

Curriculum & Quality Committee

Approved Minutes

Minutes of a Meeting of the Committee held on Monday 29 February 2016 at the Thurrock Campus at 6.00 pm.

Present: Mr D O'Halloran (Chairman)
Ms S Bridle
Mr B Brooks
Mrs S Carr
Mr T Knight
Mrs G Williams

In Attendance: Mrs W Barnes (Vice Principal, Student Support)
Ms D Brown (Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality)
Ms K Mulvey (Director of Teaching & Learning)
Ms J Belcher (Head of Student Services), (Items 7 and 8)
Mr R I Millea FCA (Clerk to the Corporation)

1. Presentation from Abi Thompson (Business & ICT)

The Committee received a PowerPoint presentation from Abi Thompson, Head of the Business & ICT Department, assisted by Ren Richards, on activities in and the performance of her Department in the last year.

Members were pleased to note the considerable improvement in Attendance for English & Maths this year and Abi/Ren explained how they are keeping on students' backs to attend. They have also stressed that their attendance to match their main qualification. The Department has a set of clear priorities for getting improved achievement in English & Maths.

Work Experience is a challenge but a lot of very good placements have been arranged, often with the students making the first contact. All placements are risk assessed and students attend an interview at the placement before commencing.

Learner Satisfaction in the Department has improved in all categories assessed, except knowledge of support available for students, which is holding steady.

One Governor challenged the effectiveness/relevance/quality of Individual Learning Plans. Abi said these are getting better and they are focused on being an active document in order to help students make progress. They are updated at tutorials and at 1-2-1 meetings with students.

Abi and Ren took Governors through the Team Improvement Targets which have been set for the Department as part of the whole College QIP.

The Chairman thanked Abi and Ren for their interesting and informative presentation.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Ms A Clarke (Student Governor), Ms A O'Donoghue (Principal & Chief Executive) and Ms R Sadiq (Interim Head of Management Information Services).

3. Declarations of Interest

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

The agenda was reordered to take items 7, 8 and 13 first and then the agenda was resumed.

4. Urgent Business

a. The Committee **RECEIVED** a Note prepared by the Principal & Chief Executive summarising the feedback from the recent Ofsted Improvement Visit on 28 January 2016. A formal letter from Ofsted is expected shortly and, when received, this will be circulated to all Board Members.

Feedback notes:

Attendance still an issue in Functional Skills cross College
Positive response from the Inspector – she could see things were moving positively
Data reliability
Moving underperforming managers
Staff turnover/new people being supported and inducted
British Values – good start, creative and engaging
Teaching observations good - reflective of what they saw during the Ofsted inspection last May
Focus on seeing how initiatives are being put in place by the College
Stretch and challenge and differentiation is still in need of improvement
HMI set the agenda for her visit – we didn't influence it
She could see the impact of past mergers still hampering our ability to improve
She focused on the weak areas which we know about

The VP, Curriculum & Quality reported that the HMI had indicated that the next full Ofsted inspection will be in Spring 2017.

ACTION: CLERK

b. The Committee **RECEIVED** a verbal Report from the Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality on the National Ofsted Improvement Seminar, which she attended, together with Paramjit Singh Narang, a Board Member, on 25 February 2016.

The Meeting was Eastern Region based and attended by inspectors who carry out local Inspections and Improvement Visits. It was noted that the good practice shown by other Colleges in the region and the guidance offered to Colleges from Ofsted Inspectors mirrored that which the College already does.

It was mentioned that, in respect to the grade awarded for Personal Development, Behaviour and Welfare (PDBW), where punctuality/attendance is poor then no more than 3 would be awarded for this grade. It was noted that attendance is getting better but punctuality requires further work and there are some variances in how teachers register arrival times.

The VP, Curriculum & Quality indicated she had some slides from the seminar to share in due course with Members.

