

## **Curriculum & Quality Committee**

---

### **Approved Minutes**

Minutes of a Meeting of the Committee held on Monday 9 February 2015 at the New Thurrock Campus, Grays at 6.00 pm.

Present: Mr D O'Halloran (Chairman)  
Mr M Allars  
Mr B Brooks  
Mrs S Carr (from 6.20 pm)  
Ms R Hawkridge  
Mr T Knight  
Ms E Mead  
Ms A O'Donoghue CBE

In Attendance: Ms C Anson-Higgs (Vice Principal, Business Development)  
Ms W Barnes (Assistant Principal, Student Support)  
Ms D Brown (Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality)  
Ms K Mulvey (Director of Teaching & Learning)  
Mr R I Millea FCA (Clerk to the Corporation)

### **1. Presentation from Gemma Simmons (Early Years, Health & Care)**

The Committee was to receive a presentation from Gemma Simmons: Interim Head of Early Years, Health & Care on her Department, which could not be delivered due to illness. She will be invited to present at the next meeting of the Committee on Monday 18 May 2015 at Basildon.

### **2. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs G Williams and Mr R Davies (Head of College Information Services).

### **3. Declarations of Interest**

Members confirmed that they had no declarations of interest relating to items on the agenda.

### **4. Urgent Business**

#### **New Appointments to the Committee**

The Clerk reported that the Search & Governance Committee had appointed Michael Allars (HE Student Governor) and Brad Brooks (Academic Staff Governor) following their recent elections by the Student Union and the College Academic Staff respectively.

## Training Seminar

The Clerk advised the Committee that arrangements are being made for the Board to receive refresher training on 'Asking Challenging Questions' in respect of curriculum & quality matters before the Board Meeting on 16 March. It will be delivered by an AoC National Subject Specialist (Kevin Finnigan, a former Principal and currently a Governor) and, under the NSS scheme, at no cost to the College.

The Clerk will make the necessary arrangements and advise all Board Members.

## **5. Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 1 December 2014**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 1 December 2014 were **APPROVED** and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

## **6. Matters Arising**

- a. The Clerk tabled the minutes of the first Meeting of the reconstituted College Academic Board, which was held on 5 December 2014. The Board is seeking two student representatives and Michael and Rebecca were asked to identify possible candidates from the Student Union Committee or more widely amongst the student population.

Members were concerned with the comment in section 8 of the Minutes which stated that '...some courses were being delivered without the knowledge of the relevant departments....' This was confirmed as being correct and the College now has a new Course Validation Process requiring new courses to be justified academically and financially before being offered.

As to courses being delivered without knowledge, this has now been stopped.

- b. The Committee noted that the College had responded to the consultation regarding the revised Ofsted Inspection Framework. The Committee was informed that the new Framework applies from 1 September 2015 and will apply both to schools and Colleges.

There will be no 'no notice' inspections but there will only be short notice given. The Principal & Chief Executive, in response to a Member question, thought it well possible that the College would be next inspected in early Autumn Term 2015 so the College may well be one of the first institutions to be inspected under the revised Framework.

- c. The Clerk reported that the Board (less 6 absentees) had received Safeguarding Training at the Board Development Day on 19 January 2015. It was noted that this may need updating once the Counter Terrorism and Security Bill had been enacted by Parliament in which the PREVENT agenda is intended to be enshrined in law.
- d. The Clerk reported that the Board, at its Meeting on 8 December 2014, had approved the HE Strategy 2016-19 and In-Year KPI Measures 2014-15 on the recommendation of this Committee at its last Meeting.

## **7. Current Learner Performance – Retention/Attendance/Learner Numbers** (Paper CQC.15.01)

The Committee received a report on the current position based on data to 14 January 2015, presented by Denise Brown.

The data included a breakdown of attendance and retention by Department, as previously requested by the Committee.

