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(incorporating SAR Development Plan, Annual Plan, Headline Targets, Three Year Development Plan, Strategic Milestones, Inspection Action Plan, LSC 2003 Audit Action Plan, Equal Opportunities Action Plan)

1. **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1.1 Braintree College's Strategic Plan for the five year period 2004 – 2009 aims to refresh the College's mission to be "a college at the heart of its community, providing high quality education and training to meet the diverse needs of individuals and organisations in Braintree and its surrounding areas", whilst ensuring that students remain at the heart of all that we do.

1.2 By focusing on the three key strategic aims of:

- ❖ Quality
- ❖ Growth
- ❖ Efficiency

the College will, by 2009, ensure that its students experience consistently good or outstanding teaching, learning and support (OfSTED grades 1 and 2), double the number of learners it serves from 2003/04 levels and improve its financial efficiency.

1.3 The College will develop its curriculum to ensure that it meets the needs of its learners from age 14 upwards, including focussed provision for 16-18 year olds and opportunities for adults from 19+. It will continue to provide high quality academic and vocational education, training and support for individuals and organisations in Braintree and its surrounding regions via a range of appropriate delivery methods including full and part time courses, classroom delivery, work based learning, outreach provision, e-learning, distance and blended learning and customised courses for local employers. It will offer appropriate progression from foundation level, through levels 1, 2 and 3 to Higher Education, whilst ensuring that the Skills for Life levels of its local communities are raised. It will seek to widen participation in education and training amongst its diverse local communities and address local skills needs and the needs of local employers and businesses. It will seek and achieve external validation and recognition of the excellence of its provision.

1.4 The College will develop an open and collaborative ethos, pro-actively seeking to work with local and regional partners externally, and internally cultivating a culture of open, honest and robust two-way communication, where students and staff feel involved and valued. The flexible provision, development and management of resources will follow strategy and the College will maintain a pleasant, safe and healthy working environment for its staff, students and visitors, whilst having regard to the impact of its operations on the broader environment.

1.5 At Braintree College we are proud of our contribution to Braintree and its surrounding region. We intend to grow, enhance and celebrate this during the lifetime of this strategic plan with the aim of engendering a reciprocal pride in our students, staff and surrounding communities.

2. **INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 There has been a College of Further Education at Braintree for over half a century. During this time the College has experienced many changes, achieved many successes, learnt a variety of lessons and delivered a variety of strategies. The College's Strategic Plan for the period 2004 – 2009 is another stage in the College's evolution. It seeks to build on the College's many strengths and tackle its known weaknesses in order to ensure the future of the College and the sustained delivery of high quality academic and vocational education and training to an increasing number of people in Braintree, rural north Essex and its surrounding regions.
- 2.2 Further and Higher Education and training in the early 21st century is a dynamic and volatile sector. In drawing up this Strategic Plan the College recognises the need for a matching dynamic and flexible response to the changing needs of our stakeholders. Whilst the College's core strategy for the next five years should remain constant, elements of it will need to evolve and flex to keep pace with both internal and external changes. All elements of the plan will be monitored and kept under regular review by the College, with key appendices being updated and re-written on at least an annual basis in order to ensure that this document remains a relevant and useful management tool as well as a strategic expression of intent.

3. **MISSION STATEMENT**

Braintree College's mission is to be:

“A college at the heart of its community, providing high quality education and training to meet the diverse needs of individuals and organisations in Braintree and its surrounding areas”

4. **KEY STRATEGIC AIMS**

4.1 **Three Strategic Aims**

The College has three overarching key strategic aims:

- ❖ Quality
- ❖ Growth
- ❖ Efficiency

4.2 **Quality**

The College should continue to increase the quality of its academic provision. The current standard of teaching and learning is above average, with very little teaching and learning less than satisfactory and much of it good. The College cannot, however, afford to become complacent. It can always do better and has a duty to deliver the best possible learning experience it can to its learners. Teaching and learning that is satisfactory needs to become good, and what is good should aim to be outstanding. Support for the learner needs to match these standards consistently. Ongoing quality improvement is necessary:

- to provide the learner with the best of possible learning experiences;
- to provide each learner with appropriate high quality support to meet his or her needs;

- to make Braintree College the first choice learning institution for the residents of Braintree and its surrounding areas and thus support the College's key strategic aim of growth;
- to raise (with justification) the profile of Braintree College within its local and regional communities.

