

MINUTES OF LEARNING & QUALITY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 14TH MARCH 2024**Members:**

Paul Averis (Chair)
 Heather Lodge
 Jat Sharma (Principal)
 Mary Mahoney
 Aysha Rahman Amani
 Rani Sahota
 Barbara Van Der Eecken (Associate)
 Linda Enow (Associate)

In Attendance:

David Turner, Assistant Principal Quality & HE
 Richard Brennan, Assistant Principal Curriculum
 James Norris, Assistant Principal (Commercial Development)
 Lesley Venables, Head of Governance
 Helena Platt, Head of Maths & English
 (minutes 30 to 52)

	Apologies for Absence	
30	There were no apologies for absence.	
	Declarations of Interest	
31	No declarations of interest were received in respect of any agenda item.	
	Minutes	
32	The Head of Governance reported that the minutes included in the papers were not the correct versions. It was agreed that both the draft minutes from this meeting and those for 27 th September and 4 th October 2023 would be submitted for approval at the June meeting.	LV
	Matters Arising	
33	Governors received a progress report on the actions arising from the previous meeting. A number of items had been completed and the Committee noted the following issues.	
34	The APCurric reported that access to the Moodle system (minute 23.23) had not yet been rolled out to parents as the IT Team had some concerns about security (as it would impact on the current measures which met the sector recommendations on cyber security including requiring an MFA code to be entered) and the potential volume of additional IT traffic that could be generated by parents. Management felt that it would be more appropriate to engage with parents in other ways such as a regular newsletter.	
35	In response to the point on recording governor challenge in a separate box at the end of the minutes the Head of Governance advised that this was now completed within the minutes themselves (minute 38.23.2 refers).	
36	Briefing documents that may be useful preparation for any future Ofsted inspection would be circulated as appropriate (minute 5.3).	DT/LV
	CURRICULUM PRESENTATION – ENGLISH & MATHS	
37	The Committee received a presentation from the newly-appointed Head of English & Maths and the AP Curriculum, which included data according to areas of disadvantage and by faculty to provide a detailed overview of performance.	
38	This area of provision was an ongoing challenge for all FE colleges, particularly Maths due to variations in attendance patterns, the lack of staffing resources, the change in the grade boundaries for 2023/2024 and the significant	

	increase in the number of 16-18 learners this academic year, many of whom required GCSE re-sits.	
39	English Governors were advised that all students were tracked robustly, with early interventions made wherever possible. Information was received on attendance levels which was arranged by factors such as those in receipt of Free School Meals and students with SEND needs, in response to the Committee's request at the September meeting. For example, in Construction 40% of students re-sitting English GCSE received FSM and 20% were classified as SEND, with attendance at 66%. A total of 42% of learners had progressed by one grade since September 2023. However, it was noted that the % students were actually working at the pass grade (4) was below benchmark. Similar patterns were evident amongst students in the V6 directorate.	
40	A governor questioned the accuracy of the data as it was not possible to have an achievement rate of 13% if there were only 3 students in that group. It was agreed that the data would be checked and reissued if required.	RB/HP
41	The Committee asked for further details on the number of students who were identified under multiple factors and the level of progress they had made.	RB/HP
42	In response to questions about the preparations for the forthcoming examinations the Head of Maths & English reported that the third assessment given to candidates was a mock Paper 2. The grades to which students were working currently were based on the February mocks. In-year streaming had been carried out to enable staff to focus teaching resources on those with the highest level of need.	
	Maths	
43	There were fewer students working at grade 4 and progress had reduced by 17% in Maths compared to the previous academic year. A total of 28% of students in the STEAM faculty had attendance levels of 66% or less. The curriculum areas of Computing, Health & Social Care and Hair & Beauty were highlighted for improvement in attendance. Overall only 17% of students had progressed to one grade higher and 6% were performing at grade 4.	
44	The data on the AchievingTogether programme (14-16 year olds) was inaccurate and would be checked before re-circulation.	RB/HP
45	Nationally 81% of students without any disadvantage factor achieved English and Maths by age 19, compared to 57% from disadvantaged groups. The figures for SEND students were 81% and 40% respectively. The Committee noted that 40% of all College students claimed Free School Meals compared to 23.8% nationally and 20% had an Educational Health & Care Plan as opposed to the average of 13%. Nationally, both disadvantaged students and those with SEND underperformed significantly in achieving Level 2 English and Maths by 19. It was felt that more delivery should be provided for these groups of learners to improve achievement rates.	
46	A governor asked whether the low attendance rates applied only to Maths & English or were the same across students' full study programmes. The AP Curriculum reported that staff targeted students where there was a variance in	

