Dear Applicant

Thank you so much for taking an interest in this VP role at our College. In the letter below I have tried to sketch out our context and to give you a flavour of what the role will entail.

We are a top performing 6th form college, which was previously a tertiary college. Amongst the tertiary work we retain is some 16-19 vocational provision at levels 1 and 2, apprenticeships, a small amount of adult work including professional courses and HE. However, the vast majority of our c2200 students are doing level 3 programmes, mainly A Levels. We have approximately 350 staff including managers, lecturers and a wide array of support staff.

We are located in a rural area with all the additional challenges that brings. Approximately two thirds of our students come in by coach each morning. In doing so they are choosing to come to us rather than our many competitors. We have survived and grown by listening to students (and parents) and delivering a great student experience and value added. Students come to us for the choice, the atmosphere and the freedom to develop in a safe and supportive environment. All our staff contribute to that but this VP role is critical in ensuring continued success.

And we have been really successful. Over the last 5 year we raised value added from around the FE average to ahead of most 6FCs whilst increasing numbers and improving retention and progression. We also did this whilst closing the gap between students from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers such that there is now no difference in their HE outcomes. We achieved all this because we have been very clear about where we wanted to go, have strong values and a well embedded ‘Ciren Way’ of going about things and a group of staff capable of achieving excellence. Of course Linear A Levels, student programmes and the new GCSEs effectively reset the clock and now we need to do it all over again. As is our way, we have thrown ourselves into these changes viewing them as opportunities to do even better. Inevitably we have made mistakes which we hope to learn from but you would be joining us at an exciting time to help lead us to renewed success.

If appointed you would effectively be one of two deputies for me (the other being VP Curriculum) and one of 3 members of our Senior Leadership Team. We are a small team and you would therefore undertake a very broad range of leadership and management tasks across the whole College and be involved in almost all decision making. You would also be on our wider leadership group with our Heads of Operations, Finance, HR and 2 Assistant Principals. In common with all Colleges we face flat/effectively falling income whilst trying to maintain high quality provision, the challenges of trying to pay our staff what they deserve and meet increasing student needs and of course to address national initiatives from mental health to T Levels. The leadership experience you will gain in grappling with the resulting dilemmas would be invaluable in applying for your own Principal-ship in the future if that is what you want.

We are in a period of transition at the College in many ways. This post is available because of the retirement of the current post-holder with the other VP likely to retire within the next year or so. In addition, our Governors have recently agreed a new 5 year strategic plan following consultation with staff and students and the new leadership team will be responsible for delivering against its stretching goals. As a result we will be reviewing much of what we do to ensure that everything is viable and fit for purpose. You would play a key role in all of these processes.

As a result of the forthcoming changes there will be some reshuffles of the portfolio of main areas of responsibilities within the leadership team in order to reflect priorities, expertise and your interests. However, your core areas of ‘student journey’ and external relations are unlikely to change.

Student journey encompasses the whole experience for students from joining to leaving. There is a highly effective SJ team who administer all aspects of this and run the major processes including admissions and exams. There is also a wider pastoral system which includes some specialist guidance staff. After an experiment with non-teaching tutors the College reverted to a traditional model of teachers as tutors with groups focussed on student’s intended destinations. This has led to a range of improvements but there is still considerable scope for new thinking here. Your role will also include oversight of customer care and feedback and being the College lead on safeguarding.

External relations includes both marketing and the wider promotion of the College. On one level there is an important ‘ambassadorial’ role here where you would be the most visible representative of the College in the community. A number of other staff (including myself) would be involved with you but you would lead on critical relationships such as those with partner schools. You would also take responsibility for College PR with support from our PAs. Successful marketing is absolutely crucial to the long-term success of the College and our environment is a challenging one. Highly effective school liaison has been a real strength but increasingly, as schools disappear into MATs, they close their doors to both our staff and guidance opportunities. We have responded by developing our events, social media capacity and HE related projects. However, a major aspect of your work will be reviewing the most effective ways to maintain and boost recruitment in a dynamic and rapidly changing environment.

You will be line-managing a range of staff with teaching and non-teaching backgrounds. Most of these will be from your core areas but we will also divide up other managers amongst ourselves for review purposes and oversight.

We are not looking for someone who is expert in all areas because this is likely to be a new role and there will be things you will need to learn. However, prior involvement in many of them would give you a definite advantage. The job-specification provides a long list of the skills and experience we are looking for but above all we need someone absolutely committed to the best possible outcomes for students and with the energy, drive and imagination to help us achieve them.

The post is available from Spring/Whitsun half term onwards because we think you would benefit by having some time with the current post-holder to handover, particularly with external relations. We can be flexible about start dates from 1 June to 1 September and if you started in this academic year would also honour any holiday you are due during the summer.

If you share our passion for the life changing impact of education and you are interested in becoming part of our team, we look forward to receiving your application, which you should address to the Human Resources Department.

Please apply by letter explaining why you would make an excellent VP and explain how you would assess the effectiveness of a) a pastoral system and b) College marketing.

In addition, please provide either a CV or complete the application form. If there are points on the form which are not in your CV then please just attach that information to your CV.

If you would like to visit the College or ask questions to find out more then please contact Helen or Kathy on T: 01285 626207   E: pa.principal@cirencester.ac.uk

Yours sincerely



Jim Grant

Principal