

Curriculum & Quality Committee

Approved Minutes

Minutes of a Meeting of the Committee held on Tuesday 28 February 2017 at the Thurrock Campus at 6.00 pm.

Present: Mr D O'Halloran (in the Chair)
Ms S Bridle
Mr B Brooks
Mr T Knight
Ms A O'Donoghue CBE

In Attendance: Ms D Brown (Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality)
Mr A McGarel (Deputy Principal & Chief Executive) (Item 12 only)
Ms D Garroway (Assistant Principal, Teaching & Learning) (item 1 only)
Ms J Belcher (Head of Student Services) (Items 11,12 only)
Mr R I Millea FCA (Clerk to the Corporation)

Mr D O'Halloran took the Chair in the absence of Mrs G Williams.

1. Presentation – English & Maths

Debbie Garroway (Assistant Principal Teaching and Learning) gave a Powerpoint presentation – copies of the slides will be sent to all Board Members after this Meeting.

Quality improvement actions to drive through the Maths & English strategy include:

- Measurement against benchmarks
- Recruitment of permanent teaching staff
- Excellent resources and CPD opportunities for teachers
- Focused development of Teaching Learning & Assessment
- Support for vocational managers who lead on E&M in their departments
- Regular monitoring and evaluating
- Reducing the use of agency staff
- Improved training

The Committee were informed of the low E&M ability of learners and how many come from schools in the area which perform below the national average, especially in Basildon. Our performance in English & Maths is in line with other FE Colleges who are judged good by Ofsted. Both of these elements comprise a good narrative for Ofsted.

In response to a governor question, the Committee learnt that overall 75% of all 16-18 entrants need GCSE Maths & English as they are below Government standards based on their school performance in 2015/16. Debbie made the point that students are benefiting from and enjoying their learning in these subjects.

Ongoing challenges in English & Maths include:

- Improving high grades (currently poor and well below NAs)
- Removing and reducing the barriers for learners
- Recruit/retain skilled workforce (reduction of agency staff)
- Adapt to new GCSE specification
- Implement the new GCSE curriculum (9-1)
- Ensuring consistency across College departments and implementing intervention plans where progress in that curriculum area requires improvement

Recent mock examinations show learners making good progress and above 15-16 outcomes. The Committee noted that we currently have 1392 learners studying GCSE Maths on Campus and 1625 are studying English.

The Committee **THANKED** Debbie for her comprehensive Report and were pleased with the progress being made in this critical area.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Billy Mansell, Maya West, Gwynn Williams and Ms K Mulvey (Director of Teaching & Learning).

3. 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 and that his wife's cousin is the Clerk to Writtle University College.

4. Urgent Business

The Committee noted the vacancy on the Committee following the resignation of Mrs Sally Carr.

5. Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 7 November 2016

The Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 7 November 2016 were **APPROVED** and **SIGNED** by the Chair.

6. Matters Arising (Paper CQC.16.11)

The Clerk **REPORTED** that the Board had approved the following documents at its Meeting on 5 December 2016:

- Teaching and Learning Strategy
- Quality Improvement Plan 2016/17
- Academic Performance Targets 2016/17
- HE Annual Quality Assessment Return

The Agenda was reordered and items 11 and 12 were covered next.

7. Updated Self-Assessment Report and Ofsted Preparation (Paper CQC.17.01)

Self-Assessment Report

The Committee **APPROVED** an amended grade for High Needs Provision to grade 2 from grade 1 in the 2015/16 College Self-Assessment Report, following the recent Ofsted Support & Challenge Visit and from an external critical friend.

On the basis of this input, the revised grade is considered appropriate because, although the provision has some outstanding features, it is now felt that grade 2 is a better reflection of the provision.

Ofsted Inspection

Management believe that the next Ofsted inspection is imminent, either commencing 6 March (next Monday) or 13 March. Governors were provided with a paper outlining the preparatory work for the Inspection allocated to individuals and the arrangements during Inspection Week. The strapline for the Inspection is 'We know we are Good because.....'