	attendance patterns, but the extent of mental health issues and the lack of understanding as to the relevance of English & Maths to their vocational courses should be recognised. One suggestion was providing mentors for students who had already achieved these qualifications and could support their peers.	
47	Average attendance for Maths was 79% compared to the target of 85%, with the lowest levels amongst students on Plumbing, Health & Social Care and Creative Arts courses. The quality of Maths teachers varied considerably, particularly as to the College was reliant on agency staff to address any gaps in the overall profile. Options for future recruitment were being reviewed by management in preparation for the 2024/2025 academic year. Governors commented that it was important to acknowledge that, even though achievement and progress levels were low against those in the sector, some students had still managed to attain higher grades than they had when they enrolled at the College. However, the Committee was keen to see rapid improvements over the next couple of months and in the next academic year.	
48	The Principal reported that work was underway on recruiting additional maths tutors and that the issues did not only centre around providing competitive rates of pay. Temporary or agency staff needed to feel part of the organisation and in receipt of the same CPD and lesson observation processes as permanent lecturers, to enable them to progress within their field. Additionally, management had to maximise the flexibility of the workforce. The Committee endorsed the approach being used and asked that the curriculum team continue to try to resolve these difficult issues.	
49	A governor commented that some students were traumatised by continual failure in examinations at school and then at the College. A proportion chose their course due to their expectation of non-traditional teaching methods, which was not then borne out. The College needed to devise a different approach and rethink how it engaged with and support students.	
50	Three levels of support were in place: Under the National Tuition Fund catch-up sessions had been organised, which had attracted 180 students who were close to achieving a level 4 in Maths. Delivery was then targeted to learners who had not reached the end of their programmes due to staffing shortages, followed by students requiring general examination support.	
51	In the longer term the College was reviewing the examination boards in use for GCSE and Functional Skills. The online platform was being assessed and a planning day had been set up to agree the delivery models for English & Maths in 2024/2025, which would lead to the development of a College-wide strategy to ensure that this was embedded into teaching, learning and assessment. The Workforce Development Strategy included upskilling teachers in the areas of English & Maths.	
52	The Chair commented that the presentation of the data had improved for this meeting, enabling governors to focus on key trends. Governors were encouraged by the 'green shoots' that had appeared as a result of the strategies outlined above and would continue to monitor progress at each meeting.	
	Helena Platt left the meeting at this point.	

	QUALITY ASSURANCE & PERFORMANCE DATA	
53	The Committee received for information a report on performance against key curriculum indicators.	
54	Attendance – Term 2 The average attendance level for 2023/2024 was 83.3% compared to 84.4% in Term 1 and was currently 80.7% for Term 2. The APQ advised that attendance at English and Maths classes was usually 7% lower than for vocational programmes. Each faculty had set an individual target for attendance and had reasons for this performance were provided in the report. It was noted that some curriculum areas had retained students even though their attendance levels were relatively low and would impact on achievement rates.	
55	No comparative national attendance data for FE colleges was currently available, so it was difficult to determine how these figures related to competitors.	
56	A governor asked whether attendance was being maximised and was advised that there had been staffing resources available in Term 1 to follow up students who had not attended classes. This had made a significant impact but had not been replicated in Term 2. Currently about 20% of students were not attending on a regular basis, which was a serious issue for the College, including how students then were able to catch-up on the work that they had missed. Governors also requested information as to whether non-attendees were part of hard to reach groups such as those with an EHCP.	
57	Retention The APQ reported that retention had improved compared to previous year and that vocational programmes were at 96.3%. In response to questions about the reasons for this, governors were advised that it was partly a result of the ‘every student matters’ culture within the College.	
58	EDI The College had updated the Management Information System with the latest data on the EDI profile of the student cohort to enable staff to identify any significant gaps within each protected characteristic in relation to retention and achievement (3% or more).	
59	Further investigation of any gaps would be undertaken and an action plan prepared for each of these, which would be monitored throughout the current and the following academic year. Achievement gaps were monitored on a termly basis through the Curriculum Quality Summit meetings and in their respective Self-Assessment Reports.	
60	Governors noted that there were no material gaps in relation to the 2022/2023 academic year for ethnicity, disability or learning difficulty groups. However, gaps did exist for gender (3.4% achievement gap, in favour of females) and age groups (9.4% achievement gap, in favour of adults).	
61	Work Experience	

