

REVIEW OF SCOTLAND'S COLLEGES

WORKING GROUP: ACCOUNTABILITY & GOVERNANCE

Minutes of Meeting on 24 January 2006 at 10.00am Forth Valley College, Falkirk

Attendees:

Aileen McKechnie (Chair)
Margaret McLachlan (Secretariat)
Col Baird, Review of Scotland's Colleges Team
George Reid, FAED
David Caldwell, Universities Scotland
Neil Cuthbert, ASC
Jennifer McLaren, SFC
James Alexander, NUS Scotland
Ian Graham, John Wheatley College
Linda McKay, Forth Valley College
Sandy Watson, Chair Angus College
John Cassidy, EIS

Apologies:

Fiona Farmer, AMICUS

1. Minutes of the previous meeting including action points

- The minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

Action Points from Previous Meeting

- i) Action points under Item 1 – A meeting between Col and the Funding Council had been arranged for 30 January to discuss a possible change to the code of Audit practice and prepare a paper.
- (ii) Action points under Item 3 – ASC had submitted a list of possible tenders. Research proposals paper had been amended and re-issued.

2. Update on Research Proposals

It was noted that the suggested list of contractors was lengthy and, following discussion, members agreed that suggested contractors would be asked, in the first instance, to submit an expression of interest. This invitation would be extended to others via the Scottish Executive website, and from returns, Scottish Executive standard criteria would be applied to select a shortlist of around 5 who would be invited to tender. Col agreed to circulate a copy of the criteria to members.

The group discussed the level of detail to be incorporated in the research specification paper. There was general consensus that the research specification should be more aspirational and should reflect the current climate of change around the establishment of the new Funding Council and the priorities identified at the recent Scottish Government Forum event. It was recognised that several of the issues from the previous review need to be revisited in order to bring them to a conclusion, however it was felt that the main objective of the current review must be more forward looking. For example, the review should look at strategic governance issues and challenges for the sector over the next 10–15 years, and should also take account of the changing landscape resulting from college mergers, for example. .

It was suggested that a one-page think-piece be produced to clarify the group's desirable outputs from this exercise, and it was noted that existing research (such as the Funding Council's review of colleges management action plans, and the Rowntree paper) would be useful for the contractors. Members agreed that a virtual sub-group should be set up to produce a paper setting out objectives for the research. The paper will be put to the main group for agreement, prior to the brief itself being re-drafted.

It was agreed that collation of general information from college boards, on areas such as their composition etc, could be obtained by way of a questionnaire. It was suggested that the Funding Council could issue the questionnaire on behalf of the Working Group and in advance of the appointment of the consultant.

It was suggested that we needed current information on Governance and Accountability to determine existing levels of good and less than good practices throughout the sector, not just members' own colleges.

ACTION POINTS: Col to circulate to members a copy of Scottish Executive's standard criteria applied to select, from expressions of interest, those who are asked to tender. Col to arrange the 'virtual sub-working group' which will prepare a paper setting out objectives for the research and bring back to full working group for approval.

3. Charitable Status

Aileen provided an update on progress with taking this issue forward. Officials dealing with the Charities Bill were meeting with the Deputy Minister for Communities today, 24 January to agree a response to the Deputy First Minister's request for exemption for the college sector. It was noted that there was concern in the sector in relation to this and it was agreed that ASC would inform the sector that Ministers were in dialogue regarding this issue and that the outcome of this would be known within the next 4 weeks or so.

ACTION POINTS: ASC to inform the sector that Ministers were in dialogue regarding charitable status of colleges and that the outcome of this would be known within the next 4 weeks or so. Executive to keep members informed of progress on this issue.

4. Proposed Changes to Board Membership

A submission on proposals for a number of changes to the constitution of FE college Boards of Management was put to Ministers on 24 October. These proposals are still being considered by Deputy First Minister.

The question of staff representation was raised with regard to numbers on Boards of management and the length of tenure.

ACTION POINT: Executive to keep members informed of progress on proposed changes to Board Membership.

5. A.O.B.

On behalf of the working group, the Chair congratulated John Cassidy on his award of the MBE in the Queen's recent New Year's honours list.

To note: Following Mark Cummings departure from ASC, Neil Cuthbert will be the point of contact on all aspects of the Review of Scotland's Colleges work-streams.

6. Discussion with Student President

Tricia Sutton-Chalmers described her role as President of the Students Association within Forth Valley College. She explained that she had been President for the last 18 months and had been heavily involved in the college merger and the setting up of the Student Association in the Clackmannan campus. She explained that she had gained great experience in terms of personal and professional development, including in negotiating and time-management skills, and self satisfaction in the knowledge that her contributions had been greatly valued. She believed that the initial handover and training provided, combined with the ongoing support from her fellow student reps, staff and members of the Board of Management had contributed to her own success in post, as well encouraging students to volunteer to be class reps and to join the student association. She believed that formal recognition, perhaps through certification, of the work undertaken by someone in this role would be a good idea although not necessarily one that should receive accreditation. She believed that the amount of participation was very much a personal thing and accreditation could potentially put someone off taking up appointment.

Due to other pressures, she had unfortunately not been able to pursue opportunities to meet with student reps from other colleges until now and feels that this is something which could be developed further by her successor. The benefits that a College Board gains from the participation and dedication of a Student President highlights the two way nature of the relationship.

Several relevant reports have been published or are due imminently, e.g. the Funding Council's 'Learning to Improve report', the HMIE report on student participation and the SPARQs report (being launched on 23 February), also on student participation. It was suggested that the working group may wish to consider discussing the 'Learning to Improve' report and that Laurence Howells should be invited to speak to the group about this at a future meeting. There was further discussion on how best to obtain the views of the existing Student Presidents prior to them leaving at the end of this academic year. This is an issue for the working group to consider further.

ACTION POINTS : Working Group to consider how best to consider the relevant reports relating to the student experience and whether Laurence Howells should be invited to a future meeting of the group. Working Group to consider best way of gaining views of current Student Presidents.

List of Action Points

ITEM 2:

- Col to circulate to members a copy of Scottish Executive's standard criteria applied to select, from expressions of interest, those who are asked to tender.
- Col to arrange the 'virtual sub-working group' which will prepare a paper setting out objectives for the research and bring back to full working group for approval.

ITEM 3:

- ASC to inform the sector that Ministers were in dialogue regarding charitable status of colleges and that the outcome of this would be known within the next 4 weeks or so.
- Executive to keep members informed of progress on taking forward charitable status issue.

ITEM 4:

- Executive to keep members informed of progress on proposed changes to Board Memberships.

ITEM 6:

Working Group to consider how best to consider the relevant reports relating to the student experience and whether Laurence Howells should be invited to a future meeting of the group.

Working Group to consider best way of gaining views of current Student Presidents.

**Margaret McLachlan
FAED
ETLLD**

Updated 20 February 2006