

MINUTES OF LEARNING & QUALITY COMMITTEE

Venue:**Date:** Monday 27th September 2023**Members:**

Paul Averis (Chair)
 Heather Lodge
 Jat Sharma (Principal)
 Mary Mahoney
 Rani Sahota

In Attendance:

David Turner, Assistant Principal Quality and HE
 Richard Brennan, Assistant Principal Curriculum
 James Norris, Assistant Principal (Commercial Development)
 Charlotte Wood, Head of Safeguarding
 Lesley Venables, Head of Governance

1	Apologies for Absence	
	Apologies for absence were received from Linda Enow (Associate Governor)	
2	Declarations of Interest	
	None	
3	Appointment of Chair	
	Resolved – That Paul Averis be appointed as Committee Chair for 2023/2024	
4	Minutes	
	Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 rd July 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair	
5	Matters Arising	
5.1	Governors received for information a progress report on the actions resulting from the previous meeting, the majority of which had either been completed or were in progress.	SLT/ HoGov
5.2	It was noted that the demonstration of Moodle content had not yet been arranged.	
5.3	In relation to minute 38.23.3 it was agreed that documents that may be useful as part of the any Ofsted inspection process would be uploaded to Convene to enable governors to have access to these in preparation.	
5.4	The APHE&Q reported that, following the departure of the former head of HE, he was working with colleagues in the MIS department on the accuracy of Individualised Learner Records returns over the last 5 years (minute 44.23.3 refers).	
6	Chair's Action	
	None	
7	Student Support Services - Presentation	
7.1	The Head of Student Support Services gave a presentation on Safeguarding, Welfare and Behaviour. The College's overall strapline for this area was "Every Student Matters",	
7.2	The majority of withdrawals to date had been for reasons related to behaviour or poor attendance. Part of the College's role was to raise student aspirations and change behaviour, with clear targets identified that management would monitor against. The College's actions around the 42 day ILR deadline had	

7.3	<p>been successful and contributed to the relatively high retention rate compared to previous years.</p>	
7.4	<p>Governors were advised that the profile of the student cohort had changed over the last 5 years, with a significant increase in the proportion of individuals with mental health issues and SEND needs, which has brought about a change in the student support strategy, with a tiered approach.</p>	
7.5	<p>Behaviour was often a manifestation of other issues and it was important for staff to comprehend the influence of internal and external factors, together with the need for non-judgemental strategies, empathy, clear boundaries and expectations.</p>	
7.6	<p>A high level of resources were required to support this culture change, including a CPD programme for staff. It was hoped that more accurate and timely data would enable staff to identify problem areas and target resources to these.</p>	
7.7	<p>In the current term there had been a total of 98 safeguarding referrals, with 14 of these related to housing issues due to the Cost of Living Crisis. New software had been implemented from September to enable greater levels of monitoring and filtering of unsuitable content. Two further safeguarding officers had been recruited one of which would be responsible for following up attendance issues.</p>	
7.8	<p>It was noted that under the revised statutory guidance from the Department for Education (Keeping Children Safe in Education) the College was required to report on a lower level of safeguarding concerns.</p>	
7.9	<p>A governor asked how the level of non-compliance with monitoring and reporting safeguarding concerns was being addressed. The Head of Student Support advised that this was being addressed proactively and that in the past the process for reporting concerns was time-consuming and complex, which should be improved by the new software.</p>	
7.10	<p>In response to questions about the operation of safeguarding practices for ESOL learners the Head of Student Support reported that this was being discussed with the relevant members of the management team.</p>	
7.11	<p>A governor commented that the level of mental health support required was high and whether resourcing was sufficient. The Committee was informed that the safeguarding team had recently been strengthened and that there were also 11 pastoral support workers across all 6 campuses, but resourcing could always be improved. A small group of staff had been formed to monitor interventions and review any common themes across the organisation.</p>	
7.12	<p>The AP(HE&Q) reported that a further online platform had been introduced to provide students with mental health support, ranging from self-help exercises to access to NHS trained professionals.</p>	
	<p>The Chair thanked the Head of Student Support for the work being undertaken by staff to prepare students for learning.</p>	