62	A total of 60% of students had not yet started their reflections on work experience. Work experience was classified as 'Completed' when students have undertaken 9 or more sessions and adequately reflected upon them. Management was concerned that as at the beginning of March 2024 a total of 56.24% are yet to start their reflection on work experience sessions to date. Directors of Faculty had been asked to address this in their team meetings as it was likely that more students had completed activities but had not yet reflected on them.	
63	Personal Development The Committee noted that clearer expectations and a strong framework were in place for 2023/2024, which had led to evidence of improvements. This area was currently assessed in the SAR as 'Good' (grade 2). However, there was still work to be undertaken in order for Apprenticeships to reach the same level of consistency.	
64	A total of 62.26% of students had recorded more than 3 sessions of personal development and 34.55% had recorded more than 6 sessions. There was still a concern that 16.22% of students had not yet reflected on any PD sessions and this was particularly prevalent amongst learners from the Adults, Community Learning & SEND Faculty where the figure was 46.73%.	
65	Destinations A total of 91% of students had progressed to a positive destination in 2022/2023, which was higher than in 2021/2022.	
66	Linda Enow joined the meeting at this point. A governor commented that retention was high but attendance was relatively poor, so it appeared that there was some further work to be done to ensure that retaining students was having a positive impact.	
CURRICULUM UPDATE		
67	The AP Curriculum presented a report on curriculum developments, which included proposals on the further development of the College's A Level provision.	
68	Governors were advised that retention remained strong and was significantly higher than the end year position for 2022/2023 across all V6 Curriculum areas.	
69	A first draft of the curriculum for 2024/2025 had recently been approved by the College's Executive Team. This included significant changes to the Travel offer as a result of qualification reforms. New programmes had also been added to Business & Law, Hospitality and Beauty. There was evidence of growth in HE programmes for Protective Services as a result of progression from Level 3 students (30 HNC starts).	
70	Achieving Together (14-16 provision) would be seeking approval to develop capacity for a new curriculum offer that supports the internal transfer of students to a programme where they need to "learn to learn" with the support of specialist staff. This strategy will further strengthen the "swap don't drop" strategy that was implemented at the start of the academic year.	

