

People & Culture Committee MINUTES

Date	17th March 2022	Time	11:00-13:00
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Venue	Virtual Meeting (Zoom)
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Chair	Gill Short
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Membership – Gill Short (Chair), Rebecca Conroy, David Smith, Averil Price, Becky Cooke, Marie Sangster
In Attendance – John Cooper (Maths Teacher), Claire Critchfield (HR Manager), Lauren Crawley (Director of People), Belle Howard (Director of Governance – *minutes*), Marcus Abel (UCU Trade Union), Claire Alexander (PA – Governance Administration)

Quorum: The meeting quorate throughout.

Apologies: None

There is a positive duty for the Executive Team to raise any issues about wellbeing of staff and working conditions with the Committee, as it occurs.

Pre-Meeting

1.	<p>INFORMAL DISCUSSION WITH TRADE UNION REPRESENTATIVE</p> <p>1.1 GS welcomed MA to the People & Culture Committee meeting and invited him to raise any points of discussion that he would like to share with Governors.</p> <p>1.2 MA shared the following comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A priority concern for staff members at present is the issue of pay. • Since 2009, staff have experienced ‘a loss in pay of 35%, in real terms’ and noted that staff had not yet received a pay increase this academic year. • MA noted that there had been suggestions of staff receiving additional annual leave in lieu of a pay increase; unfortunately, many staff were unable to afford holidays away to make this option meaningful or viable. • Further thought was needed terms of the messages given to newly qualified teachers and their ability to progress their careers meaningfully, given that their pay was not comparable to the school sector. • MA reflected that the college already struggled to recruit staff, which would likely to get worse and in turn impede the college’s ability to attract talent. • As such, the issue of pay needed to be address as a priority. • Some staff had the perception that the college was spending more on IT and facilitates than on pay. 	11:01
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Pre-Meeting

- There were examples of technicians who claimed universal credit, which should be a genuine concern for the college.
- However, it was positive news that no redundancies had been made last year.
- MA suggested that the college should review the proportion of income that was allocated to the spend on staff pay.

1.3 The following discussion then occurred:

- **GS thanked MA for his comments and asked – do you have any other priority concerns or issues?** MA advised that Executive Team had committed to respond to the issue related to the harmonisation of contracts. MA advised that he would be meeting with MW next week to discuss this further, e.g. as a means of deferred pay increases.
- MA stated that the Executive Team had readily engaged in communication with the trade unions.
- MA explained that UCU had initiated a national indicative ballot for a 10% pay increase for the next academic year, which may lead to strike action. With that in mind, MA expressed a desire to establish a pay deal, so that local staff members would not be involved in this action.
- MS noted that as they were the lowest paid, support staff were particularly impacted by these issues, particularly as many supplemented their income with government benefits and routinely utilised foodbanks.
- RC advised that this area remained a priority focus area for the Executive Team and as such had been in discussion with the trade unions. It was a difficult position, particularly in recent years when the college reported inadequate financial health. The college was therefore working with the trade unions to develop a medium-term strategy that recognised the fragile position of the college, that had not been helped by significant under recruitment in the previous year.
- With this context in mind, RC noted that whilst there had been some increase in funding, the college still needed to remain focussed on cost reduction. The plan would therefore focus on narrowing the pay gap, harmonisation of contracts, ensuring clarity around roles/responsibilities and addressing pay for the lowest paid staff.
- RC advised that, with agreement from this committee, a 1.5% pay award would be presented for approval at the next Full Board meeting on 29th March 2022.
- RC also noted that the college did not make any redundancies last year and that utilisation was at 88%. Business planning will therefore need to be as efficient (and transparent) as possible, in order to facilitate a pay award to staff.
- RC reflected that any plans would be developed in collaboration with the trade unions and expressed a strong commitment to ensuring transparency in addressing the issue of pay, particularly for the lowest paid.