ACTION: VP, CURRICULUM & QUALITY

Ofsted stated that too many providers need improvement in the Eastern Region. They indicated that 90% of teaching provision is now seen in Inspections via walkthroughs by inspectors.

c. The Clerk **INFORMED** the Meeting that the College has completed negotiations with Barclays Bank to put in place from 1 March 2016 a temporary £2million overdraft for the College valid until the end of April 2016 to manage shortfall in the College's cash flow. The Bank require a resolution from the College authorising Anthony McGarel and Debs Hurst to sign the facility agreement to this effect.

The Clerk presented the resolution and the Committee was reminded that the Board had authorised an overdraft of £1million at its Meeting on 18 January 2016 and that, under delegated powers, the Policy & Resources Committee, at its Meeting on 1 February 2016, had authorised that the overdraft be increased to £2million.

The Bank require the resolution to be made after the facility letter had been issued by them whereas the two Meetings referred to above were in advance of the letter being issued. Therefore, there is a need to pass a further resolution.

The Clerk further informed the Meeting that he had obtained verbal agreement to the resolution from Ms A O'Donoghue (Principal & Chief Executive), Dr R Gray (Chairman, Policy & Resources Committee) and Mr R Patterson (Chairman, Audit & Risk Committee) earlier this afternoon when they attended Thurrock Campus for another Meeting.

In the light of the above, the Committee **APPROVED** the resolution to authorise Anthony McGarel and Debs Hurst to sign the facility letter required by Barclays Bank in connection with the £2million temporary overdraft. The resolution was signed by the Chairman of the Committee and the Clerk to the Corporation.

ACTION:CLERK

5. Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 9 November 2015

The Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 9 November 2015 were **APPROVED** and **SIGNED** by the Chairman.

6. Matters Arising

Initial Teacher Education

The Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality updated the Committee on arrangements for this provision in the future instead of it being provided by the University of Essex. Two partners are being approached.

ACTION: VP, CURRICULUM & QUALITY

Awarding Bodies

The Committee will be informed of changes to the above – none to report at this Meeting.

QSR Methodology

The changes in the Methodology are to be explained to the Board by the Assistant Principal, Learning & Standards at the forthcoming Board Development Day on 21 March 2016.

ACTION: CLERK

Corporation Approval

The Clerk advised that the full Board of the Corporation on 7 December 2015 had approved the following matters on the recommendations of this Committee:

- Adult Curriculum Plan 2016-17
- Basildon Sixth Form Proposals
- The Committee's Terms of Reference
- Teaching and Learning Strategy
- Quality Improvement Plan 2015/16

Members raised a number of other matters:

The Committee noted that the Curriculum dashboard with KPIs and progress has not been circulated as agreed (item 10 previous minutes). This will be rectified as soon as possible. The layout is being clarified so that the document is meaningful and understandable for governors.

The Committee asked for an update on the roll out of the revised Teaching & Learning strategy which the Board had approved at its December Meeting. The Director of Teaching & Learning explained that this was done face to face with staff at the recent Staff Development Day. Those staff not present have been separately briefed. They understand that there is better linkage with professional practice reviews and performance management reviews.

The Committee was informed that recruiting is going on locally for the Basildon 6th Form but low take up at present. Planning is well in hand for a September start, including premises, staff etc.

7. Annual Safeguarding Report (Paper CQC.16.01)

The Head of Student Services presented this Report for consideration by the Committee. This is a half yearly Report with the annual Report going to the Board, via this Committee, for approval later in the academic year.

The Report provides the full Section 11 Audit for South Essex College in order to provide assurance that College functions are discharged having the 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 of twelve areas – high compliance is considered to apply in eight areas, high compliance in three and moderate compliance in one. There are no areas in Safeguarding considered to be inadequate.

In the May 2015 Ofsted Inspection, Safeguarding was graded Good and demonstrates clearly how successful the College is in fulfilling its responsibilities.

The Report identified further development areas to be Cross College Staff Training, Student Training & Education on key issues (e.g. online safety, social media usage), Cross College communication with Academic Departments, expansion of external networks with agencies and appropriately resourced pastoral support.

