be held accountable for their 2020 – 2021 results (tests, assessments, exams). The 2020-2021 data will not be published in the traditional performance tables. However, a restricted set of data will be published on the Gov.uk compare school performance webpage, and will include; the subjects and qualifications pupils or students took at key stage 4 and post 16 and how well schools and colleges support their key stage 4 and post 16 pupils or students to their next destination.

Although the 2020 to 2021 national, regional, and local level educational performance data will be available, external benchmarking will be a significant challenge for governors re queries over whether the data can be used as a reliable and meaningful benchmarking indicator, given the different pandemic experiences at all levels and the apparent disparity in the way Centre Assessed Grades (CAGs) were applied in the summer of 2020 (with some colleges appearing to interpret the criteria in a more rigorous way to others).

- 125.4.8 Pastoral: During lock down, students will continue to have access to the wide range of support mechanisms and interventions, that would ordinarily be available to them. Mental Health support includes access to; personal and senior tutors, welfare hub staff working on and off site and trained councillors. Staff are aware of the need to ensure

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-W7R4OF46I>

⁵ Assumes a return to normality by September 2021

early identification of students that may be struggling, for example, with the mental isolation of remote learning or those in danger of becoming disengaged.

Due to Covid restrictions, students have been unable to visit universities in person. Many students will now be in the position of confirming university offers without having visited university or the town or city in which their chosen destination is based. It is expected that Universities will be considering carefully, how they are going to engage with the 2021 cohort of students and what remedial work, may be required in order to help this cohort of students fulfil their aspirations and full potential.

125.5 Current Position

In summing up, the Principal informed governors that at the present time, the College is unable to provide students and parents with the reassurances they seek re summer 2021 assessments. Information, to be sent to students and parents in the forthcoming days, will reiterated the need for students to remain engaged with teaching and learning, to ensure that they receive the best possible progress/outcomes and be able to progress post 18. Mock exams, are likely to be rescheduled to take place after the February half term, however, this will depend on the government restrictions in place at the time. Everyone is hoping that a vaccine, combined with other measures, will mean a return to a near normal situation by the end of the academic year.

On behalf of the Corporation, the Chair asked the minutes to record thanks to; the staff for their dedication and hard work and to the students and their parents/guardians for their understanding during this extraordinary time.

There being no other business the Chair closed the meeting at 19.10pm.

Approved by the Corporation on Minute No.....