In addition to the in-house planning, the College has commissioned external challenge from a critical friend and an ex-HMI to prepare Heads of Department and other middle managers for inspection.

Preparation has gone well and predicted grades for each learner has been a particular focus, including achievement in English & Maths (see Debbie's presentation). We are in a strong position to respond to any Ofsted questions or line of enquiry, however they need to see the evidence in the classroom and improvements in classroom practice.

Some governors will need to be involved in meeting the Inspectors and will be advised as soon as we get the call from Ofsted.

The update was **NOTED**.

8. Current Learner Performance – Retention/Attendance/Learner Numbers 2016/17 (Paper CQC.17.02)

The Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality **PRESENTED** a detailed data dashboard on College Curriculum KPIs for the year to date (to 20 February 2017) which showed retention and attendance so far this year, together with learner numbers.

A governor raised some queries on the learner number data, as there was a combination of learner starts and headcount. The query will be followed up and a response sent.

Retention

The Committee noted that retention rates for this year for 16-18 learners is 1.9% up on last year at 95.5%. For 19+ learners, retention stands at 95.1%, 3.5% up on last year end.

The KPI in each case is 91%.

All 16-18 Departments have a retention rate above 91%, with three Departments having an increase of more than 3% over last year (Building Environment, Engineering & Construction Trades and Sport and Public Services).

All 19+ Departments have a retention rate above the target except Media and Performing Arts (76.2%), SE6 (83.3%) and Service Industries (88.3%) which have very small numbers. Engineering & Construction Trades (95.8%) and Sport and Public Services (100%) are 10% higher than last year's final outturn.

Attendance

College attendance stands at 87%, 1.5pp above the same point last year. There have been some difficulties with registers since the implementation of the new MIS system and, for Ofsted purposes, an Attendance Report for comparative purposes is being run this week to give a much more accurate attendance rate at this time of the year. The overall attendance increases have been influenced by the better attendance of students in English & Maths.

A governor asked about our definition of attendance in the context of punctuality – essentially, if the student is late, they are marked as late, but they have still attended. The guidance in this regard has been reissued to all teaching staff.

Learner Numbers

The College has not reached its 16-18 learner allocation for the 2015/16 year with current enrolment representing 88% of the allocation at 5365.150 16-18 Traineeships are planned which will enable the College to reach 91% as against the allocation of 6093, 578 learners short of target. The current enrolment includes 405 learners with Collaborative Partners.

This data has now formed our student number allocation for next year, confirmation of which is expected shortly. The cash equivalent should be known by the end of March.

The Committee **RECEIVED** the Report, **NOTING** the current level of student enrolment, retention and attendance for 2016-17.

Regarding 19+ SFA Funding, the funding performance thus far this year currently stands at 65% (same time last year 84%).

This reflects the introduction of 19+ loans and not purposefully recruiting 20 year olds onto 16-18 study programmes as had been done in the previous years, as the programmes were not appropriate for adults and many withdrew or failed. A Governor asked for an explanation of this reduction.

Further work is required for this funding stream to achieve to 100% of the allocation and a clear plan to meet the target is being developed and will be provided to governors for scrutiny as soon as possible.

Governors observed the criticality of achieving this funding target of £3.5 million for 2016/17 as part of our Financial Recovery Plan. This funding target is subject to clawback determined by performance. This was discussed in detail by the Board at the Special Board Meeting which preceded this Meeting.

The Advanced Loans budget is at 59% against allocation and this figure will rise during the rest of this year as new provision is planned.

The Committee **NOTED** the Report.

9. Monitoring of College Improvement Plan 2016-17 (Paper CQC.17.03)

The Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality **PRESENTED** a Report on Monitoring of the College Quality Improvement Plan 2016/17.