Mrs Williams (Safeguarding Governor) confirmed that the requirements of external bodies regarding procedures relating to section 11 compliance are met by the College and provide satisfactory assurance to the Committee in this area.

The Committee **RECEIVED** the Report.

8. Equality & Diversity Annual Report (Paper CQC.16.02)

The Head of Student Services presented this Report. It meets the requirement of the Committee to monitor College performance in respect of Equality & Diversity issues. It summarises the many events that took place in the College and includes data on student performance and staffing for the year 2015-16 (January to January).

The document incorporates an *Executive Summary* to emphasize key highlights which includes the percentage of students from ethnic backgrounds (18% vs 11.6% in the local population). Female students achieve better than male students as has been the case over the past three years (2.3% difference at 16-18 and 0.9% difference at 19+).

There is no significant achievement gap between students who identify with an ethnic minority compared to White British students but overall qualification success for older students is better than for younger students. Success rates for those who have disclosed a learning difficulty or disability have worsened this year compared to last year.

The gender of staff is 64.5% female and 35.5% male, with 4% disclosing a disability (last year 4%). The ethnic percentage is the same as last year at 8% and staff not disclosing has remained the same at 8%. It remains difficult to recruit BME staff at a senior level.

A Member observed that there seems to be less emphasis on LDD students, who have an awareness day, compared to LGBT students, who have an awareness week. The Governor challenged if there needed to be a refocus of the report to provide balance. It was explained that there are specific awareness days for types of LDD students (e.g. deaf students) so the Report needs to better reflect the whole effort for LDD students. This will be done before it goes to the Board for approval on 21 March 2016.

ACTION: HEAD OF HUMAN RESOURCES

It was noted that there will be a particular emphasis on British Values next year.

Members also observed that students self-declaring that they have health/disability issues has gone up from 25% last year to nearly one third. This information is being further analysed – it may reflect a greater awareness by students of their own mental health issues, because of greater public focus on this area of illness.

The data needs more differentiation in this area so the judgement is sound. It was noted that staff said 4% in answer to this question on a self-declared basis. Accordingly, the College needs to consider what further action needs to be taken to meet the apparent greater need in the disability/health area.

The Committee **DISCUSSED** the Report and **RECOMMENDED** that the Report be approved at the next Board Meeting on 21 March 2016, after amendment as indicated above regarding LDD/LGBT focus.

ACTION: CLERK

9. Current Learner Performance – Retention/Attendance/Learner Numbers 2015/16 (Paper CQC.16.03)

The Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality, on behalf of the Interim Head of College Information Services, presented a detailed dataset on College KPIs for retention and attendance as at 11 February 2016, plus learner numbers, based on the ILR funding file at that date.

Retention

The Committee noted that retention rates for this year for 16-18 learners is 92.6%, up 3.8% on last year. For 19+ learners, retention stands at 93.5%, up 4.3% on last year.

All 16-18 Departments have a retention rate above 92% and a number of areas have a rate of more than 10% higher than the final position for 2014/15 (Business Development, Construction and Building Environment, Health and Science and Engineering).

All 19+ Departments have a retention rate above the 91% target, except Construction and Building Environment, Media and Performing Arts and Sport and Public Services, the first two being below 80%.

Those areas with a 10% increase over last year are Art and Design, Construction and Building Environment, Engineering and Service Industries.

Attendance

16-18 attendance is up 1.4% attendance on last year at 86.1% and 19+ attendance is 3.3% up on last year at 84.3%.

A number of Departments in each area are achieving over 85% attendance, the best being Art and Design, which is over 90% for both groups of learners.

(Chair) Each department has its own target – the 85% is a College average – will be reported by department in future. The rates quoted include Maths & English so that pulls the figures down.

The College continually monitors retention and attendance in both age groups to ensure successful outcomes at the end of their programmes of study.

Learner Numbers

The College has still not reached its 16-18 learner allocation for the 2015/16 year. Current enrolment is 5976 which represents 91% of the allocation. Of the total headcount, 708 is represented by Collaborative Partner activity. It is unlikely we will meet the target and this will impact our student number allocation for next year with possible knock on effect on our financial FE grant.

