Minutes of the **Business Development, Employer Engagement and Recruitment committee**
held on Monday 14th June 2021 at 12 noon

Present: Tim Thurston (Chair)
             Pradeep Bhardwaj, Peter Boucher, Carole Kitching, Rob Wheeler

With: Mary Prince, Interim Vice Principal Business Development and Employer Engagement
             Amanda Walton, Head of Marketing
             Tracy Scaife, Head of Governance

17.   Apologies for absence – received from Chris Baish.

18.   Disclosures of interest – none received.

19.   Minutes of the last meeting held 28th April 2021 and matters arising – minutes agreed as a correct record.

Matters arising raised as follows:

(a)   10 Minutes of the last meeting held 6th October 2020 and matters arising (a) Introduction and overview of provision – presentation (inc. risk management update and 16-19 recruitment, apprenticeship and partnership updates) – noted that the Chalkstream report was commissioned prior to merger and is therefore very out of date and has not been circulated. The Principal advised that governors were still welcome to have it if they wished but the offer was declined.

(b)   12 Marketing and Recruitment Strategy – it was suggested that there needs to be a specific plan to combat key competitors and that this should be a separate section within the marketing and recruitment strategy.

ACTION: AW to include separate section within Marketing and Recruitment Strategy regarding key competitors.

(c)   13 Committee role and relationship with IoT Employers Steering Group – the Chair stated that it is important to confirm the role of the committee. The committee needs to focus on discussion rather than analysis and support the leadership using its strengths to take the business forward. The Principal advised that she would like to see the group as an advisory committee rather than as a formal committee of the governing body and to use it as a sounding board with regard to employer engagement. It was noted that the group would need to receive relevant data in order to measure the impact of its proposals and plans and this was agreed.

20.   Order of agenda – the Chair advised that he would like to amalgamate items 4, 5, 8 and 9 on the agenda.

21.   Risk management update (inc. recruitment, apprenticeships and partnerships); recruitment update; apprenticeships and partnerships – reports by Interim Vice Principal Business Development, Employer Engagement and Recruitment and Head of Marketing received and noted.

With regard to apprenticeships it was noted that there are still challenges with recruitment and there is currently a focus on generating as many starts as possible. However employers are not currently taking on apprentices in the same numbers as they were pre-Covid. A question was asked with regard to feedback received from employers on the apprenticeships offer and whether this is used to focus and keep a clear track of the apprenticeships offer. Nationwide advised that they had provided some feedback on the IoT ffer but had yet to receive a response to this from the college, no idea of timeframe for consideration. They have also received no acknowledgement or idea of timeframe for the consideration of this feedback. The Principal advised that she is aware that feedback has been received and that changes to the offer have been made based on this. The Principal advised that she is aware that feedback has been received and that changes to the offer have been made based on this. The Principal and the Interim Vice Principal Business Development, Employer Engagement and Recruitment agreed to investigate this and report back to governors.

With regard to the college apprenticeship offer it was noted that the span of this is very wide and needs to be put into sub-sets within the college. It was suggested that the IoT should also become a discreet sub-set. Some of the areas will obviously shrink given the current situation with Covid, but others are expected to grow and these areas need to be identified. It is hoped that apprenticeship numbers will recover but it is thought unlikely that they will return to pre-Covid levels, and that this recovery will not be at a quick pace.

The Government is introducing many initiatives to get people back into work and a part of this is a move to shorter courses that are not necessarily qualification based. The courses are designed for both employers and employees, and a number of employers appear interested. These, along with other initiatives, could take the place of some apprenticeships.

Partnerships are in a better place with levels much the same as previously. The Partnerships Team have been working hard on putting in a significant number of bids and ensuring as wide a reach as possible.

There are still several months left to recruit students and this is the main focus of the Marketing Team at present. Covid has and continues to present many challenges and conversion rates are not as they normally would be.

ACTION: MP/CB to investigate feedback received re. IoT and what areas are in demand and where we are struggling to recruit and report back to the committee.