### Retention

The Committee noted that retention rates for this year so far are similar to the comparable time last year at 96.1%, which is 3.5% above the national average and 5.1% above the College retention target. All 16-18 Study Programmes are above the National Average but retention for 19+ is below the NA in Art & Design - 0.5%, Media & Performing Arts - 2.1%, and Sport, Public Services and Travel & Tourism - 3.4%.

The Senior Leadership Team is focused on monitoring retention at its regular meetings weekly, and at curriculum reviews. Heads of Department have to explain why students have left and what actions were taken to prevent the withdrawal, we also look at “at risk” students and what support is being provided to prevent them from dropping out.

### Attendance

Overall attendance is 86.6%, below the College target of 90%. College provision is 5% below target and partner provision is 4.2% above target.

It still remains a challenge to meet the College target of 90% and not meeting the target could be a possible indicator of issues, such as poor teaching and learning and inappropriate/inconvenient timetabling. Considerable progress still needs to be made in this area – thus far, it looks a bit slow. There is a direct correlation between attendance and achievement.

Members expressed concern as to this under performance and challenged the Senior Team as to reasons and actions to improve, summarised below:

- The biggest issue is Maths & English which is a national requirement to deliver and is an area of focus for Ofsted. Students attend better at Functional Skills as part of the Study Programme but not well at all when it is a stand-alone GCSE. In response to Committee questions, the College believes the model is right but it needs student and parent buy-in, to improve attendance (which is poor) and ultimately achievement.
- The Committee asked if there any sanctions if students do not turn up for Maths & English – financially, only in circumstances where a bursary has been provided due to low family income or there is subsidy for travel costs – academically, students are told that failure to attend M&E will affect overall course performance, put achievement at risk, and may prevent them progressing to the next level.

- The Committee were assured, in response to questioning from Governors, that the importance of M&E is stressed at interview, staff are actively and tirelessly pursuing students if their attendance is poor – noted that the attendance at Functional Skills is 72% but GCSE M&E is only 49%. There is a gulf between Yr 1 and Yr2 students – Yr1 is better reflecting a greater emphasis on this year's intake which didn't apply for last year's intake. The Staff Governor confirmed that this was the case from his experience.
- One adjustment to the collaborative partner totals needed on the dataset as notified by Terry Knight

This data will be sent to all governors monthly. The Committee asked that last year's retention figure be inserted on the dashboard for comparison and to amplify their understanding of the RAG rating.

The Committee **NOTED** the existing retention and attendance for 2014/15 to date.

### **8. Ofsted Improvement Letter & Action Plan (Paper CQC.15.02)**

The College had an Improvement Visit on 17/18 November 2014 by two inspectors and the Committee (as well as the whole Board) were provided with a copy of the letter from the Ofsted Inspector following the visit.

The letter covered areas of improvement and also highlighted a number of issues which still require attention:

- Level 1 provision, A level provision, Engineering and Construction and Maths & English. A clear focus on improvement is required to significantly raise achievement in these areas. It was noted that new managers have been appointed for in-house Level 1 provision and English & Maths and they are already making an impact
- Support arrangements for A level students
- Still some poor examples of Individual Learning plans, although all students now have them and overall they have significantly improved as a tracking tool for staff and students
- Employability
- Continuing to improve assessment (both formative and summative)

The Committee asked a number of questions arising from the Motoring visit:

- What is the future of A Level provision for the College as it has a relatively low cohort and has delivery and achievement challenges? Improvement is not anywhere near as fast as hoped. The response was that the future of A Levels has not yet been decided but is being kept under constant review. The Committee did not want this area dragging down those areas of the College provision which are doing well
- Engineering & Construction is still not good and the Committee wished to see more positive action to overcome the relatively weak content of Individual Learning Plans. There needs to be improvements in the standards of teaching, some being still requiring improvement

- Employability is really difficult and the Committee asked for a report back in respect of this area at the next Meeting to see how successful the College has been in finding valid and auditable work placements. It was noted that, for A Level students, such placements will take place after those students have taken their examinations.

The Quality Improvement Plan was revisited following the visit and a number of actions are being taken to address the continuing issues, which are summarised in the Report.