4.3 **Growth**

The College needs to grow. Full time student numbers have declined over the last seven years. In contrast, the population of the local and regional communities have grown and there are recognisable skills and training shortages. Many young people in Braintree go to school and college out of area and out of county. The reducing size of the college is starting to impact on its financial health and makes improved efficiency more difficult to achieve (an experience of many small colleges of the size of Braintree). The College believes its optimum size, in broad financial and student number terms, is approximately double its 2003/04 levels. It aims to achieve this increase by 2009, which is a challenging but potentially achievable target. Growth is necessary:

- to secure the College's financial health;
- to secure the College's improved efficiency;
- to match and support local and regional development;
- to meet the needs of our local communities and individual students;
- to safeguard the quality of the students' learning experience;
- to widen participation in learning.

4.4 **Efficiency**

The College needs to be more efficient. Whilst full time student numbers and related income have declined over the last seven years there has not been a commensurate reduction in expenditure or use of resources. Improved efficiency needs to develop in tandem with the College's planned growth, whilst maintaining and developing the quality standards currently enjoyed by the College. Efficiency is necessary:

- to secure the College's financial health;
- to support the College's key strategic aim of growth;
- to ensure appropriate stewardship and best use of public funds;
- to ensure value for money;
- to ensure that resources follow strategy;
- to permit investment in and appropriate quality support of the learner experience;
- to permit investment in and appropriate reward of the College's staff.

5. **COLLEGE FOCUS AND CULTURE**

- 5.1 If the College is to grow at the heart of its community, then the individual student must grow and develop at the heart of all that we do. If an action does not benefit the learner or contribute to one of the College's three key strategic aims then we must question why we are doing it. There must be an appropriate balance between the aims of growth, improved efficiency and increased quality and that balance must be adjusted by the long term and short-term needs of our students. The College must be efficient and business like in all that we do, but we must remember that we are not a commercial business; we are

an institution of learning which exists to serve the learner. We need to grow, but quality is as important as quantity. In striving towards increased quality we must remember that a learner's achievement and success can take many forms and traditional academic success is but one of them. It would be short sighted to target pure academic success at the expense of individual learners and the 'value added' they can gain from being a part of Braintree College.

- 5.2 The College will seek to develop an open and collaborative ethos, proactively working with local and regional external partners, and internally cultivating a culture of open, honest and robust two-way communication, where students and staff feel involved and valued. In terms of external collaboration the College will seek to engage with local, private and public sector organisations, becoming an active member in local community development and proactively seeking opportunities for partnership and collaborative working to enhance the learning opportunities available to local people. The College will seek to grow the number of employers that it works with both locally and regionally and will ensure that it collaborates productively with local 11-16 and 11-18 schools in order to deliver a cohesive 14-19 curriculum strategy in the locality (see section 6.1 below). The College will work collaboratively with other work based learning providers in order to deliver the government's skills agenda. (See section 6.3 below). It will work in partnership with Braintree and Uttlesford District Councils and the related public sector planning groups in order to better contribute to its local communities.
- 5.3 Within the College we will seek to develop a variety of mechanisms to ensure open, honest and robust two-way communication with staff and students. For staff this will include regular cross College staff meetings, the weekly Braintree Gazette newsletter, e-mail, line management structures, one on one discussions, constructive dialogue with the College's recognised Unions, and development of the role of the Academic Board and other cross College committees. In terms of students we will develop student fora, the meaningful use of student questionnaires, increased contact between students and senior managers of the College and increased involvement of students on College and Corporation committees.
- 5.4 Whilst recognising that from time to time the College will need to maintain confidentiality on some issues, we will not seek to keep matters unduly from the public domain and will look to share both good and bad news appropriately with all concerned.
- 5.5 Over the lifetime of the Strategic Plan the College will seek to empower staff by incrementally delegating both responsibility and accountability to as many levels throughout the College as possible. We will seek to undertake this delegation gradually, beginning with the management of budgets and staff.
- 5.6 We will aim to cultivate a culture of mutual respect, where open and non fearful two-way communication is the norm, where it is acceptable to ask questions and challenge in an appropriate manner, where decisions are taken at appropriate levels without the buck being passed up or down as a mechanism for avoidance.
- 5.7 We will aim for clarity of communication and decision making and a full exchange of information based on mutual respect; respect between staff and students and respect between individual members and groups of staff. All staff have an important role to play in the successful development of the College

irrespective of the role that we play. We are all members of the College and ambassadors for it.