8	QUALITY ASSURANCE & PERFORMANCE UPDATE	
8.1	The Committee received for information a report on emerging vocational student outcomes for 2022/2023.	
8.2	The overall level of achievement was 87.5% compared to 82.5% in 2021/2022. For the 16-18 cohort achievement was 81.4%, which was below that for pre-COVID years and the corresponding figure for adult learners (92.8%). Level 3 programmes had the lowest achievement levels due to increased examination requirements.	
8.3	GCSE Maths results for the 16-18 learners were 78.2% compared to 73% in 2021/2022 and for GCSE English the figures were 82.1% compared to 75.6%), both of which were below the national average. For adults studying these qualifications the results were better but still under the pre-COVID levels.	
8.4	Functional Skills outcomes had improved by 6.7% compared to 2021/2022 and were 83.9%. In response to questions the AP(C) reported that the GCSE syllabus had radically changed over the last few years, with many students finding it difficult to understand the question paper, making this a barrier to success.	
8.5	Higher education achievement levels were static, however, it was noted that there were no concerns about the quality of the student experience. Predicted apprenticeship outcomes were currently 51.7% compared to the prediction at the end of June 2023 for 59% and against the national average of 53%.	
8.6	Retention was still below pre-COVID19 levels and was a particular challenge for the College.	
8.7	Governors were concerned about the under-performance compared to previous years and the national averages and were advised that the qualifications studied and the examinations had increased in difficulty. They noted the improvement in adult levels of performance but recognised that reforms of the Functional Skills qualifications had had a negative impact. Each college in the sector had its own approach to examination entries for 16-19 year olds and Walsall College had decided to enrol a high proportion of learners on Functional Skills courses rather than GCSEs.	
8.8	The Chair asked whether the achievement rates for English and Maths had been anticipated, as higher levels had been predicted at several previous Committee meetings. The AP(C) responded that the number of achievements had decreased despite fewer students being entered for the relevant examinations. Grade outcomes had increased for 16% of students but overall the results had been disappointing for the organisation. Nationally there was downward pressure on the number of high grades achieved.	
8.9	The College was currently recruiting specialists in Maths and English for GCSEs and Functional Skills. Once this had been completed an action plan would be devised to address the issues in English and Maths, which would be shared with the Committee Chair to provide a level of assurance.	AP(Curr)
8.10	The Chair commented that the Committee needed to have a more intense focus on English and Maths at each meeting, together with regular reports between these scheduled times.	Cttee/ SLT

8.11	A number of suggestions for improvement were being planned, such as more examination practice sessions, so that staff were able to act quickly to support students at risk of falling behind with their studies.	
8.12	Governors were advised that there had been a significant increase in the number of students undertaking Maths and English GCSE resits in 2023/2024. The College was finding it difficult to ensure it had enough staff to support this process, however, the current focus was ensuring that it met its enrolment targets and retained students beyond the 42 day ILR point.	
8.13	The staff governor had been informed of some classes that were larger than average, which was not effective in the long-term. The AP(C) responded that these classes were mainly GCSEs where there were gaps in teaching that were being covered by colleagues. The total number of GCSE students had increased from 900 in 2022/2023 to 1500 in the current year.	
8.14	The Principal commented that the outcomes would be a 'red flag' for Ofsted's risk assessment process. A higher level of resourcing was required, together with strong leadership and CPD for staff. The Board needed to be given assurance that every effort was being made to address the situation.	
8.15	It was agreed that the Committee Chair would meet with the APs (Curriculum and HE&Q) and the Head of English & Maths to discuss items such as teaching styles and planned assessments. The Committee would review the action plan at its next meeting.	PA/APs
8.16	Governors were offered the opportunity to undertake informal learning walks with managers to improve their knowledge of English and Maths.	Cttee
9	Date and Time of Next Meeting	
	The meeting ceased at 6.00 p.m. and would be re-convened on 13 th October 2023.	