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

- Monitoring of Departmental Meetings – to ensure that middle manager's attention is focused on the pertinent issues
- Success rates in GCSE English – good progress has been made but the new grading system is making prediction of outcomes difficult
- Functional Skills – staffing has been changed and again it depends on outcomes but there is a high level of compliance with the completion of the speaking and listening elements of English
- Certification of awards to learners for 100% attendance – problems caused by the transition of the MIS system making attendance tracking difficult in October and November 2016

There are not felt to be any concerns in the eventual implementation and impact of these AMBER items and it is the opinion of management that they will move to GREEN by the end of this academic year.

Governors asked that the 'Progress' column on the Plan should make it clear if the element of the Action Point has been completed.

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

10. Findings from Departmental Reviews (Paper CQC.17.04)

The Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality **REPORTED** that Department Reviews took place at the beginning of February as part of the College Quality Improvement cycle. The responsibility in leading the review was moved from the C&Q Team to the Heads of Departments and departmental managers.

The Meetings included review of teacher practice and provided evidence of performance management and specific target setting for immediate short term improvement. Tracking of learner progress, work placements, target setting and SEN progress were all discussed and evidenced.

The Report spelt out positive outcomes from the process and the Areas for Development and the actions taken after the Meetings, summarised as follows:

- Distribution of Actions to staff
- Plan of action for all departments linked to overarching areas for improvement
- Promonitor day arranged to enable all marking and tracking to be brought right up to date
- Progress monitoring meetings set up for each Department this week

The Curriculum & Quality Team will assess the progress being made in each Department on an ongoing basis and put interventions in place where required. In addition, Departmental Team are also required when updating Department QIPs to evidence impact and amend actions for monitoring through regular C&Q Meetings.

Governors will be walked through the Promonitor reporting system in a short training session on a 'live' basis before the next Board Meeting.

Link Governors have attended a number of these Reviews and have reported their observations through to the Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality. They have challenged management of their departments in those Meetings and governors have met with some students as part of their visit to the College for the Reviews.

Some points raised by Governors included:

- IT device accessibility difficulties due to 'older' machines to enable coursework to be done
- Targeted efforts being made to engage further with SMEs as part of Employer Engagement
- Suggestion that the College have a CRM database
- More ownership of budgets by Departments is required
- Further improvement in rolling out good practice in Health & Safety
- Poor performance is being tackled well in Engineering
- Small numbers of teaching staff who need constant monitoring and performance managed
- Presentation of Department QIPs to ensure clarity of due dates for tasks to be completed and to match tasks to actions required
- Linkage of Departments QIPs better to strategic plan of the College

These points are all being followed up and will be reported back to the individual Link Governors involved.

The Board **NOTED** the Report.

11. Analysis of Compliments and Complaints 2015/16 (Paper CQC.17.05)

The Board **RECEIVED** a Report from the Head of Student Services, which analyses complaints in detail and also reminded the Board of the College's Complaints process and the role in that process of the College's Quality Improvement Team.

In total, 164 formal complaints were received, an increase of 19.5% over the previous year – there was a decrease in the overall percentage of complaints upheld from 58% to 53%. Notwithstanding the increase, the number of complaints is very small, given the size of the student population.

Any negative comments about the College through other means (e.g. google search) are not treated as complaints but are sometimes responded to if it is felt necessary to remove a misconception or misunderstanding or some factual error.

Only one complaint was escalated to appeal stage.

The number of compliments received reduced by 57% from 44 to 19.

The main areas of complaint revolved around issues arising from staffing restructuring, the new Campus building (at Thurrock) and Level of Service and the Learning Experience. The Board noted that Complaints are assessed as to whether there are any Equality & Diversity issues arising and in a few cases, this was the case.

The numbers are small and although they have increased, it demonstrates the College's openness in receiving and processing complaints.

The Board **NOTED** the Report.

12. Safeguarding Report (Paper CQC.17.06)

The Head of Student Services **PRESENTED** the Annual Report on Safeguarding for consideration by the Board and, if agreed, approval.

