

MINUTES OF LEARNING & QUALITY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 14TH OCTOBER 2024

Members:

Paul Averis (Chair)
Mary Mahoney
Barbara Van Der Eecken
Jat Sharma

In Attendance:

Kirsti Lord, Deputy Principal Curriculum, Innovation & Student Success
Richard Brennan, Assistant Principal Curriculum
Kelly James, Head of Quality
Lesley Venables, Head of Governance
Rachael Smith, Director of Apprenticeships – minutes 37 to 56
Rachel Davies, Director of Adults, Community & SEND - minutes 37 to 56
Advanced Practitioners – minutes 1 to 6

	Apologies for Absence	
1	Apologies for absence were received from Heather Lodge, Alexandru Marina (Student Governor), David Turner (AP Quality & Student Experience) and James Norris (AP Adults, WMB & Community). The absence of Rani Sahota was noted.	
	Declarations of Interest	
2	No declarations of interest were received in respect of any agenda item.	
	Appointment of Chair	
3	Resolved – That Paul Averis be appointed as Committee Chair until the first meeting of the 2025/2026 academic year	
	Minutes	
4	Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 rd July 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.	
	Matters Arising	
5	Governors received a progress report on the actions arising from the previous meeting and noted that the majority of these had been completed, were in progress or featured on the agenda. Management was asked to update the information in minute 40.23.9 to indicate the current position.	Exec
	CURRICULUM PRESENTATION – ADVANCED PRACTITIONERS	
6	Governors received a presentation from 4 Advanced Practitioners on the initiatives they had introduced in their particular curriculum areas.	
	QUALITY ASSURANCE & PERFORMANCE DATA	
7	The Committee received for information a report on performance against key curriculum indicators. Achievement Rates 2023/2024	
8	The achievement rate for Vocational courses was currently 85.2% ('best case' is 87.1%), with a small number of results to be uploaded. For 16-18s there had been a slight increase in retention from 88.2% to 90.6%. For 19+ achievement, was slightly lower than the previous year (88.2% compared to 89.9%).	

9	A gap had been identified in achievement at overall level 3 (78.6%) compared to pre-pandemic levels (18/19 - 90.3%). Following significant growth in this cohort it was felt that there was an opportunity for further improvement.	
10	T Level achievement had increased from 77.5% in 2022/2023 to 78.8%.	
11	Despite increased numbers of starts in 2023/2024 (644 additional entries) achievement rates for GCSE English fell by 2.5% on the previous year to 15.3% However, there had been an improvement in achievement rates for GCSE Maths – from 7.8% to 9.2% against an increased cohort of 224 starts.	
12	The achievement rate for Functional Skills English was 77.9% (against a best case of 81.9%), with fewer adult enrolments. Retention on these programmes had improved by 2.9% translating into an overall improvement in achievement of 2.5% and it was noted that 16-18) achievement had improved by 12.4% compared to 2022/2023.	
13	The Functional Skills Maths achievement rate was 57.3% (against a best case of 60.4%), with retention increasing by 4.8% and an overall improvement of 1.6%. The majority of students were adults but it was noted that the 16-18 achievement rate had increased by 10.9%.	
14	Governors asked that information on first time passes in English & Maths should be included in the report in future. The Deputy Principal confirmed this would be included. However, the proportion of high grades for 16 and 18 year olds decreases the more re-sits taken.	DT/KJ
15	Evidence from Ofsted inspections at other colleges indicated that it would be important for the College to provide some context on the performance levels for English & Maths for 16-18s, including volumes of learners, the distance travelled and behavioural challenges. For example, compared to feeder schools there was a much higher proportion of learners in receipt of Free School Meals.	
16	Vocational students classified as High Needs had an achievement rate of 84.5% which was marginally higher than the previous year against a higher cohort (+28 learners).	
17	Achievement rates on higher education courses were currently 71.3% which was 9.1% below previous year (despite an improved retention rate). In response to questions about the reasons for the reduction in performance the Deputy Principal reported that further analysis of the outcomes was required to identify any issues.	
18	The achievement rate for apprenticeship programmes was 57.4% (against a best case of 64.6%), representing an increase of 6% compared to the previous year. Retention had improved by 13.5%.	
19	It was agreed that the national benchmarks would be included in the next performance data report to the Committee, although it was acknowledged many benchmarks had not been updated since 18/19, together with any internal KPIs or targets.	DT/KJ

