

Curriculum & Quality Committee

Approved Minutes

Minutes of a Meeting of the Committee held on Monday 7 November 2016 at the Thurrock Campus at 6.20 pm.

Present: Mrs G Williams (Chair)
Mr B Brooks
Ms A O'Donoghue CBE
Mr D O'Halloran
Ms M West

In Attendance: Ms D Brown (Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality)
Ms K Mulvey (Director of Teaching & Learning)
Mr N Zaidi (Interim HE Consultant) (Items 12 & 13 only)
Mr R I Millea FCA (Clerk to the Corporation)

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Terry Knight, Skye Bridle and Sally Carr.

2. Declarations of Interest

Members confirmed that they had no declarations of interest relating to items on the agenda. The Clerk notified his interest as Clerk to Chelmsford College.

3. Welcome to new Committee Members

The Chair welcomed Maya West (new Member) to the Committee.

4. Urgent Business

There were no items of Urgent Business.

5. Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 16 May 2016

The Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 16 May 2016 were **APPROVED** and **SIGNED** by the Chair.

6. Matters Arising (Paper CQC.16.11)

The Clerk **REPORTED** that the Board had approved the FE and HE Curriculum Plan 2016-17 including Adult Provision on 11 July 2016. They approved the 4 year high level FE and HE Curriculum Plan 2016-20 on 3 October 2016. This four year Plan had been submitted to the Area Review panel as part of the required dataset.

The Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality **REPORTED** that discussions have been held with Open University and they have confirmed that are interested in being our new validating partner for Initial Teacher Education after the University of Essex withdraw in September 2017. The Open University aim to have us approved so that courses can be offered from 1 September 2017 and institution and programme validation will take place in April 2017. The Committee **AGREED** that this was a really positive step, noting that the Open University is a respected provider in this area.

The Agenda was reordered and items 12 and 13 were covered next.

7. Teaching & Learning Strategy Annual Review (Paper CQC.16.20)

The Director of Teaching & Learning **PRESENTED** this Review, reflecting on the first year of the revised Strategy, which had been rolled out to staff in December 2015.

Members were reminded of their duty to monitor improvements in the quality of teaching & learning which is driven by this Strategy.

It reports on the application of the strategy throughout the year just ended and the impact of the measures planned on the quality of teaching and learning, which have helped the College reach a position for the 2015-16 where it has self-assessed as Good.

The Strategy will be embedded further in 2016-17 and linked closely to department monitoring and Professional Practice processes. It has been introduced fully throughout the College but needs further embedding.

Two minor amendments have been made to the Strategy in order to maintain a consistent approach to improving teaching, learning and assessment, namely inclusion of Personal Development, Behaviour and Welfare into Section 4 – Tutorial, in line with Ofsted changes and to reference Blended Learning in Section 6 the Learning Environment.

The Committee **RECOMMENDED** that the amended Teaching and Learning Strategy for 2016-17 be approved by the Board at its Meeting on 5 December 2016, noting that this Committee will monitor the Strategy during the year.

ACTION: CLERK

8. Final Learner Performance 2015-16 (Paper CQC.16.21)

The Board **RECEIVED** the Final Report from the Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality for the 2015/16 academic year. An interim Report had been considered by the Board at its Special Meeting on 17 October, when the SAR was validated.

The College Overall Achievement 16-18 headline rate for 2015/16 is 87.9% and represents a 7pp improvement over last year.

It was agreed that the 2013/14 comparators will be removed from the qualification tables as they are no longer comparable with current position, given the change in methodology and general education policy.

Key highlights:

- GCE A/AS below NA
- Study Programme Achievement for 16-18 learners at Level 1 up 24.6pp. The provision is below NA, but there is rapid and solid improvement. At Level 2, there is progress but not as fast as Level 1
- Achievement of GCSE English & Maths and Functional Skills English & Maths still remains and is known to be a challenge
- Adults – Level 1 is above NA and close to NA at Level 2 but Level 3 has presented difficulties.
- Apprenticeships 1.1pp above NA
- HE is same as last year and are good

A governor wished to know how the results will be viewed by Ofsted. English & Maths is the vulnerable area of the argument that we are not making fast enough progress but it is believed it is no longer for Ofsted a limiting factor. The College is in a position to demonstrate improvement and it is rapid. However, it is acknowledged that we may be taking an optimistic view.