The Report provides the full Section 11 Audit for the College in order to provide assurance that College functions are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

The Audit was completed by the Head of Student Services and the Head of Human Resources and involved a range of criteria in twelve areas. There are no areas in Safeguarding in the College that are considered to be inadequate or non-compliant with best practice. Only one criteria was considered to be moderate compliance but that has now been brought up to high compliance.

The Report identified priorities for the College moving forward which include work on:-

- Preventing radicalisation and extremism and prevention work
- E-Safety
- Gang Culture and Youth violence
- Child Sexual Exploitation and building positive relationships

The Report also identified Areas for Development:

- Cross College staff training
- Student Training & Education
- Cross College communication with Academic Departments
- Expansion of external networks with agencies
- Information sharing

A Governor asked a question about the Section 11 Audit and how rigorously it was completed. The Audit is very rigorous and we have to provide evidence to back up our grading. Audit outcomes have improved from last year.

(Post-Meeting Note: Mrs G Williams is the Safeguarding Governor and she has met with Jane Belcher and Roney Brooks to discuss the Report and, in particular, to confirm that she agrees the content of the Section 11 Audit Report).

The Committee **RECOMMENDED** that the Report be approved by the Board at its next Meeting on 20 March 2017.

13. HE Update (Paper CQC.17.07)

QAA Review

The Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality **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 QAA review takes place in July 2017. An updated Action Plan will be the outcome of all this work which will be submitted, with documentation and evidence, to the Review Manager by 12 June 2017. A visit is likely following this process.

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 consequences. It is considered that the Action Plan is robust and meets the objectives – there has been no feedback from the HER team.

HEFCE Letter

As part of the HEFCE Assurance Review, the 'metrics' of all HE learning providers are being analysed and HEFCE are then seeking responses to any downward trends and significant variations from benchmarks identified in these metrics. It is very difficult to understand how these benchmarks have been derived.

The College received a letter from HEFCE in this regard (dated 1 February 2017) with a response required by 9 March - we are trying to get to grips with the methodology they are using to analyse the data, which is difficult.

It would appear that HEFCE are seeking to assert their role for the future as they take over supervision from the QAA. In effect, there are two systems operating at the moment.

The letter identified two areas of concern for the College – retention and the NSS survey.

In answer to a governor question, it is not clear yet as to how other FE Colleges are responding to this. It might be that HEFCE is looking at ways to take some providers out of the market.

The Committee were informed that the College has appointed a new Dean of HE recently, who was previously with the University of Northampton. He is getting to grips with this new HAR process and will prepare the College response to HEFCE. We have a support conversation arranged with HEFCE next week, who are happy to support and help us in our analysis of the data.

New HE validating partner

The Committee also informed the Board of progress made in seeking a new validating partner to replace the outgoing University of Essex partnership. Our preferred partner is the University of East Anglia and they have confirmed that they are happy to work with us so we will now progress the Institutional Review with them.

The Committee were provided with an Action Plan to outline progress against the targets set for QAA HER process - so far, reasonable progress is being made.

The Committee **RECOMMENDED** to the Board at their Meeting on 20 March that the University of East Anglia be the College's future HE partner, subject to due diligence and Institutional Review.

In the meantime, the Committee asked that negotiations with UEA be progressed.

Skye Bridle informed the Committee that the National Union of Students are boycotting the NSS survey this year as the Union believe the information is not being used in the way it was originally intended. We will continue to monitor this situation.

The Committee **NOTED** the Report.

14. Committee Matters

The Clerk **REPORTED** that, with the resignations of Stuart Burrell (8.2.17) and Tom Thompson (25.3.17) from the Board, there are vacancies for Governor Links in SE6 (Sixth Form), Art & Design and Sport & Public Services. The Committee **AGREED** that the Search Committee be asked to review the Links and reallocate as necessary when it meets on 15 May 2017.

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 March.

ACTION: CLERK

15. Forthcoming Events (Paper CQC.17.08)

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

16. Date of Next Meeting

Monday 15 May 2017 – Basildon Campus at 6.00 pm.

There being no further business, the Meeting terminated at 8.00 pm.

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