71	Students had been able to access a wide range of trips and visits outside of the classroom which enhanced their experience and supported the links between theory and application in the real world. Recent student trips included the Houses of Parliament (Protective Services), Birmingham Airport Security and CTU (Travel) and the Fairlawns Hotel (Hospitality).	
72	Study programme numbers in the STEAM faculty still exceeded the identified target past the mid-year census point. However, staff resource issues had meant that some planned short programmes (such as Electric Vehicle Hybrid courses) could not run. Enrolments for substantial programmes other than Access courses were at or had exceeded the target.	
73	Retention for the STEAM faculty was currently 94.6% (core aims only), compared to the national average achievement of 80.8%. Retention was slightly higher for GCSEs and Functional Skills programmes but there were issues with attendance across the Faculty as more students prioritising work, were dealing with mental health issues or involved in safeguarding incidents. The change to the formal attendance policy has affected the processing of some interventions.	
74	Staffing resource shortages were most acute in Electrical Installation and GCSE Maths and it was noted that recruitment in these areas remained challenging. There was a potential impact on income levels as without English and maths students would not meet their full study programme hours. Curriculum managers were working to ensure that any gaps in provision were minimised.	
75	Applications for 2024/2025 were similar to 2023/2024, with a slight increase both in student acceptances at this point in the year (+60) and in the conversion rate (+1%). Growth areas included the Construction trades (especially Electrical Installation), Motor Vehicle and Law.	
76	Governors were reminded that the College was already the largest provider of T Levels in the West Midlands, with 2 more qualifications being introduced from September 2024.	
77	Currently there were approximately 100 students studying A Levels and for 2024/2025 a suite of 13 subjects was planned, which was similar to a stand-alone sixth form college. The Committee was asked for its support in developing proposals to this effect for consideration by the full Board, in terms of leadership and management, performance targets and an organisational structure.	
78	A governor asked about the possible quality of learning in a sixth form, given that the teaching style differed considerably from that of FE. If successful, the project would impact positively on destinations, achievement and other key indicators. The APC reported that the aim would be to have a separate institution that had its own indicators and reporting structures. It was suggested that management should consider whether the Advanced British Standard qualification announced by the Government in 2023 could be a pre-cursor for A Levels. However, there was likely to be a high level of competition from other institutions offering the ABS.	
79	The Committee questioned the likely demand for A Levels and the unique experience that the College would need to provide to attract learners who may	

80	also be applying to more traditional sixth forms, including those in their current schools. The APC commented that multi-academy trusts offered A Levels but usually across several sites involving students travelling between campuses, whereas the College's offer would be contained in the one place. Governors were of the view that the College needed A Levels delivered through industry, such as Aston Martin and Google, as the content could be linked to jobs and could provide progression routes to employment. Management felt that the proposal would provide a value for money option for students and a better pathway to higher education. Exploratory discussions had already been held with a number of key employers who had been broadly supportive	
81	Resolved – That further work on the proposals for an A Level Centre be undertaken and brought back to the Committee for consideration and recommendation to the Corporation	
Apprenticeships Update		
82	The APCD presented a report on performance against key apprenticeships indicators. The achievement rate for 2023/2024 to date was 45% with more achievement expected before R14. This compared to 63% in 2021/2022, however, it was noted that the apprenticeship standards were now much more rigorous and management felt that this area was progressing well in the current year, supported by the findings of the Click consultants, which had led to a number of recommendations being implemented.	
83	Feedback from apprentices about their course had been easier to obtain and had improved in 2023/2024, particularly around personal development. The Apprenticeship Week activities had been positively received by employers and key stakeholders.	
84	A total of 162 out of 1246 apprentices had now overrun their end dates. Governors were advised that the number of OOFs was currently 9% against the target of 10% (previously reported as 18%).	
85	Three year strategic direction documents had been prepared for the whole Apprenticeships and Workbased Learning faculty and each constituent cost centre against which apprenticeship performance was tracked on a regular basis.	
86	In terms of sub-contracted provision, 3 firms were currently engaged by the College with no concerns on quality. It was noted that Embark had just been inspected by Ofsted but the outcome had not yet been published. Performance against these contracts was monitored by the Combined Authority as well as internally.	
Quality Improvement Plan		
87	Governors received for information a report on progress against the areas for improvement identified in the QIP that had been approved by the Corporation in January 2024. Effective target-setting for individual students was a particular focus for the College. Unseen lesson observations were being piloted at the moment, with an approach centring around reflective conversations. In response to questions about the latter strategy the APQ	

88	reported that a mix of reviewers (including subject specialists) was used to carry out the observations. Feedback from staff was uncertain as yet. A total of 4 curriculum areas were assessed as 'Requires Improvement' with 6 graded as 'Outstanding'. Quality Summit meetings were currently being held, which may impact on the grades assigned to each curriculum area.	
	Date of Next Meeting 3rd July 4.30 p.m.	