Pre-Meeting

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RC also advised that the college would explore creative solutions in the benefits provided to staff, such as food subsidies. RC again reiterated her commitment to partnering with the trade unions, with a view to avoiding industrial action. • BC noted the West London College UCU agreement and asked MA whether this was the type of deal he was hoping for with ESCG? MA confirmed that the West London College agreement was a good example which would avoid the need for national action. MA also noted that this agreement had included a 3% pay award this year, as well as a pay increase over the rate of inflation in September, which represented a good deal for staff. • BC asked – what sort of timescale would be needed for a deal to be agreed in order to avoid national action? MA advised that negotiations were ongoing with RC and MW to explore this issue further. MA also advised that the indicative ballot would close on 30th March 2022, which would likely lead to a postal ballot. MA estimated that this may result in strike action to commence at the start of the next academic year. As such, there was still time to come to an agreement. • MA noted that in light of their concerns around pay, teaching staff were carefully considering whether they wished to remain in the FE sector and were particularly mindful of the differences in pay as compared to sixth form settings. • DS thanked MA for articulating his concerns so succinctly and noted that it was encouraging to hear the Executive Team and Trade Unions had maintained an open and collaborative dialogue throughout these discussions. • DS reflected that industrial relations in the FE sector had often suffered, primarily due to a lack of meaningful conversations that explored creative solutions. DS also considered the need for greater awareness on the bigger picture, noting that there were often misconceptions about pay conditions in schools and sixth form colleges. • MS suggested that it would also be helpful for a representative from Unison to attend, to ensure their views were also be shared. Governors agreed. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <u>Action 1.3.1</u> – Invite representative from Unison to attend the next People & Culture Committee meeting. • Governors again thanked MA for sharing his insights. • MA left the meeting at 11:20. 	BH/RC
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2.	<p>WELCOME & APOLOGIES 11:21</p> <p>2.1 GS formally opened the meeting at 11:21 with a warm welcome to colleagues. GS particularly welcomed BH and LC to their first meeting at this committee.</p> <p>2.2 There were no apologies as all members were in attendance. Governors noted that JC would join the meeting later.</p>	

3.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</p> <p>3.1 There were no new declarations of interest received.</p>	11:23
4.	<p>MINUTES OF LAST MEETING</p> <p>4.1 Approval</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governors considered the minutes from the last meeting on 22nd September 2021. • Governors agreed that the minutes were a true and accurate record of what was discussed. <p>4.2 Matters Arising</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governors noted that the Annual Gender Pay Gap Report would be considered at the next meeting. 	11:24
5.	<p>PEOPLE & CULTURE REPORT</p> <p>5.1 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RC directed Governors to the ‘People & Culture Report’ and shared the following update: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ At 15.6%, staff turnover was currently well above the targeted level of 10%, so this area would require close monitoring in the light of the earlier discussion on pay. Key drivers identified as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Several staff had recently ended their fixed term contracts, so had left in line with their planned end date. ▪ There was also an element of data cleansing that had impacted the data. ▪ The departure of some longer tenured staff, who post-lockdown had re-evaluated their career aspirations and plans. ▪ As such, there was higher than usual volatility in staff turnover levels. ○ Staff Pulse Survey: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There had been a 43% staff response rate to the pulse survey conducted last November and the survey was open for 5 days. ▪ The output of the pulse survey was considered as part of the newly established staff think tanks, which were designed as a mechanism for staff to focus on priority staff wellbeing issues. ▪ A more comprehensive survey was planned for after Easter. • BC reflected that the college was performing better than the national average for staff turnover, which was currently trending at 17% (as compared to 15% in the public sector). LC noted that the AoC had reported national staff turnover rates of 18% in the prior academic year. 	11:26

- BC therefore recommended that the college complete a benchmarking exercise as a target of 10% may not be realistic in the current climate. [Governors agreed.](#)
- **DS reflected on the mandatory training rate of 92% and asked whether in real terms, there were too many members of staff who had yet to complete their safeguarding training?** RC advised that she was keen to implement a clearer annual cycle of safeguarding/core training, in a similar format to the approach adopted in schools, where staff complete this at the start of the academic year during INSET days.

5.2 Staff Appraisals

- **GS reflected that there had been a history at the college of not all staff routinely receiving an annual appraisal and asked – would this be addressed by the end of the current academic year?** RC advised that good progress had already been made in simplifying the annual appraisal process, with a newly developed appraisal template. This was in readiness for the year-end review process in the Summer Term, though RC reflected that this may not fully resolve this issue and further work was ongoing.
- RC explained that some managers had as many as 40 staff reporting into them, so the previous performance management process had not been achievable or sustainable. However, RC noted that the recent work on developing the curriculum structure had supported this effort. RC advised that LC would ensure oversight and the ongoing development of the staff appraisal process moving forward.

