

APPROVED MINUTES OF LEARNING & QUALITY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 1ST JULY 2025

Members:

Mary Mahoney
Adam Comery
Barbara Van Der Eecken (Interim Chair)
Heather Lodge
Jat Sharma
David Wheeler

In Attendance:

Kirsti Lord, Deputy Principal Curriculum,
Innovation & Student Success
Lesley Venables, Head of Governance
Rachel Jones, Assistant Principal MIS
James Norris, Assistant Principal Adults & WBL
David Turner, Assistant Principal Quality

	Apologies for Absence	
191	Apologies for absence were received from Paul Averis.	
	Declarations of Interest	
192	There were no declarations of interest in any agenda item.	
	APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR	
193	Resolved – That Barbara Van Der Eecken be appointed as Chair for this meeting only	
	MINUTES	
194	Resolved - That the minutes of the meeting held on 27 th February 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair	
195	The minutes from the special meeting held on 3 rd June 2025 would be submitted for approval in October.	LV
	MATTERS ARISING	
196	Governors received a report on progress against previous recommendations and noted the following items: (144) Dashboard of apprenticeship performance – the AP Adults & WBL reported that, after a detailed tender process, a new employer responsive tracking system had been purchased and would be installed over the next few months. This was partly a response to recent funding audit outcomes and gaps in the current systems which required a high level of manual input and duplication. An appropriate apprenticeship dashboard would be developed from the replacement product which would enable the Committee to monitor performance. (19) National benchmarks to be included in next performance data report – The Committee asked about progress on this item which had featured on the monitoring report for some time. The Deputy Principal reported that a data dashboard was under development and would include the KPIs that aligned with the 2030 Project (as previously agreed). National averages for the FE sector (as opposed to benchmarks) should be published by the Department for Education in November 2025, against which the College's performance could be compared. The College was aiming to be above the national averages and work towards achieving its stretch targets in future (Good or Outstanding).	
197	All remaining items had either been completed, superseded or were featured on the agenda.	

	QUALITY ASSURANCE & PERFORMANCE DATA	
198	The AP Quality presented a detailed report on Quality Assurance and performance data for 2024/2025.	
	Attendance	
199	Attendance rates for Young Learners had been identified as a key area for improvement in Nov 2024 Ofsted Inspection report.	
200	Overall attendance was 81.77% against a target of 81.5% and aspirational target of 83%. There had been an improvement since the last report in February 2025, but there was still further development required, with an attendance working group established to review the data and any possible interventions. The criteria for marking unauthorised absence in registers had been tightened up, which had contributed to the decline in overall attendance. The new Education Record was being piloted and may generate a need for this data.	
201	Governors questioned the impact of poor attendance of some school leavers and were assured that changing the culture of attendance would be one of the main areas of focus for the new student support officers, together with closer liaison with schools to ensure that the College received information on incoming students as early as possible. The Deputy Principal was now a member of the Walsall Learning Alliance which should enable the College to forge more positive links with local schools.	
202	The Committee was advised that the recruitment and retention of teaching staff could have a significant impact on school attendance levels. A governor commented that it may be possible to change attendance behaviour at the College, despite incoming students having poor attendance records at school.	
203	Patterns of attendance throughout the year would be monitored to determine any mitigating factors, such as the tightening of marking authorised absence in registers during 2024/2025. The Committee asked that future reports should include evidence of increased value added which would illustrate the impact of students attending the College.	KL/DT
204	Information was received on attendance levels by directorate, which indicated that STEAM was the highest performing and that V6 had continued to have lower levels of attendance. In response to questions governors were advised that male attendance was higher than that for females.	
205	Governors also asked about the challenge of the significant increase in Maths and English students and were assured that the College had been far more prepared for this in 2024/2025 and further capacity was being built into structures for 2025/2026. There were still some staffing issues which should be resolved by the restructuring programme and the delivery model had been changed for 2025/2026 (Century Tech).	
206	Attendance at the recent GCSE examinations had been the highest for a number of years and there were early indications of significant numbers of students who had progressed from grade 1 to 2 and from grade 2 to 3. The November 2024 re-sits had seen an even split between new and existing students.	