Governors wanted assurance as to consistency across the College and how we would convince Ofsted that we are confident of our trajectory of improvement. Regarding teaching and learning, there still is some patchy provision but it is not systemic and intervention occurs when such situations are identified. The improvements in 2015/16 in learner outcomes and their consistency with what we predicted during the year will be a convincing argument.

The report contained full details of results in all key framework areas and the Committee **NOTED** the Report.

9. Current Learner Performance – Retention/Attendance/Learner Numbers 2016/17 (Paper CQC.16.22)

The Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality **PRESENTED** a detailed dataset on College KPIs for the year to date (to 2 November 2016) which showed retention and attendance so far this year.

Retention

The Committee noted that retention rates for this year for 16-18 learners is 2.2% up on last year at 95.8%. For 19+ learners, retention stands at 94.7%, 6.7% up on last year.

The KPI in each case is 91%.

All 16-18 Departments have a retention rate above 91% except Construction and the Built Environment (88.1%), with four Departments having an increase of more than 3% over last year (Engineering, Media, Skills, Support and Foundation Learning and Sport and Public Services).

All 19+ Departments have a retention rate above the target except Health and Science (87.7%) and SE6 (90.9%), and five are 10% higher than last year's final outturn.

The Board was reminded that these retention figures are based upon the number of starts from the beginning of the year and not the Ofsted funding rules measure of those learners which have passed the census point, which is typically 42 days from the start of their course. In effect, the figures so far measure attrition rates since enrolment.

Attendance

Due to the implementation of the new MIS system and changes to the curriculum structure, attendance data is not complete for this month but will be reported to the Board on 5 December.

ACTION: CLERK

In answer to a governor question, attendance is being tracked manually at Departmental Level but the figures are not available centrally. The College believes that Departments are managing attendance well and, in particular, taking action with students who are at risk for whatever reason.

Nevertheless, there is a risk that, without the central figures, certainty of attendance may be vulnerable.

Learner Numbers

The College has not reached its 16-18 learner allocation for the 2016/17 year with current enrolment representing 90% of the allocation at 5470 (including 150 16-18 Traineeships) as against the allocation of 6093, 623 learners short of target.

Clearly, if not reduced with in-year enrolments, which are continuing, this will impact our student number allocation for next year with consequent effect on our funding allocation for 2017/18.

Governors asked what actions are being taken to move closer to the allocation in addition to further enrolments and were informed that it may be necessary to consider using our existing collaborative partners to assist in delivering further courses and increasing student numbers for this year in order to go further towards meeting the allocation. However, this will not be at the expense of quality.

The Committee **RECEIVED** the Report, **NOTING** the current level of student enrolment, retention and attendance for 2016-17 and that the retention rates are based on the total number of learners that started a programme of study at the College as a percentage of the number of learners who are still on the course at 2 November 2016.

Regarding 19+ SFA Funding, learner numbers currently stand at 998, 16% less than at the same time last year. This does not include the Collaborative Partner allocation of 270. Recruitment continues of such students and further activity is planned, so that the College can hopefully deliver its full SFA allocation of £3.5 million. The Advanced 19+ Loans allocation is at 52% of the budget and further activity is planned for this year to increase this figure.

The Advanced Loans budget is at 52% against allocation and this figure will rise during the year. In connection with this item, the Committee was informed that no new subcontracting agreements can be established this year beyond those providers utilised in the past. From next year, all subcontracting provision funded through learner loans will be prohibited under new SFA rules. This will impact on learning loans spend but we plan to replace this with other provision.

The Committee **NOTED** the Report.