- 5.8 Whilst supporting one another, we should not tolerate poor performance, but should seek to address it swiftly when it occurs. All people need to be able to make mistakes from time to time and to learn from them, and this should not be discouraged, but consistent poor performance should be challenged and appropriate support and action be taken to improve performance.

6. **STRATEGIC PLANNING 2004-2009**

6.1 **14-19 Curriculum**

The College is committed to the development of a vibrant and achievement focused 14-19 strategy for the Braintree area. To this end it will work collaboratively with its partner schools in and around Braintree and the North West Essex rural hinterland to provide leadership in the development of such a strategy. In terms of 14-16 provision the College recognises the benefits for certain young learners from participation in the more adult and vocationally focused environment of an FE College. We will work with our partner schools to extend this provision, as far as resources permit, to ensure that as many young people as possible who would benefit from this type of provision can do so. Subject to available funding the College will seek to enhance its BEST and 14-19 Flexibility Projects and seek further project funding where possible, to enhance the learning and support available for 14-16 students in its locality. In so doing it will also strive to maintain an appropriate balance of young and older students on its courses thus ensuring that the adult ethos that is so essential to the success of such initiatives is unaltered. In terms of 16-18 provision the College is proud of its role as the tertiary college for the Braintree area and will seek to enhance this whilst doubling the size of its 16-18 full time cohort during the lifetime of this Plan. This increase will enable the College to return to pre-1997 student levels. In developing this growth the College will seek to brand the provision available for 16-18 learners, including the promotion of an A Level Academy, to those who wish to pursue the traditional academic route to higher education or employment, whilst promoting and expanding the vocational opportunities for those whose route to HE or employment is more vocationally orientated. At the same time the College will seek to promote and develop its ethos of initial strong support for the young learner whilst increasingly allowing the learner to stand on their own as they progress through College so that by the time they progress onto higher education or work they have the necessary life and study skills to benefit fully from this transition.

6.2 **19+ Curriculum**

The College will seek to grow its 19+ provision, doubling it in size by 2009. It will do this by developing progression routes for adult learners and ensuring that there is a variety of delivery mechanisms and venues to suit individual learners' needs. The College will increase the number of level 2 qualifications achieved by adults in the area and ensure that progression routes exist to and from this level. Learning for many adults needs to have regard to their employment obligations and thus the College will seek to develop this provision having regard to its work based learning activity (see section 6.3 below) and its response to employer needs (see section 6.7 below).

6.3 **Work Based Learning**

The College has only recently offered work based learning provision to its learners, but the initial success of and on going demand for the same has convinced the College that this is an area of huge potential growth and demand and the College will therefore seek to respond within funding constraints. In developing its work based learning provision the College will have particular regard to the skills needs of Essex, currently identified as Care, Construction, Engineering, Retail and Transport and Logistics. The College will seek to develop work-based learning and other courses in all areas.

6.4 **Higher Education**

The College has a key role to play in increasing HE participation by the people of North Essex. The College is seeking to at least double its HE provision during the lifetime of this Plan through innovative delivery mechanisms which will match the needs of its local population. It will expand its currently limited HE portfolio to include an HND in Art and Design and HNC in Beauty Therapy in 2005/6 and will seek to extend its portfolio of HE provision further in accordance with the needs of its local community and through partnership working with Anglia Polytechnic University.

6.5 **Skills for Life**

The College recognises the importance of skills for life for all its learners whether delivered in the form of Basic Skills or Key Skills provision. The College also recognises the need for proactive learner support to ensure equality of access to learning for all its students. The College will continue to embed its Key Skills activities within its core curriculum and will seek to expand its Basic Skills programmes, taking learning out to the learner rather than expecting learners to always come into the College. The College will seek to develop its provision for students with learning difficulties and disabilities, working with partner organisations to ensure that the skills for life needed by these students, as well as their right to academic and vocational achievement, is provided by the College.