207	The Committee enquired about any delays in awarding body processes and was advised that there had been some quality-related issues with AIM which had slowed down accreditations and IQA approvals can be delayed, which was why the College was seeking direct claim status.	
208	Management was concerned about maintaining attendance levels for students who had already achieved their qualification aim. Curriculum managers had been asked to ensure that staff marked any such absence as unauthorised.	
209	Retention The level of retention for apprentices was higher than at the same point in 2023/2024 (76.8% compared to 61.3%) and should achieve the target of 70% by the end of the year.	
210	Retention levels for 16-18s were 89.5% against 90.2% in 2023/2024 and the target of 92%. For adults the current retention figure was 94.2% against a target of 96% and a year-end performance of 94.9% for 2023/2024. The Committee noted that there was further work to be undertaken in this area. Overall retention was 91.8% compared to 92.7% for the previous year and the 2024/2025 target of 94%.	
211	Achievement Levels of achievement for young people and apprenticeships had been identified as a key area for improvement in the November 2024 Ofsted Inspection Report: For 16-18s achievement the current figure was 64.8%, which was an improvement compared to the same point in previous years, however, the majority of achievements would not be confirmed until the exam results were published in August 2025.	
212	In response to questions from governors the AP Adults & WBL advised that the apprenticeship achievement level was higher than in 2023/2024 (55.9% compared to the full year figure of 57.5%). A prudent approach had been taken by the apprenticeship team on including achievements on the MIS. As a result of national capacity issues there could be upto a 12 week delay in end point assessments taking place.	
213	Governors noted that the national Qualification Achievement Rates for 2024/2025 would not be published until January 2026, so it was difficult to compare performance with other colleges. However, the College had already exceeded the target achievement level for 2024/2025 and no further withdrawals were anticipated at this point.	
214	On adult programmes the achievement level was below the identified target (77.1% compared to 89%) and that for 2023/2024 (88.4%). This predicted outturn was partly due to changes in the mix of qualifications undertaken by students, together with lower attendance by some learners. It was likely that the overall achievement level of 85.5% would not be achieved for 2024/2025. Achievement rates for GCSE English and mathematics at grade 4 and above	
215	Individual curriculum areas set targets which aimed to achieve 22% overall, which was a 7pp increase compared to 2023/2024) for English and 15% overall (an increase of +6pp) for Maths.	

216 217	Applications Overall applications had reduced slightly compared to the same point in June 2024, particularly for 16-18s and 19+ learners. However, the Committee was informed that further applications had yet to be processed and this year there was a tendency for school leavers to apply later. Additional marketing strategies would be implemented over the next few weeks to try to increase the current position. Governors were reminded that there had been a 3 year trend of higher applications, which had provided a substantial amount of growth funding for the College.	
	TEACHING, LEARNING & ASSESSMENT	
218 210 220 221 222 223 224 225	The Assistant Principal Quality presented a report on Teaching, Learning and Assessment performance and activities since the February 2025 Committee meeting. As outlined at the special meeting in June 2025, predicted achievement levels for 2024/2025 were set to increase by 2.4% for vocational programmes (from 83.8% in 2023/2024 to 86.2%). The new system of Developmental Observations had had a positive impact on the individual performance of lecturers. A total of 45% of staff had received a DO to date and it was noted that the College would be moving to a two-year observation model from 2025/2026. <i>A governor asked if there was a plan to increase the volume of unseen observations over time and was advised that this system had already proven to be successful and received positively by staff. The approach would be rolled-out across curriculum departments and an agreed model was in operation for developmental observations.</i> The ‘Walk-through’ process formed part of the overall observation strategy. The Committee received information on teaching strengths and areas for improvement/further development. The Observation of Teaching Policy had been updated for 2025/2026 and included the new cycle of activities (2 year cycle for developmental observations, unseen observations, walk-throughs and probationary period observations). Trauma-Informed Emotional Coaching would form part of the Workforce Development programme for the new academic year. Governors were advised that a ‘reportable event’ (defined by the Office for Students (OfS) as an incident or matter that negatively affects a provider’s eligibility for registration) had now been completed. This related to the agreed closure of a number of HNC and HND programmes for 2025/2026, with the OfS confirming that no further action was required. The Assistant Principal Quality outlined recent changes to the quality team across the College. <i>It was agreed that a small group of Quality Development Coaches would present a session at a future Committee meeting. Part of the remit of these staff was to support improving achievement based on solid evidence.</i>	DT/KL/LV