20 21 22 23	Destinations 2022/2023 The Head of Quality reported that overall 91% of students leaving the College in 2022/2023 had positive destinations compared to 90% in 2021/2022. For 16 to 19s the figure was 91.2% and for 19+ 87.3%. It was noted that some students in the latter cohort do not progress directly to employment or HE but enabled them to contribute more positively within their families and communities, or improve their confidence levels. Positive destinations amongst HE students was 85.1% and 96.6% for Apprenticeships, both of which compared favourably to previous years. Any previous gaps in performance between students with protected characteristics and those without had now been closed. Attendance 2024/2025 Attendance was currently 86%, with attendance at Maths and English GCSE classes at 78%. This compared to 2023/2024 where the corresponding figures for term 1 were 85% and 78% respectively.	
CURRICULUM & ENROLMENT UPDATE		
24 25 26 27 28 29	The AP Curriculum presented a report on curriculum developments and information on the level of enrolments for 2024/2025. Governors were advised that the number of students on Study Programmes had increased compared to 2023/2024 by approximately 100 to 4408. A number of courses were over-subscribed (such as Electrical, Plumbing, Construction, Hair & Beauty, Health & Social Care, Protected Services Level 2), others were limited due to the capacity of specialist accommodation. The “Swap Don’t Drop” initiative had been successful in the majority of cases, with 2700 calls made to students to persuade them to continue studying at the College. Weekly meetings were held to facilitate the transfer of learners between curriculum areas. Courses continued to recruit to 110% of their enrolment target to ensure that the College achieved its overall target by the October census date (42nd day / 6-week period). Enrolments on T Level programmes had been impacted by the current national qualification reform, but were still attracting a high level of interest. Governors were advised that the decision by the Pearson awarding body to change the grade boundaries on GCSEs had had a substantial impact on T Level enrolment, with some students not meeting the entry criteria. Although there had been an increase in the number of T Level students, the College had not yet met its overall allocation target (371), which may result in a clawback of £600 per student not recruited. The College was involved in a regional initiative to provide an alternative entry criteria rather than GCSEs to increase the number of Level 2 students accessing T Levels, which included 3 members of staff.	

30	Performance on T Levels in 2023/2024 was good with 75% of students achieving high grades, which was around twice the national average. Overall achievement levels were high at 90% against a national drop-out rate of 30%).	
31	A governor asked whether College staff had the appropriate skills and experience to teach these courses. The AP Curriculum responded that there were staffing recruitment and retention pressures in the skilled trade areas. The College had advertised on multiple occasions to fill some teaching vacancies and it may be necessary in future to review the contracts and job roles for groups of staff to align them more closely to delivery requirements.	
32	In terms of standards of teaching the highest performing curriculum areas tended to be those that were over-subscribed, with the exception of Health & Social Care in 2023/2024.	
33	Governors questioned the level of vacancies in English and Maths and were advised that there was only 1 vacancy in Maths at the moment. It was agreed that support for staff from the College's Advanced Practitioners was critical in these areas. The Deputy Principal commented that the College's acknowledged that the college recruited teachers who were relatively new to the profession, and to support and train them to a high level. A proportion were likely to then leave and progress into schools, but this should be planned for as a rolling programme..	
34	The number of students enrolled on A Level courses had continued to increase, together with the number of pathways on offer, against the background of the higher grade boundaries for GSCE Maths and English.	
35	A governor asked whether the College was monitoring contextualised English and Maths and how this was performing. The Deputy Principal reported that the College would soon be able to extract engagement with contextualised sessions and vocational links as walkthroughs on these areas had commence, to assess quality and consistency.	
36	The Committee sought further information on the performance of the College's Adult & Community directorate for 2024/20 recruitment, which was below the target. The AP Curriculum reported that this was mostly due to SEND learners and that more of these enrolments had now been processed, which should increase the overall numbers.	
Adults, Work-Based Learning & Community Update		
	Rachael Smith and Rachel Davies joined the meeting.	
37	The Curriculum Directors presented a report on performance against key indicators for Adults, WBL and Community provision.	
38	Apprenticeship achievement rates had increased from 51% in 2022/2023 to 57.6% potential outturn in 2023/2024. Performance on the Construction apprenticeship (27% achievement) would be investigated further but was partly due to relatively low levels of retention and difficulties in recruiting an retaining suitably-qualified staff. STEM apprenticeships was a further area of concern, with an achievement rate of 34%	