6.6 **Student Support**

The College believes that appropriate levels of support both within and outside of the learning environment are necessary in order to maximise the achievements of learners. Learning support should be available to all who can benefit from it and the College will seek to ensure that all learners have the opportunity to have their learning needs assessed at the earliest opportunity during their time with Braintree College. The College will seek to maximise the learning support available to students with identified need in order to ensure that all have equal opportunity to achieve their goals.

6.7 **Community Provision**

The College recognises the value of community provision in terms of genuine lifelong learning and the role the College wishes to have at the heart of its community. To this end we will endeavour to ensure, within funding perimeters, that all members of our local communities have provision suitable for their needs. This should include an element of recreational provision and learning for learning's sake, but in seeking to offer such provision the College

recognises that funding may have to be met by the learner or will have to be sourced from non-traditional funding routes.

6.8 **Employer Engagement**

The College enjoys good relationships with its local employers and we will seek to extend this activity through a broadening of our education and training portfolio, the varying of our delivery methods and the growth of customised full cost courses for local employers. The College will seek to engage further with local employers and organisations in order to ascertain better their training needs and will consult widely with them via informal and formal channels including the development of a Centre of Vocational Excellence and an Employer Consultation Group.

6.9 **Quality Standards and CoVE**

The College will continue to increase the already good quality of its academic provision. The current standard of teaching and learning is above average, with very little teaching and learning less than satisfactory and much of it good. The College cannot, however, afford to become complacent. It can always do better and has a duty to deliver the best possible learning experience it can to its learners. Teaching and learning that is satisfactory needs to become good, and what is good should aim to be outstanding. Support for the learner needs to match these standards.

During the course of this Strategic Plan the College will seek external validation and accreditation for its quality standards including recognition as a Centre of Vocational Excellence and Charter Mark accreditation. By 2009 it aims to improve its teaching and learning standards to the extent that all areas awarded a satisfactory grade in the 2003 OfSTED inspection will, if inspected, achieve good status and all areas identified as good during the 2003 OfSTED will be recognised as excellent. For the next College inspection after the 2003 OfSTED review the College will aim to achieve only grades 1 and 2 in its curriculum delivery areas. This increase in quality will be supported by rigorous quality procedures including ongoing lesson observation, meaningful and regular appraisal and focused staff development. The College will build upon its existing mentor and induction schemes in order to ensure that all new staff are suitably supported and will seek to ensure that by 2006/07 100% of its established delivery staff have appropriate teacher qualifications or are studying for the same. All new lecturers to Braintree College without a recognised qualification will be expected to undertake and achieve an appropriate teaching qualification within their first two years at Braintree College. Whilst supporting its staff to enable them to deliver the highest standards they are capable of, and whilst recognising that we all make mistakes and can learn from them, the College will not tolerate consistent poor performance and will respond swiftly to the same, utilising its quality and human resource procedures to ensure that support is provided and action taken so that standards swiftly return to an acceptable level.

6.10 **Widening Participation and Equal Opportunities**

"It is Braintree College's mission to provide the opportunity for all to learn and achieve, no matter what their age, personal beliefs, background or circumstances." (College Equal Opportunities Policy).

The College is committed to widening participation in education and will develop outreach activities in order to involve those members of its communities who traditionally have not seen education and training as a route available to them. The College will have particular regard to the value of project work and will endeavour to identify funding sources which can be used to support its mission to reach out to learners who have historically not sought to be part of the learning community. The College will monitor its equal opportunities practices and their impact, including reviewing its equal opportunities processes and drawing up a specific action plan which will be closely monitored to ensure that the College genuinely offers equality of opportunity to all its learners and staff and broadens its accessibility to others who have not traditionally been involved in education. In doing this the College will ensure that it is fully compliant with all related legislation.

6.11 **Accommodation Strategy**

The College recognises that its current Accommodation Strategy does not truly reflect the aims of the College as enshrined in this Strategic Plan. It has therefore produced a new Accommodation Strategy for the period 2004-2008 to reflect the true needs of the College and its curriculum. Key issues within the Accommodation Strategy include:

- Consistent maintenance of College premises in order to maintain the high standard of accommodation currently enjoyed by the College;
- An increased emphasis on environmental issues and the impact of the College on its local, regional and global environment;
- Increased efficiency in the use of existing premises;
- Adaptation and development of existing premises to match the changing curriculum needs of the College and ensure flexibility of provision;
- Disposal and rationalisation of accommodation surplus to College requirements in the long term.