226	A quality audit had been completed recently, with some gaps identified in assessment processes and IQA. Following this, an action plan had been implemented, which included a significant amount of training for teaching staff.	
227	The College's cycle of business would be driven by an annual calendar process which encompassed quality, business, financial and governance elements so that these aligned as closely as possible and enabled the fulfilment of statutory and regulatory responsibilities. The annual plan included regular audits of IQA and further strengthening of QA/QI activity.	
228	Governors were advised of a recent incident of teaching malpractice, which had highlighted the importance of adhering to College procedures. A formal investigation had been instigated and the member of staff involved had now left the organisation. The impact on students had been reduced from 5 individuals to 2, who were being supported by the College.	
229	In response to questions on whether the current safeguards were sufficient to prevent any recurrence, the AP Quality reported that changes had been made to the College's processes as a result of the investigation. Governors were assured that this event was extremely rare and that the College had sought to minimise any impact on the affected learners.	
230	Information on predicted achievement levels had been discussed at the previous (special) meeting.	
231	A number of areas for improvement were set out in the report, including providing additional stretch and challenge of students. This was linked to the ability of some staff to tackle low-level poor behaviour in the classroom, which affected the level of learning taking place. Appropriate training had been devised and would be rolled out during 2025/2026.	
232	A further area for development was engagement with employers to ensure that the curriculum was appropriate and aligned to their needs, together with providing opportunities for students to undertake work placements and other activities related to future employment.	
CURRICULUM PRESENTATION		
233	The Deputy Principal gave a presentation on the impact of the new curriculum delivery model and recent/future national curriculum developments.	
234	As discussed at Corporation meetings, the first phase of the 2030 Project (which focused on 16-18 delivery) was almost complete.	
235	Governors were reminded that the areas for improvement identified at the November 2024 Ofsted Inspection were a) the link between the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to attendance; b) increasing the number of high grades for GCSE English and Maths; and c) achievement levels for 16-18s and some apprentices.	
236	The attendance working group had had a positive impact since its inception in February 2025 and it was felt that greater levels of ownership and accountability amongst management/staff would improve this position further.	

237	Management and delivery of English and Maths was now centralised, providing a greater degree of co-ordination and consistency. An audit of awarding bodies was underway and a comprehensive programme of staff development. Attendance at GCSE examinations had increased by 2% for 2024/2025 and was now at 91% or above.	
238	Staff would be working hard to ensure that as many students as possible were retained in the first few weeks of the new academic year. Improved tracking and monitoring systems were being implemented to support this process	
239	In relation to apprenticeships the Deputy Principal reported that the length and poor quality of some standards was being addressed. A new employer-responsive system had been purchased and would be operational in the Autumn Term. Good practice between directorates and from the rest of the FE sector would be built into the College's processes in 2025/2026.	
240	The recent restructuring project had resulted in 10 curriculum managers with programme area leaders allocated to each of these. The priorities for 2025/2026 would be IQA provision, tracking student success and timely interventions where required.	
241	A draft structure for apprenticeships, Work-Based Learning and CC was shared with the Committee, which aligned to the education case for the Adult Learning Centre. This area would be overseen by 3 Directors - Adults & Community, SEND and High Needs and Sales & Marketing. The curriculum management tier of the directorate would replicate the structure for 16-18 provision.	
242	From September 2027 there would be a number of skills academies, all based within the ALC. It was agreed that an update on structural changes would be provided to the next L&Q Committee meeting.	JN
243	Governors were reminded of the KPIs that had been agreed for 2025/2026. These included a 20% reduction in the attrition rate for 16-18 programmes by day 42, a 2% increase in attendance and aspirational targets of 85% for 16-18s, 86% for 19+ and 91% for apprenticeships. The College aimed to reduce the attendance gap between core programmes and English & Maths courses by 4% and for retention and achievement rates to increase by 2% for every learner type. However, it was noted that the national grade boundaries for English & Maths had not yet been determined and so this target may need to be reviewed at the next meeting.	KL
244	A total of 10% of staff would be targeted to undertake CPD activities linked to career progression. Student satisfaction targets had increased to 94% of higher and the KPI for walk-throughs and developmental observations was 100%, with a focus on raising levels of performance and aligning to delivery. The College aimed to have the student support and personalised learning team fully trained for the start of the new academic year with further training throughout 2025/2026.	
245	In future reports the performance against the agreed KPIs would be detailed and RAG-rated.	KL/RJ/DT