In particular, Learner Progress Audits are focusing on assessment including assignments, homework and in-lesson assessments. Assessment feedback to students is getting better including timeliness of return to students and being clear on expectations.

Overall, the SLT believe that steady progress is being made on all the issues identified by Ofsted. The next Improvement Visit is confirmed, for 16/17 March 2015 and the inspectors will wish to discuss progress with governors at that time. There is a good story to tell across these areas of concern but there is no complacency in the College and solid continuing effort is necessary.

ILPs – members questioned whether they were good enough and were received positively by students - students don't always focus on the ILP as a document but they are aware of the targets being set and the underlying significance of them.

The Committee **NOTED** the actions taken as a result of the Improvement Visit last November.

## **9. Monitoring of Quality Improvement Plan (Paper CQC.15.03)**

The Committee considered this Report presented by Denise Brown and Kathy Mulvey and were asked to comment on progress with the implementation and impact of the College Quality Improvement Plan, noting the observations of the Ofsted Visit referred to in item 8 above.

The QIP uses a RAG rating system and currently there are no Red rated actions. However, there are a number of Amber rated issues where progress is not as fast as anticipated or where impact of the proposed action is not yet evident and there is a risk that some of these areas could go RED later in this academic year.

The Committee asked the VP, Curriculum & Quality to report back on these AMBER actions at the next Meeting of the Committee.

The Committee noted that the three key risks are quoted at section 4.4 of the paper and the actions planned to address these matters were agreed. The Committee wanted the risks to reflect both attendance, which is acknowledged to be an area of concern, and quality of delivery.

In total, there are eighteen such actions falling in a variety of categories as explained in the Report and it is the view of SLT that these actions will become Green rated by the time of the next Report except for three which still give considerable concern – A levels, English & Maths and Accessibility of data and tracking information.

The Committee were concerned about the risks associated with staff having difficulty in accessing data relating to students including tracking student progress and target setting. The Principal & Chief Executive and the VP, Curriculum & Quality responded by saying that the MIS is being reviewed, together with IT support services, to make them more accessible and easier for staff and managers to use.

The current Management Information System has been in place a long time and has been added to over the years and is not now felt to be fit for purpose. In the medium term, a new MIS system is desirable (cost approximately £250K) and it is hoped could be in place by the start of the 2016/17 academic year. Advice has been taken from external consultants to reflect what people want and need and to improve the timeliness of data availability, in the short term.

It was observed that a recent Learner Progress Audit was carried out in English & Maths and further work needs to be done to raise the standard of teaching, learning and assessment to ensure that national standards are reached or exceeded. Also, attendance is a problem, especially at GCSE. This will be quite challenging. It was noted that this area is causing difficulties right across the sector.

The Committee **NOTED** the Report and the actions being taken to address the Amber rated areas in the QIP.

#### **10. Learner Progress Audits (Paper CQC.15.04)**

The Committee were informed by Kathy Mulvey as to the results of four Learner Progress Audits, which took place between September and December 2014 in A Levels, Engineering and Building Technology, Media & Performing Arts and Early Years, Health and Care. These LPAs are scheduled on an 'at risk' basis and, for this year, focus mainly on those areas requiring improvement. English & Maths is being reviewed at the moment.

After the LPA, a Report is issued to the Department setting out the actions required which is circulated to all staff and the Learning & Standards team meet with each management team in the Department to agree actions recommended and when they will be implemented.

Progress is reviewed on a bi-monthly basis to ensure six week improvement programme is being followed for those teachers in need of improvement and this is resulting in improvements or appropriate action being taken.

The LPAs are similar to a 'mini-Ofsted'. They are very thorough and rigorous. It is a developmental process review not just an 'inspection' at a snapshot in time. Staff have been very responsive and cooperative and want to do better, if there are issues to be addressed.

The 2014/15 SAR will inform the 2015/16 series of LPAs. Members will be sent a diagram outlining quality processes and how they link together.