5.3 Apprenticeship Levy

- RC shared the following update:
 - There was currently £190,987 in the levy pot with £18,622 spent since March 2021.
 - There were 6 apprentices currently employed by ESCG.
 - LC would be leading this area moving forward, leveraging her experience from her prior role at East Surrey College.
 - RC explained that the ongoing 'Change Makers' project had specifically focussed on the apprenticeship levy and the opportunity to share ideas and best practice from a leadership and management perspective. This remains a complex area that would require ongoing development.
- GS noted that the college had student peer coaches and suggested that there may be an opportunity to recruit them through the apprenticeship programme.
- LC suggested the following opportunity areas for employing further apprentices at the college, through:
 - Mentoring
 - Teacher qualifications
 - Learning support assistant roles
- GS suggested that a creative way to make use of the apprenticeship levy could be to support partners and stakeholders, in addition to efforts to support the development of existing staff.

- DS noted that RC was due to meet with FE Sussex on 28th March 2022 and suggested that there may be an opportunity for this organisation to consider appointing apprentices, e.g. for administrative based roles.
- GS reflected on leaver destinations and suggested that there may be a sizable proportion of young people that may not wish to immediately pursue higher education, so providing an alternative apprenticeship pathway could be a particularly appealing option.
- [Governors agreed to discuss the Apprenticeship Levy in further depth at the next meeting.](#)

5.4 Recruitment & Selection

- RC advised that recruitment was underway for the following roles:
 - Vice Principal – Student Experience
 - Vice Principal – Business Development
 - Assistant Principal – Hastings
 - Director – English & Maths
 - Director – Partnership & Inclusion
- Additionally, RC shared plans to establish Deputy Head of Curriculum roles, via the redeployment of existing resources, which would in turn establish a clearer development pathway for staff and ensure greater support for teaching staff.

5.5 Pay Award

- RC shared the following comments:
 - As previously explained, a pay award was not made at the start of this academic year.
 - Similarly, the pay award that was made last year was late, though it was backdated.
 - In recognition of the position that staff are currently in, a 1.5% pay award was recommended. This was affordable and had therefore been built into next year's budget.
 - The college were looking to find a further 2% next year as part of the business planning process, which would mean an overall increase of 3.5%.
- DS reflected on the need to work closely and sensitively with the trade unions to ensure a shared understanding of the broader FE context and the comparative funding model in the schools/sixth form sectors. [Governors agreed.](#)
- LC reflected that a 1.5% pay award was relatively generous compared with other colleges at this time and offered to source pay data from across the FE sector as a point of comparison.
 - **Action 5.5.1 – Consolidate comparative pay data from across the FE sector, with a view to share this with Governors.**
- MS expressed concern that support staff were under-represented and may be under-supported by their union. RC advised that the college had actively promoted trade union membership with support staff and provided reassurance that the Executive Team were mindful of the needs to support staff.