22.   Marketing and Recruitment Strategy – papers from Head of Marketing received and noted.

It was noted that the role of marketing within the college needs to be established and understood - is it central to the organisation, or a department used to promote it. Whether the college is marketing informed or marketing led also needs to be established. It is fundamental to identify the unique selling points (USPs) of the college, at present it is a very broad church. It is recognised that a standard set of USPs will not work and that there will need to be different USPs for different areas. As an organisation, the college is under-developed in how it approaches strategy. Labour Market Information (LMI) is used but is not sufficient and other sources of information need to be accessed. Marketing needs to be seen as a role throughout the whole college with the customer at the heart of it. The college needs to be a place that stands out, inviting and somewhere that people want to be and to spend time both learning and socially.

The marketing strategy needs to consider what the students want, what the market wants and what the organisation has to do to meet these needs. An outline of what can be achieved in the short to medium term needs to be identified. It is accepted that all of the above cannot be done for September 2021.

Reference was made to the difficult task of merging the two colleges together with the addition of an Institute of Technology (IoT) during a major pandemic. Concerns were raised that people generally are unaware of the merger of the two colleges, partly due to branding. However this is an important issue and awareness of this needs to be promoted. People need to know what the college stands for and what its priorities, values etc. are. Some local companies have mixed views on the merger and the IoT and this needs to be addressed. The Principal stated that positioning of the college will continue and that some of the messages raised have appeared on the website, in social media and within the college offer, however these do need to be more visible. Internal communications are as important as external communications and appropriate attention needs to be given to this matter.

The Chair stated that it is important to understand what is deliverable and when, with realistic achievable timescales set. The priorities are setting a tactical marketing plan, repositioning the college as one brand with appropriate sub-brands, and understanding the requirements of the market place. The Head of Marketing advised that there are currently resourcing issues and the marketing Team is currently three members short which is challenging. At the present time all of the Team's energy goes into chasing numbers for September 2021 as this is the most important short-term issue. The establishment of a marketing strategy is important as is it sets the future viability for the college and leads to the avoidance of fire-fighting.

The college is currently looking at agencies that it can utilise to help and any ideas or contacts that governors can provide would be welcome. The Principal is currently running the project for branding and positioning and has some views on this and will work with the Interim Vice Principal Business Development, Employer Engagement and Recruitment and the Head of Marketing to take these forward. She concurred that more capacity for marketing is needed. Work is in progress with a company for a new college website which will take approximately 7 – 9 months to complete. Due to the lead time the exercise needs to run concurrently with the branding exercise.

The Chair advised that the committee will help wherever it can in order to establish and implement the marketing plan.

In summary, the main points of action are –

- Establish and understand role of marketing
- Is college marketing led or marketing informed
- Identify unique selling points (USPs)
- Marketing needs to be seen as role throughout whole college with customer at heart
- Be a place that stands out , be inviting, place where people want to be and to spend time both learning and socially
- Marketing strategy needs to consider wants of students and market and what college needs to do to meet these needs
- Outline of what can be achieved short to medium-term
- Increase awareness of college merger and improve public and employer views on merger and IoT
- Improve branding and positioning of the college
- Make it known what the college stands for and make these values more visible

- Pay attention to internal communications
- Decide what is deliverable within timescales
- Priorities – setting a tactical marketing plan, repositioning the college as one brand with appropriate sub-brands, understand the requirements of the market place
- Address resource issues within the Marketing Team
- Utilise agencies
- Committee members to pass on any helpful contacts

23.   IoT recruitment update – noted.

24.   Employer Engagement strategy – noted.

25.   Any other business – raised as follows:

(a)   Frequency of meetings of committee – a discussion was held regarding the frequency of meetings and it was agreed that meetings should be held once per term or approximately every three months with interim updates provided every six weeks. In addition, updates will be provided to Corporation meetings.

ACTION: TS to plan meetings once per term (approx. every three months); CK and MP to provide interim updates: CK and MP to provide updates on BDEER related matters to each Corporation meeting.

16.   Date of next meeting – to be advised.