

APPROVED MINUTES OF LEARNING & QUALITY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 27TH FEBRUARY 2025

Members:

Paul Averis (Chair)
Mary Mahoney
Alexandru Marina
Mykola Rovnyi
Barbara Van Der Eecken

In Attendance:

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

	Apologies for Absence	
72	Apologies for absence were received from Heather Lodge and Jat Sharma.	
	Declarations of Interest	
73	No declarations of interest were received in respect of any agenda item.	
	Minutes	
74	Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 th October 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.	
	Matters Arising	
75	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.	DT/KL
76	Previously management had been asked to provide an update on the development of a behaviour strategy and reported that this would form part of a new Attendance Policy. Relevant data would be provided to the Committee at the end of the academic year within the key performance indicators accompanying the Corporate Plan (minute 40.23.9).	
77	In relation to minute 144 on performance information for apprenticeships the Committee was advised that a review of apprenticeship systems had been undertaken and, subject to the appropriate approvals, a new tracking system would be purchased and implemented for 2025/2026. The apprenticeship team had continued to review the progress of the Out of Funding apprentices and had discussed this with the respective link governors.	
78	Further data sets on SEND provision were required before the action point against minute 54 could be completed. It was suggested that training for governors on their responsibilities for SEND issues may be useful, given the significant increase in this cohort. Discussions with Walsall Council on potential student numbers for 2025/2026 had been positive and would continue throughout the year.	RD/JN/LV
	CURRICULUM PRESENTATION – ENGLISH & MATHS UPDATE	
79	Governors received a presentation from the Director of English & Maths on the success of existing initiatives and any new measures introduced in 2024/2025, including new exam boards (Pearson and City & Guilds), the Century Tech software system and a review of the timetabling model.	

80	It was noted that there had been a steady increase in enrolments for GCSE and Functional Skills, for example, a total of 514 students were registered for Level 1 Maths FS which was an increase on the previous year.	
81	In the November 2024 re-sits 45% of entrants had achieved a grade 4 to 9 in Maths and 50% for English. These outcomes were considerably above the national benchmarks for FE providers of 24.1% and 34.9% respectively. Some learners had re-sat their examinations quicker as a pilot project, which had proved to be beneficial.	
82	The College had set targets for 2024/2025 at 1 to 2% above the benchmark in both English (+7%) and maths (+6%) high grades. Each curriculum area had also been given a target. A governor asked whether this had generated any resistance from staff and was advised that this was only minimal. In order to improve Maths achievements by 9% a total of 218 learners would need to pass at grades 4 to 9 and for English to increase by 15% would require 299 passes at grade 4 or above.	
83	Management had asked Curriculum Delivery Managers to identify students working at grade 3 who would have a good chance of raising this to grade 4. Governors were advised that high achievement levels in Maths & English were not traditional in areas such as Plumbing and Travel & Tourism.	
84	Students had been given a target of a 1% increase in their achievement levels. Currently they were working their way through the 4 assessment papers, all of which took place in their usual classrooms to provide a sense of familiarity. For Maths, 40 students had already successfully undertaken assessment 1, with a further 98 on target to achieve. Marking required some moderation to ensure greater levels of consistency.	
85	The Director of E&M outlined the additional support strategies in place to improve this position further, such as staff being paid overtime to work intensively with small groups and weekly revision workshops.	
86	Attendance at English & Maths was 78%, which was 2 to 3% higher than for 2023/2024. The stability of the current teaching team had impacted on this figure. Feedback from the Ofsted inspection had highlighted that some students required a slower pace of learning compared to the delivery of some tutors and this had been addressed through the walkthrough process, which was now indicating strong leadership and a proactive approach to teaching.	
87	The Committee was advised that the Century Tech software provided specialised, individual support for students. It could also generate a teaching plan covering delivery, reflection and discussion.	
88	Staff seemed to be optimistic about the revised English & Maths strategy compared to the previous academic year and there were positive signs of improvement. The focus was now on building confidence on exam techniques and ensuring that staff adhered to the attendance monitoring process. Further changes were planned for 2025/2026, including the introduction of a new centralised timetabling model.	