	EDIB ANNUAL REPORT 2023/2024	
246	Governors received for information the Equality, Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging Annual Report for 2023/2024. It was agreed that, due to the limited time available at this meeting, governors would submit any questions/comments they may have on the Report to the Head of Governance prior to the Corporation meeting (10 th July).	ALL
	HE STRATEGY	
247	The AP Quality presented an updated draft of the College's Higher Education Strategy, which had been informed by national and local priorities and the agreed Curriculum Plan for 2025/2026. The Strategy included an analysis of the opportunities and threats facing the College and the impact of the external landscape.	
248	The Committee was reminded that the College had closed a number of HE programmes for 2025/2026, due to lack of enrolments and the need for a refreshed curriculum offer. Many other HE institutions were finding it difficult to recruit and retain students, which meant that colleges were ideally placed to take advantage of their ability to change their courses to align with student demand.	
249	A governor commented that the document was not a true strategy and had not included an appropriate vision for the Adult Learning Centre in terms of HE programmes, which offered progression routes from existing College courses and professional qualifications. The HE Strategy needed to set out how the College's programmes would transform skills within the area, how it was positioning itself to achieve this and the role of employers, the challenges it faced and how these would be addressed, perhaps by offering a different pattern of delivery (such as evenings and weekends). A greater analysis of the local and regional marketplace for HE courses should form a key part of the Strategy, with provision organised on a more commercial and streamlined basis.	
250	The draft presented focused on Level 4 courses, whereas other HEIs (including FE colleges) were offering Level 4 and Level 5 programmes, with an opportunity to 'top-up' to Level 6. Regional labour market information had not been translated into the growth strategy for HE, particularly given the importance of the new Lifelong Learning Entitlement.	
251	The AP Adults & WBL responded that a gap in the market had already been identified for more Level 4 provision to be offered locally. The education business case for the ALC had included professional courses and distance learning, but needed to be amalgamated with the HE Strategy. Development of Level 6 programmes would require significant development and delivery costs, so demand would have to be more certain.	
252	Greater ambition for the local population to raise their aspirations through study at HE level was required and a full business case so that governors could assess the impact of the strategy over time. Management was also asked to consider what chartered professional courses could be offered (such as accountancy).	
253	It was agreed that further work should be undertaken on the HE Strategy, with the link governor for HE consulted before an updated draft was submitted to the Committee for approval by the Corporation at its October 2025 meeting	DT/JN/KL

254 255 256	The Committee received an updated, non-exclusive partnership agreement with the University of Worcester to offer HE programmes. This co-created a 'University Centre' at Walsall College and would enable the College to advertise this provision as such and test the reaction of potential students, which would inform future HE activity. It was noted that the College could continue to work with other HEI partners such as University of Wolverhampton, University of Staffordshire and Birmingham City University. The intention was to open and launch the University Centre after the October 2025 half-term. Resolved - That the Corporation be recommended to approve the partnership arrangement with the University of Worcester	
	DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS	
	13th October 2025 27th November 2025 26th February 2026 30th June 2026	