39	The number of Out of Funded apprentices (ie those who had continued beyond their expected end date) had reduced from 12.2% over 180 days in 2022/2023 to 8.7% over 180 days in 2023/2024. Governors asked that future reports contain information on OOFs over 365 days and categorise the data by age.	JN/RS
40	It was noted that the College's performance in this area was classified as 'On Track' against the criteria in the Apprenticeship Accountability Framework.	
41	The majority of withdrawals from apprenticeship programmes were for employment-related reasons, with only a small number due to course content issues. The Committee noted that the College removed non-attenders from the Management Information System at a much earlier stage.	
42	Following an ESFA funding assurance audit the directorate was currently working through the resulting recommendations. Progress continued to be monitored by the Audit Committee at each meeting with some positive movement evidenced already.	
43	There had been a good outturn for stand-alone WBL provision with many pre-employment and in work programmes performing in excess of national benchmarks.	
44	There were no concerns on sub-contractor activity for 2023/2024. However, the College was in discussion with the Combined Authority on any new starts on Free Courses for Jobs operated by Learning Curve. Governors were advised that the Finance & Resources Committee had been concerned that any under-performance would mean that the College would face a clawback of funds by the CA and had recommended that this contract should only continue if the CA was willing to underwrite any shortfall as the contract had been undertaken to fill a gap in provision.	
45	It was agreed that the Corporation would be advised of the outcome of discussions between the College and the Combined Authority prior to making any decision.	JN
46	All areas for 16-18s had performed well against target, with Supported Learning and ESOL in particular demonstrating high levels of quality of education. This had impacted positively on personal development and progression. Essential Skills courses had seen a reduction in achievement of 3%, mainly due to the performance of Maths Level 2 and some challenges in staffing which had now been resolved.	
47	Performance on adult programmes varied considerably in 2023/2024 Improved retention for Access to HE students meant an increase in success rates. However, staffing challenges within Professional Services had impacted on the overall experience for students and success rates had fallen by 8.9%. A full review of this provision had commenced and it was intended that any courses with poor levels of recruitment and performance would be closed.	
48	The Directorate was starting to plan the curriculum that would be offered in the Adult Learning Centre from September 2026.	