For 19+ learners, enrolments to meet the allocation target continue (funding is not based directly on numbers of students but on courses).

The Committee **RECEIVED** the Report.

10. Monitoring of Quality Improvement Plan 2015/16 (Paper CQC.16.04)

The Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality and the Director of Teaching & Learning presented the updated QIP, showing progress against agreed Actions to Improve.

Governors were reminded that poor progress against the identified actions is likely to result in poor student outcomes, with consequences on the College's grading at the Ofsted inspection next year. Final outcomes for 2015/16 will be the key indicator.

In year data is pointing towards strong improvement compared to last year and clear and regular monitoring can be demonstrated.

The QIP continues to use a RAG rating system and currently there is only one RED rated action relating to an increase in serious breaches by students of the Student Behaviour Policy, mainly aggression against other students and, in a couple of instances, staff (caused by drink and drugs) and not relating to non-attendance or non-completion of work. Numbers are not great but higher than before.

The Committee asked what is being done to address this issue. There may be some linkage with mental health issues but there is no clear answer. It is difficult often to get to the root cause of a serious behavioural incident. We do ensure that the right support mechanisms are in place to help difficult and troubled students.

It was noted that looked after children are an issue, across all campuses, due to their challenging circumstances.

One member observed that the use of learning technologies by teachers often focuses too much on the data side but not the teaching side. An update on progress in this area was requested for the next Meeting in May.

ACTION: DIRECTOR OF TEACHING & LEARNING

There are a considerable number of AMBER rated items where progress is underway but the outcomes not yet achieved. The VP, Curriculum & Quality explained that such items did not necessarily indicate a concern but usually pointed to work in progress in the various areas and success will often be only measurable when final outturn data for the year is available.

The expectation is that these items will turn GREEN by the end of the academic year.

The Committee asked that the VP, Curriculum & Quality report back on progress in connection with these items at the next Meeting.

ACTION: VP, CURRICULUM & QUALITY

The Committee **RECEIVED** the Report.

11. Analysis of Compliments and Complaints 2014-15 (Paper CQC.16.05)

The Committee received a Report from the Vice Principal, Student Support, which analysed complaints in detail and also reminded of the College's Complaints process and the role in that process of the Quality Improvement Team.

Most complaints continue to be related to 'Level of Service' and 'Learner Experience'.

Overall, complaints had decreased again this year (by 17%) and only one complaint escalated to the appeal stage. The total number of complaints was 138 of which 58% were found proven.

Compliments dropped from 87 to 44 compared to last year.

The Committee noted that there were some actions identified for this year and included better recording of compliments.

The Committee **NOTED** the Report.

12. Progress Audit Outcomes (Paper CQC.16.06)

The Committee were informed by Kathy Mulvey as to the results of Learner Progress Audits, now called Progress Audits, carried out between October 2015 and January 2016 – HE, Art and Design, and Sport & Public Services.

The Report also included a commentary on monitoring of English & Maths given that changes in the structure of the Department have recently occurred.

The Report identified strengths noted in the areas reviewed, areas for development and progress being made.

Key areas of development include:

- Individual targets for learners and careful monitoring of learner progress
- Increased walkthroughs by managers
- Improve stretch and challenge
- Ensure use of cross college QA documentation
- Monitoring of punctuality and attendance (learners' code of conduct)
- More engagement in HE by Heads of Department
- Improved liaison with student representatives
- Too much passive learning and lack of motivational and inspirational teaching and learning

English and Maths

The structure of the Department has been changed so that E&M teachers work alongside vocational teachers in allocated departments with consequential change in the line management responsibilities so that it is within departments rather than separately.

Attendance has accordingly improved; English by 16pp and Maths by 13pp.

In response to governor questions, the VP, Curriculum & Quality stated that attendance is closely monitored. There are robust discussions with departments about their responsibilities and they are told not to accept excuses from students too readily. There is a reluctance to use student disciplinary procedures to enforce attendance as a last resort for persistent offenders, but staff are reminded that it is there.