LC

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GS reflected on the cost of living crisis, the associated impact on support staff in particular and the need to provide appropriate support. As such, it was important to establish a longer term pay strategy that takes these issues into consideration. • RC also noted the need for staff to proactively support student recruitment to assist efforts to generate future income and thereby help ensure that further pay awards were financially viable. • DS noted the need to ensure input from both teachers and support Staff Governors to enable the People & Culture Committee to ensure a balance of perspectives when considering the sensitive issue of pay. • GS asked – when will the Staff Governor election process take place? DS advised that the Staff Governor election process was due to commence from the Summer Term, ideally timed to ensure a handover from the existing Staff Governors. • RESOLUTION: Governors agreed to recommend a 1.5% pay award for approval by the Board at the next meeting on 29th March 2022. 	
6.	<p>PEOPLE STRATEGY</p> <p style="text-align: right;">11:57</p> <p>6.1 Staff Wellbeing, Staff Representation, Culture & Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RC shared the following update: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ LC had already commenced an initial review of the People Strategy and suggested a range of enhancements to approach and timings. ○ A key aspect of the strategy leveraged the newly launched ‘Staff Think Tanks’ on each campus, which were designed to explore and address a range of staff wellbeing issues for both teaching and support staff. ○ Whilst RC attended the first sessions for each campus, moving forward, each Think Tank would have a Support Staff Manager and Curriculum Lead as part of its membership. This would be to address any relatively simple queries, but also to feedback on wider issues, challenges and concerns to the Executive Team. ○ The first round of Think Tank discussions raised a number of suggestions, including the introduction of a ‘cross college’ Think Tank, which would enable broader collaboration on a range of shared issues. ○ Moving forward, Think Tank discussions would be led by staff (with commitment from leaders to attend), with a view to empower staffing groups to consider staff feedback and work to explore potential solutions as needed. ○ Additionally, each Think Tank now had an MS Teams group set up, to enable the Executive Team to directly connect and obtain direct feedback on any burning issues. ○ The primary intent of this new approach was to shift emphasis away from staff simply sharing their feedback/raising concerns (as may have historically occurred with Student Councils) to a more dynamic approach where staff were empowered to share their ideas and possible solutions to problems. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MS reflected on the recent Think Tank discussion at the Eastbourne campus and noted that the discussion format had been particularly positive, which gave the staff the opportunity to explore a range of ideas, e.g. staff social events and cross campus IT access. CC advised that both the Eastbourne and Lewes Think Tank sessions were very positive, which included an update on the imminent launch of the Staff Portal. This tool would make it much easier for staff to find key staffing information and resources in a single location. AP asked – how frequently will the Think Tanks meet moving forward and who has responsibility for the organisation of these? RC advised that in line with their terms of reference, the Think Tanks would meet a minimum of three times per annum, but more frequently if needed. Additionally, smaller working groups could be established to focus on specific projects, e.g. social events etc. RC confirmed that the Think Tanks would be underpinned with HR support and organised and administrated by the Executive Team Personal Assistants, in terms of scheduling meetings and drafting minutes. RC also reflected that it may be useful for the Chairs of each Think Tank to share an update to Governors at a future People & Culture Committee meeting. Governors agreed. GS asked – what has been the response to the Think Tanks from the Trade Unions? RC advised that there had been no significant feedback or concerns. One of the TU Reps had attended the Hastings Think Tanks. DS suggested that it would be helpful for the Director of Governance to keep engaged around the staff Think Tanks, with a view to interpret and share key themes/insights with the Board. GS reflected that it was equally important for Governors to have oversight of both ‘staff voice’ and ‘student voice’, in order to develop a coherent strategy. Governors agreed. DS noted that AP and NT had agreed to be the Student Voice Link Governors. GS explained that as Safeguarding Link Governor she had been involved in Student Voice. As such (and when appropriate), GS indicated that she would welcome the opportunity to work with the Student Voice Link Governors moving forward. 	
7.	<p>EQUITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION (EDI)</p> <p>12:11</p> <p>7.1 RC shared the following update:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> EDI remains a priority focus area for ESCG. Managers recently participated in Unconscious Bias Training, led by two highly experienced local trainers. This was very well received. Work was underway to establish a comprehensive EDI data set, in order to better understand staff needs, issues and concerns. As such, a clear and sensitively worded communication would be issued to staff to explain why the college was updating its records, i.e. to better understand and celebrate diversity, as well as support staff as needed. A further update on this work would follow at the next meeting. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additionally, a student led Lewes Pride event had been scheduled for 31st March 2022, which was being hosted at the college. It was hoped that future events could be held in the town centre from next year. <p>7.2 The following discussion occurred:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GS reflected that it was important to be sensitive in how EDI data was used, with a view to engender trust with all staff groups. • RC noted that EDI remained a priority focus area for both the Board and Executive Team and hoped that a culture had been established whereby both students and staff felt able to disclose any EDI related issues or concerns. • BC reflected on the need to be clear about the purpose of gathering EDI data, so that staff understand the benefits of sharing this information and how this would inform the college's approach and strategy moving forward. Governors agreed. 	
<p>8.</p>	<p>CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT</p> <p style="text-align: right;">12:16</p> <p>8.1 Campus Update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GS reflected on the earlier discussion with MA, with regards to staff perceptions related to how funds were spent on capital development versus spend on staff pay. • RC noted that there had recently been some significant issues related to IT/servers at the Hastings Campus and reflected on the impact that this can have on both staff and students, hence the need to prioritise investment in the college's infrastructure and resources as well. • RC then shared the following update on the Capital Development Plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Work was ongoing with Wilmot Dixon, who had been commissioned to complete detailed pre-planning work on a range of options across the estate. ○ The Executive Director – Resources & Organisational Development (EDROD) was currently on a period of sickness absence. ○ As a result, an interim part time resource (Nathan Haffenden) had been appointed on a secondment basis from Eastbourne Borough Council, to ensure momentum on some key investment projects (and excess estate) in Eastbourne and Lewes. ○ A priority focus area of this work would also include the engagement and feedback from staff, with a view to feed this into early planning activity. ○ In the absence of the EDROD, the last Capital Development Board meeting was cancelled, with a view for this to be rescheduled in due course. ○ There were a significant number of smaller projects across all campuses, including the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Newhaven: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Partnership with Lewes District Council to occupy the former UTC Building to develop marine technology and marine sciences. A consultant had therefore been engaged to develop a bespoke offer, with a view to attract a wide range of potential students. – Collaboration with Brighton & Hove Buses on a hydrogen centre, also to be based in the UTC Building. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Eastbourne: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Partnership with Eastbourne Borough Council and The Towner Art Gallery, using the levelling up funding to develop a learning centre at Blackrock Farm. – Decarbonisation Academy Project based at Hampden Park, in co-location with OHM Energy. This project included plans to develop a pipeline of employees, as well as the upskill existing ESCG staff. • GS asked – can you share an update on the disruption caused by the ongoing ground pump works? RC explained that the Lewes and Eastbourne sites were most impacted by this work. There had been particular focus on clear communication with staff to ensure they were well informed on noise disruption caused by this work. 	
9.	HEALTH, SAFETY & WELFARE POLICY 12:23 9.1 Governors noted that the Health, Safety & Welfare Policy would be reviewed (and recommended for approval) at the Audit Risk & Compliance Committee on 24th March 2022. 9.2 RC advised that there had been no significant changes to this policy. 9.3 RC also confirmed that there had been no significant health and safety incidents in the intervening period.	
10.	UNDERTAKING A PHD & ASSOCIATED PROJECTS 12:26 JC joined the meeting at 12:26. 10.1 JC shared the following update: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JC shared a brief summary of his career as a teacher of mathematics and advised that he was currently teaching at the Eastbourne campus. • JC advised that his career development had been directly supported by ESCG, whilst he was still able to remain teaching in the classroom. • JC advised that five years ago, he had secured funding from the Education & Training Foundation (ETF) of £35,000 to develop his project related to muscle memory and Maths Mastery. • As a result, JC advised that this funding had enabled him to create the ‘Essential 8 Maths Mastery Programme’, which was a learning technique and scheme of work linked to the Ebbinghaus Forgetting Curve. • JC reflected that the approach had transformed the way in which he now taught maths and formed the basis of his PhD. • Additionally, JC explained that he (and his colleague) had since published the ‘Essential 8’ books and advised that the series had been made available to students at the college, sold at cost (£1.28). As result, more than 10,000 copies had been sold and 30,000 free copies had been downloaded. • JC explained that he continued to collaborate with a number of colleges including Exeter, South Thames, Brighton, Sunderland and Leicester on the programme. • JC also advised that he was the Sussex Hub Maths Lead for post-16 and remained committed to being a reflective teacher, focussed on the student learning experience. 	