10. Update of College Improvement Plan 2016-17 (Paper CQC.16.23)

The Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality **PRESENTED** the updated Quality Improvement Plan, building on the draft Plan discussed and approved by the Board at its Special Meeting on 17 October 2016.

The Plan is a continuation of the very successful Plan last year, which contributed to the College SAR showing a Grade 2 – Good for the College.

This Committee will continue to monitor the Plan throughout the year.

Monitoring of the QIP so far this year indicates that the College has made a reasonable start to implementing the designated improvement actions. There are no actions identified as RED at this stage, but a number are noted as AMBER:

- Connection between digihub activities and classroom based activities
- Success rates on A Levels and Science
- Success rates in GCSE English
- Attendance monitoring
- Further embedding of English and Maths
- Learner attendance and punctuality (reports not yet available)
- Improvement of Work Placement activity
- Better understanding and effectiveness of Team Meetings with staff

Governors asked about Work Experience and how it is organised and its effect on Study Programmes delivery. It is up to the College to organise the Work Experience for students and the students cannot do it themselves as that contravenes the funding rules. It can be difficult to track because of the number of 16-18 year old students we enrol. The WorkSearch software module will enable better record keeping in this area.

The Committee **NOTED** the Report and was satisfied with the progress to date on implementing the improvements identified for this year.

11. Academic Performance Targets 2016-17 (Paper CQC.16.24)

The Principal & Chief Executive submitted a paper outlining the proposed academic targets for the College for 2016-17, together with headline achievement against the key targets set for 2015-16.

Members carefully reviewed the performance for the year just ended, noting the improvements over the previous year, and the proposals for this year proposed by the Senior Leadership Team, as to whether those targets are not only realistic but stretching.

Members remained concerned about the need for improvement in English and Maths and A/A2 levels as 2015-16 was not as good as had been hoped.

In framing these targets, it was noted that the National Averages for 2015-16 are not likely to be available until early in 2017 and the KPIs recommended are based on achievement in 2015/16 and are related to the National Averages for the previous year.

The targets have been modified so that they distinguish English & Maths between GCSE overall and for students who achieve a Grade C or above.

Some of the targets are not at the NA as the jump from last year's achievement to NA in some areas is considered too great and therefore not realistic.

There was a question about Value Added scores and it was clarified that the lower the number, the higher the Value Added.

The Principal & Chief Executive commented that the targets are challenging but achievement will demonstrate further significant improvement in student outcomes.

The Committee **NOTED** the performance against targets for 2015/16 and **RECOMMENDED** the targets proposed for 2016/17 be approved by the Board at its Meeting on 5 December 2016.

ACTION: CLERK

12. HE Update (Paper CQC.16.25)

The Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality, assisted by Nabeel Zaidi, HE Consultant, **PRESENTED** this Report, focusing on Actions taken and planned in response to the QAA Higher Education Review and designed to enable the College to move from 'requires improvement' to 'meets expectations' by the time the expected QAA review takes place in July 2017.

The Action Plan is very detailed and includes fields for the evaluation of the actions taken and the impact thereof.

Most of the actions due to be completed by September 2016 have been done and a holistic approach is being adopted with a number of recommendations being completed simultaneously.

Milestones for completion have been agreed with the QAA HER Review Manager with progress meetings scheduled for January, March and May 2017. Achievements against the action plan are continually monitored by the review manager. Final documentation and evidence will be provided to the Review Manager by 12 June 2017. A visit is likely following this process.

The implementation needs to be tied into a clear audit trail. This picked up a recommendation made by the QAA Review Manager.

Governors asked about progress to date with the Action Plan and were informed that it is good so far but enhancement continues to be a challenge e.g. quality of learning opportunities and their improvement. It can vary between institutions depending on the maturity of the organisation and the level of resourcing. It is measured at department level, programme level and institutional level.

In response to governor challenge, it was the case that the strategic level of enhancement for the whole College was not mature and not always clear although there was good practice at both department and programme level.

Successfully completing the Action Plan is critical in order to maintain the College's accreditation for HE, with the consequent financial implications. It is considered that the Action Plan is robust and meets the objectives – there has been no feedback from the HER team, to say that it does not.