Even if attendance at main qualification is acceptable, there can be poor attendance at English & Maths. Staff are pushing hard for more parental engagement.

Skye Bridle confirmed that the Students Union is pushing better attendance through engagement with student representatives. She explained that students are being told there is no choice here, attendance has to improve by students and that message is beginning to get through.

The point about punctuality was reiterated. It remains an issue as does the recording thereof.

The Committee **RECEIVED** the Report.

13. Student Services Report (Paper CQC.16.07)

The Committee **RECEIVED** this Report for information. It provided an overview of the work of the Student Services Department, which supports students with careers guidance, enrichment and sport activities, discretionary funding and pastoral/welfare issues.

14. Departmental Reviews – Jan/Feb 2016 (Paper CQC.16.08)

This Report was presented by the Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality and the Director of Teaching & Learning and covered recent Departmental Reviews where each Department was assessed for learner tracking, monitoring of progress of students and target setting.

Some of the Departmental Reviews were attended by Link Governors. The VP, Curriculum & Quality was very pleased with this engagement by Governors – they had made a real contribution to the scrutiny in the Reviews.

The Report identified positive trends, areas for development and actions taken. One of the biggest positive actions was the engagement with Promonitor, the College's agreed tracking and monitoring tool which monitors student progress. It needs to be used as an intelligence tool so that QA Department can really drill down into specific issues and trends in individual departments.

The Areas for Development were:

- Uploading of assessment schedules
- Better tracking of courses
- Learners not submitted coursework not followed up
- Some poor feedback
- Disconnect between SMART targets and SEN support needs
- Inconsistent criteria in rating learners as RED
- Inconsistent use of QIPs in Departments to inform progress
- Lack of consistency in Departmental monitoring cross College

The Report was **RECEIVED** and a follow up Report is to come to the next meeting of this Committee.

ACTION: VP, CURRICULUM & QUALITY

15. HNC/HND Policies (Paper CQC.16.09)

The Committee **NOTED** that a number of revised Policies in this area had been agreed by the College HE Committee, to reflect the fact that policies need to conform to the expectations laid down by the QAA Quality Code and the requirements of Pearson, the awarding organisation. In the past, the policies, whilst robust, had complied with those applicable in the University of Essex under the agreement with them.

16. Committee Matters

a. The Clerk reported that an internal audit on the Curriculum planning process is underway at present. The scope of the review was agreed with the internal auditors.

It covers viability of courses financially, the timetable for creating curriculum plans, the approval process etc. The results will be reported to the Audit & Risk Committee at its Meeting on 11 May and then to this Committee on 16 May.

ACTION: CLERK

b. The Committee received the Report of the Meeting of the Academic Board held on 12 December 2015 for information.

c. The Clerk provided a verbal Report on Governor Links, noting that there had been considerable activity recently, with governors attending a variety of Meetings in their Link areas. Written feedback on their visits has been forwarded to the Principal & Chief Executive and the Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality.

The Clerk reminded Governors that care must be taken so as not to take on, albeit inadvertently, the role of management and asked Governors to reread the Protocol developed at the time the Link system was established.

In particular, he quoted paragraph 2 of that protocol – governors should focus on the strategic aspects of their link by gaining an overview of the Department's activities with emphasis on teaching and learning and the delivery of the curriculum plan.

If governors are in any doubt, then they should consult the Clerk, in the first instance, for guidance.

17. Forthcoming Events (Paper CQC.16.10)

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided by the Clerk relating to forthcoming events, noting that the Chairman and Clerk were attending the AoC Governance Summit in London on 2 March 2016 and the Principal & Chief Executive and the Clerk were attending the AoC Area Review Conference in Reading on 16 March 2016.

ACTION: CLERK

18. Date of Next Meeting

Monday 16 May 2016 at the Basildon Campus at 6.00 pm.

There being no further business, the Meeting terminated at 8.15pm.

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