49	Enrolments for 2024/2025 in Access to Higher Education were lower than anticipated due to the external environment, student finances and the time commitment involved. Staff were reviewing whether a blended model of delivery and attendance would be more appropriate for these students.	RD
50	ESOL programmes were over-subscribed but it was noted that these did not align with the priorities of the Combined Authority which was keen to promote courses that prepared individuals for employment and improving skills.	
51	Similarly, Essential Skills courses had achieved 114% of their enrolment target, with Adult Education Budget programmes comprising approximately 80% of the funding. This compared favourably to the same time in 2023/2024 and it was noted that many of these enrolments were at entry or level 1, providing good progression opportunities for further study.	
52	Achievement rates for SEND programmes in 2023/2024 were 87.9%, an increase of 2% on 2022/2023. The number of supported internships had risen for 2024/2025, with some students progressing o apprenticeships.	
53	The Directorate was forging a closer relationship with Walsall Council in terms of education provision and data sharing. There had been some difficulties recently in relation to the timely provision of Education, Health & Care Plans and the associated funding.	
54	It was agreed that more detailed data on the College’s SEND provision would be prepared for the Committee’s next meeting.	
55	Governors were advised that operational responsibility for the College’s 14-16 provision had now been transferred to this directorate. An experienced interim manager had been engaged and proposals for the future of this area’s curriculum would be prepared by February 2025. Youth workers to support students were being considered.	
56	Currently there were 154 students, 35 of whom were over 16, with most being new to Year 10. Priority had been given those who had previously been home educated and any new students were from the Walsall area only, in line with the decision made by the Corporation. Rachael Smith and Rachel Davies left the meeting.	
57	OFSTED PREPARATION The Deputy Principal gave a presentation on preparations for any future Ofsted inspection.	
58	In the short-term all curriculum Self-Assessment Reports would be cross-checked against any ‘data packs’ prepared by MIS to ensure consistency and validated by the Quality Team. An inspection-ready checklist had been devised and there would be a dry-run of potential areas to undergo deep dives by the inspection team.	
59	Position statements would be provided to governors at the Corporation meeting on 24 th October. The Quality Improvement Plan, setting out key actions from the previous academic year, and levels of progress, would be a critical document.	

60	Governors had been given an opportunity to undertake walkthroughs with members of staff to gain an informed understanding of their selection of curriculum areas	
QUALITY ASSURANCE		
61	The Head of Quality presented a report on QA issues in term 1.	DT/KJ
62	The College had set an aspirational target for managers to observe every member of teaching staff at least once each term. A significant amount of work had been carried out in preparation for this and a digital platform to record these observations was now operational and would be a useful analytical tool. Training for the observation team had commenced and it was noted that all observations would be validated.	
63	A total of 317 teachers were in scope for observation, however, only 61% had been completed in 2023/2024. A target of 85% completion had been set to be achieved by the end of Term 2.	
64	Student satisfaction rates were 94%, with the main concerns identified as independent advice and guidance. All issues were reviewed by the Quality Team and action plans agreed with particular departments.	
65	For 2024/2025 the questions on the survey would be reviewed, as approximately 600 students had felt that some questions did not apply to them and, thus, had not responded to these.	
66	Monitoring meetings had been scheduled for courses requiring further review due to performance levels. The outcomes of this process would be reported to a future Committee meeting.	
67	Governors were advised that all SARs/QIPs were due to be drafted by 18 th October. A total of 11 curriculum areas had been graded as 'Outstanding, 15 as 'Good' and 29 as 'Requires Improvement'. In response to questions from the Committee on whether management was confident that the areas graded as RI could be transformed the Deputy Principal advised that the impact of the measures put in place this academic year would be more evident from January 2025, following mocks and term one summative assessment, Apprenticeships is working through a 3 year plan due to the length of some standards still impacting on achievement: however, retention is currently at 82% with 96% pass rates in 23/24 therefore an improved picture is anticipated.	
68	The College had been successful in gaining the Investors in Diversity award – Bronze level and was reviewing the requirements for the Silver level	
COMMITTEE SELF-ASSESSMENT 2023/2024		
69	Governors received the final draft of the completed Committee Self-Assessment for 2023/2024.	Head of Gov
70	The Head of Governance was asked to revise the tone of some of the content and to include a sentence recognising the improvement in the quality of the Committee's discussions.	
71	Resolved – That the Committee's Self-Assessment for 2023/2024 be approved, subject to updating some of the wording and final sign-off by the Chair	
DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS		

	28 th Nov 2024 27 th Feb 2025 1 st Jul 2025	
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