The College's aim is to maintain a pleasant, safe and healthy working environment for its staff, students and visitors, whilst having regard to the impact of its operations on the broader environment.

6.12 **Health and Safety**

The College will increase its focus on Health and Safety matters to ensure a safe and healthy working environment for its staff, students and visitors. A review of its Health and Safety policies, procedures and practices will be supported by regular monitoring and review. By 2009 the College will have sought and achieved external validation and accreditation for its high standards of health and safety. In doing this the College will ensure that it is fully compliant with all related legislation.

6.13 **Resources**

The provision, development and management of resources will follow strategy. The College will seek to maintain the high levels of physical resource in terms of general and IT equipment that are currently enjoyed by students, within the financial resources available to it. The College will seek to increase the efficiency of its use of IT equipment, the levels of which are already higher than many Colleges enjoy, but which need to be more accessible to all

students. The College will continue to embed the use of IT throughout its curriculum and will seek to use the same to enable improved working with its far-flung rural communities. Use of physical resources will need to be flexible in order to keep pace with changes in the College and FE sector.

6.14 **Human Resources**

Similar flexibility will need to be employed in terms of human resources management. The College's human resources are its greatest asset and its greatest cost. These will need to be managed flexibly and efficiently in order to match the changing needs of the College's strategic development. The College will seek to ensure that between 75% and 80% of its teaching is delivered by staff on established contracts, with between 20-25% delivered by Associate Lecturers and temporary staff. This balance is necessary in order to achieve flexibility and efficiency whilst maintaining quality of provision. As the College grows its aim will be to spend 65% or less of its income on staffing costs. During the life of this Plan it will review its pay structures and salary levels with the future aim of accommodating annual pay awards which are commensurate with or above nationally recommended levels. The College will continue to develop the skills and expertise of its staff via a focused programme of staff development and industrial updating linked directly to the strategic aims of the College. The personal growth of its own staff, within the parameters of its Strategic Plan, will be of importance to the College. The College will also seek to support and develop staff via regular appraisals and annual target setting and by 2009 aims to be able to offer a package of personal review, development and remuneration which is sufficiently attractive to recruit and retain staff of the highest calibre. This will only be possible if the College achieves the strategic aims enshrined within this document.

6.15 **Financial Planning**

The College currently enjoys Category A financial status, but this is not sustainable in the short term. In keeping with its commitment to efficiency the College needs to take steps to secure its long-term financial health and the appropriate stewardship and use of public funds. The College will fully review its financial regulations and procedures in order to ensure that its financial management is robust. It will set clear financial objectives and monitor progress towards the same. Over the lifetime of this Plan it will seek to devolve and delegate, supported by appropriate staff development, the management of budgets and resources. It will plan for break even or surplus budgets with a view to improving its cash flow position and regaining Category A financial status by 2009. Its sound financial management will be underpinned by robust audit practices which adhere to legislative and statutory guidelines. It will seek to undertake a more robust review of financial and other risks and develop realistic contingency plans accordingly.

6.16 **Marketing and College Profile**

In order to place the College firmly at the heart of its community we will review our marketing strategy with a view to raising the profile of the College both locally and regionally and to reaching out pro-actively to those with whom we want to work. This will include an increased profile in the local and regional press, as well as focussed publicity activities. The College recognises, however, that publicity is only one facet of a pro-active marketing strategy. The College considers it vital that all staff are directly involved in its marketing

activities and that promotion of the College to students and would-be students is a task best undertaken by those staff closest to client and student need. The College will therefore seek to delegate such promotional activities to the most appropriate staff within the College. The College will seek to increase market penetration both in Braintree and the surrounding regions, including North Essex, Hertfordshire, South Cambridgeshire and Suffolk. Where appropriate the College will seek to brand its activities, e.g. the A Level Academy, in order to ensure increased clarity of its offer amongst its client groups. By focusing on the quality and responsiveness of its provision the College believes that its reputation will be enhanced with and promoted by its learners to the wider community. The College will seek to highlight the College's adult yet supportive ethos in order to ensure that learners choose their place of study according to their needs rather than unsupported perception.

6.17 **Risk Management**

The College will review extensively its risk management policies, procedures and register with the aim of fully embedding the risk management process within the strategic planning and day-to-day operation of the College.