The Committee **NOTED** the Report.

13.HE Annual Quality Assessment Return (Paper CQC.16.26)

The Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality, supported by Nabeel Zaidi, HE Consultant, **PRESENTED** this Return to the Committee, inviting the Committee to consider and discuss the Report and the relevant aspects of the Action Plan underpinning the Report, and to approve the Return for submission to HEFCE by 1 December.

It was **AGREED** that the Return should be sent to the whole Board directly after this Meeting asking for its approval by email resolution by 25 November so that the Report can be submitted by the deadline of 1 December.

The Return will be formally **APPROVED** at the December Board Meeting.

(Post Meeting Note: An email resolution with the accompanying documentation was sent to the Board on 8 November)

ACTION: CLERK

The Committee was informed that the Return forms a pivotal part of the new HEFCE Assurance Review process, the satisfactory outcome of which ensures continued HE Funding for the College and HEI/University validation, as well as the ability being secured to gain new validating partners.

The Return focuses on providing the evidence base necessary to demonstrate alignment to the two assurance statements relating to the continuous improvement relating to the student academic experience and student outcomes and the reliability of degree standards (HE Code of Governance)

The Committee examined the Return in detail and assured itself that the review is accurate and evidence based.

A governor asked about RAG rating and how it was done. It is not a benchmark comparator with other Colleges and has been prepared on a 'trends' basis within the College. Governors will all be made aware of this methodology in the email that is circulated and, if there is no RAG rating, it is because the cohort is too low.

Governors asked how Degree Level Apprenticeships will be judged/rated as they are different from traditional provision. This is to be clarified but it is thought that it will be the responsibility of HEFCE through QAA, as that matches the funding arrangements.

It was agreed that validation and approval of this Return will be an annual matter and it will be built into the Schedule of Business of the Committee for Build in the cycle for next year.

ACTION: CLERK

The Committee **RECOMMENDED** the Return for submission to HEFCE by 1 December, as required, subject to an email resolution seeking approval from other Board Members. Once approved, the Principal & Chief Executive will sign the Return on behalf of the Board.

ACTION: CLERK

14. Area Reviews

This was deemed to be a Confidential Item under the Instrument & Articles and a separate minute has been prepared and is attached to these Minutes.

15. Committee Matters (Paper CQC.16.28)

The Clerk **TABLED** a Paper on a number of Committee Matters.

The Committee **REVIEWED** its Terms of Reference and did not consider any changes were necessary. It **RECOMMENDED** the Terms of Reference be approved by the Board at its next meeting on 5 December 2016.

ACTION: CLERK

The Committee **NOTED** that, having reviewed a paper prepared by the Clerk, it had complied with its own Terms of Reference during 2015/16.

The Committee **RECEIVED** a copy of the Curriculum Planning audit carried out in May 2016 by RSM for information, noting that it had already been received and considered by the Audit & Risk Committee and also **RECEIVED** a copy of the Minutes of the Academic Board held on 20 May 2016.

The Clerk **INFORMED** the Committee of curriculum-related Internal Audit work planned for 2016/17, the main item being the Student Journey: the first six weeks.

The Committee **RECEIVED** an updated schedule of Governor Links, reflecting Departmental changes which have recently taken place, along with the proposed retirement as a governor of Sally Carr at 31 December 2016.

Maya West was content with the reallocation of her Link following the intended retirement of Sally Carr.

The Committee were **REMINDED** to return their completed Self-Assessment forms for 2015/16 to the Clerk, so that a Report can be provided to the Board in December.

ACTION: CLERK

16. Forthcoming Events (Paper CQC.16.29)

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided by the Clerk relating to forthcoming events.

17. Dates of Forthcoming Meetings 2016/17

Monday 27 February 2017 – Thurrock Campus

Monday 15 May 2017 – Basildon Campus

Both Meetings to commence at 6.00 pm.

There being no further business, the Meeting terminated at 8.10 pm.

Signed.....Dated.....