	<p>10.2 The following discussion then occurred:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GS thanked JC for his comprehensive update and asked whether all ESCG campus locations were leveraging the ‘Essential 8’ technique? JC advised that the system had been fully embedded at Eastbourne, whilst Lewes were in the early stages of its use and Hastings had yet to leverage the resources, as they were currently tied into another system. • GS reflected that it was a shame that the ‘Essential 8’ programme was being shared so widely with other colleges but had yet to be embedded at all ESCG campuses. RC/JC agreed that there was an opportunity for greater collaboration in this area. 	
11.	<p>ANY OTHER BUSINESS</p> <p>11.1 Governors noted that the following items had been deferred to the next meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff Code of Conduct • Annual Gender Pay Gap Report • Capital Development Plan • Current Workforce Composition • ESCG recruitment and selection processes and comparator data • Annual Gender Pay Gap Report • Pay framework for college staff 	12:49
12.	<p>DATE OF NEXT MEETING</p> <p>12.1 Governors noted that the next meeting was scheduled for 16th May 2022, 14.00-16.00.</p>	12:50
13.	<p>LIVE COMMITTEE SELF-ASSESSMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Did the agenda and papers arrive seven days in advance? Y</i> • <i>Were the agenda and papers written with clarity? Y</i> • <i>Papers were clearly written? Y</i> • <i>Were the issues considered at the meeting appropriate? Y</i> • <i>Did you have all the information you needed to fully participate in the discussion and decision? Y</i> • <i>Was sufficient time available for thorough debate? Y</i> • <i>Were you satisfied that the decisions were arrived at in a proper manner? Y</i> • <i>Were you able to express your views? Y</i> • <i>Was the meeting chaired effectively? Y</i> 	12:51
14.	<p>CLOSE</p> <p>14.1 GS thanked DS for his contributions to the People & Culture Committee at his final meeting, prior to standing down from the Board. DS noted that as the new Chair of the Board, IM would be joining the meeting moving forward.</p> <p>14.2 The meeting closed at 12:52.</p>	12:52

Action Summary

Item	Owner	Action	Due Date
1.3.1	BH/RC	Invite representative from Unison to attend the next People & Culture Committee meeting.	16 th May 2022
5.5.1	LC	Consolidate comparative pay data from across the FE sector, with a view to share this with Governors.	16 th May 2022