The Committee **RECEIVED** and **NOTED** this Report.

## 11. Equality & Diversity Annual Report & Action Plan (Paper CQC.15.05)

The Principal & Chief Executive presented this Report. It meets the requirement of the Committee to monitor College performance of Equality & Diversity issues. It summarises the many events that took place in the College and data on student performance and staffing for the year 2014-15 (January to January).

The document includes an Executive Summary to emphasize key highlights which included the percentage of students from ethnic backgrounds (24% vs. 11.6% in local population). Female students (52%) achieve better than male students (1.4% difference) but this has reduced from last year, when it was 2%. Students of Indian and Asian backgrounds were the highest achievers. The overall achievement gaps between White British and Non-White British have improved. Success Rates for those who have disclosed a learning difficulty or disability have improved from last year by 4.7% but are still 3.6% below other students. Further work will be carried out in 2015/16 to narrow this difference.

Staff comprise 63.3% female and 36.7% male, with 4% disclosing a disability (previous year 2.9%). The College has increased its BME staff to 8% (last year 6.2%) but it is noted that the number of staff not disclosing their ethnicity has increased from 5.8% to 8.2% and it is still proving difficult to attract sufficient applications from ethnic minority staff, particularly at more senior levels.

It was noted that Ofsted identified some major concerns re a lack of planning of the embedding of equality and diversity within teaching and learning and noted that many staff did not take advantage of opportunities to embed/promote equality and diversity in their teaching.

The Action Plan sets out the actions being taken to tackle the issues raised by Ofsted.

The Committee **DISCUSSED** the Report and **RECOMMENDED** that the Report, including the Action Plan be approved by the full Board at its next Meeting on 16 March 2015.

## 12. Analysis on Compliments and Complaints 2013-14 (Paper CQC.15.06)

The Committee received a Report on this subject from the Assistant Principal Student Support. It analysed complaints in detail and also reminded the Committee of the College's Complaints process, and the role of the Quality Improvement Team.

Most complaints revolved around Level of Service and the Learner Experience.

The Report detailed examples of where complaints have enabled the College to revise its procedures to improve customer service to students, parents and other stakeholders.

It was noted that complaints had reduced for the third successive year – 8% down on last year.

The Committee observed that the most significant increase in complaints was in Skills and Foundation Learning, mostly relating to functional skills.

However, given the size of the student population, the number of complaints is very small.

The number of complaints upheld slightly increased and that mirrors a more rigorous administration of the complaints system. The system has been streamlined this year which has helped in the following through of complaints.

More complaints proportionately arising from Thurrock were upheld compared to the other two campuses.

The Committee **NOTED** the Report.

The Committee asked the Student Governors to take this Report back to the Student Union Committee for their comments and observations and to report back to the next meeting of this Committee on 18 May 2015.

In particular, the student governors were asked to enquire whether students are aware of the complaints system, how to use it when circumstances justify it and whether students are aware that the system has been streamlined.

### **13. Governor Links** (Paper CQC.15.07)

The Committee **RECEIVED** an updated schedule of Governor Links following some reallocations discussed at the Board Development Day. The Clerk reported that all members had been contacted in connection with the revised Links and were content therewith.

It was noted that Art & Design does not, for the time being, have a Governor Link – this will be rectified in due course but the Committee noted that this curriculum area is currently Grade 1 and the Committee wished to concentrate Governor input on areas where there is poorer performance.

### **14. Forthcoming Events** (Paper CQC.15.08)

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided by the Clerk.

The Committee noted, with pleasure, the announcement that the New Thurrock Campus will be officially opened by HRH Prince Edward, Earl of Wessex on Tuesday 17 March 2015.

The Clerk informed the Committee that he will be attending the AoC Governance Summit on Wednesday 4 March 2015 in London. Elaine Mead will also attend.

### **15. Date of Next Meeting**

Monday 18 May 2015 at the Basildon Campus at 6.00 pm.

There being no further business, the Meeting terminated at 7.40 pm.

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