89	Governors requested that reference in future presentations and documentation be made to creating a culture of excellence in terms of English & Maths	
PERFORMANCE DATA		
90	The Committee received information on performance against key indicators – attendance, retention, achievement, enrolments and English & Maths. A number of areas for further exploration had been identified in the report, namely, attendance levels compared to 2023/2024 and retention on adult programmes (but it was noted that this was less of an issue than achievement levels).	
91	Attendance Attendance for all students and apprentices was currently predicted to out-turn below the identified aspirational target. Governors noted that there was no recognised national benchmark for attendance, but the College had set in-year and aspirational targets with performance levels RAG-rated in the report.	
92	The Committee questioned the timetabling issues highlighted in the report and their impact on attendance. The Deputy Principal advised that a working group had been established to devise appropriate and cost-effective solutions, such as the ‘ownership’ of students, different approaches to interventions across curriculum areas and the sequencing of curriculum delivery. It was felt that staff having clear accountability for students was the key to improvements in attendance.	
93	Overall attendance was Amber and it was noted that the number of adults had decreased in comparison to 2023/2024.	
94	A governor asked for further details of the issues that could bring about the necessary improvements. The Deputy Principal advised that the Working Group had examined several areas, including greater clarity of register marking, more effective timetabling both for core lessons and English & Maths, ownership of students and greater consistency amongst how staff handled interventions and at what level, and sequencing of the curriculum to ensure a better integration between personal development and core activities. Improving attendance levels was partly a cultural issue, due to the previous lack of clear accountability for learners.	
95	Retention Retention for the 16-18 cohort and apprenticeships had improved compared to 2023/2024, There was further work to be undertaken on the adult retention level which was currently below target, together with additional enrolments to be included on the MIS.	
96	Better behaviours had impacted on 16-18 retention and it was felt that the ‘Swap Don’t Drop’ initiative and stricter guidelines for staff to enforce College policies in the classroom had contributed to this. In response to a request for the reasons for adult students withdrawing from their courses the Deputy Principal reported that this could be due to them finding employment or other job-related commitments and caring responsibilities.	
97	Achievement 16-18 achievement was higher than in previous years, however, the Committee was reminded that the majority of achievements could not be captured until August 2025.	

98	Apprenticeships currently exceeded the levels of previous years, but the adult achievement remained behind the profile, which meant that the overall achievement target may not be met. The full picture on 19+ achievement was linked to job outcomes which were not all available yet and the data needed to include the results of the recent ESOL examinations for 2024/2025.	
99	The Committee questioned whether there were clear actions regarding apprentices who were continuing beyond their expected end date (Out Of Funding). The Assistant Principal Adults & WBL reported that under the funding regulations the training plan and targets of each student had to be re-evaluated once they reached that point. The new requirements for Functional Skills English & Maths on adult apprenticeships would mean that the choice of enrolment on these qualifications was the responsibility of the employer, in consultation with the College.	
100	The Assistant Principal MIS advised that apprentices were classified as OOFs for a number of reasons, including being in learning but had not yet completed their programme, those awaiting Gateway and students where the College was undertaking compliance checks prior to the apprenticeship being signed off by staff.	
101	Governors noted the inter-dependence of attendance, attainment and retention to the success of students.	
102	Applications Applications for 2025/2026 were at a similar level to the current academic year, with further rounds of interviews yet to be carried out, which should increase numbers.	
OFSTED INSPECTION & FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS		
103	The Deputy Principal presented a report on the outcomes of the recent Ofsted inspection process, together with progress against the resulting action plan	
104	Improving high grades on English & Maths had been discussed under an earlier agenda item. Timetabling and line management structures were being reviewed for 2025/2026 to contribute to increased attendance. An attendance working group had been established and a progression week would take place in 2025/2026. A review of the holistic student journey was underway to ensure that learners were retained, tracked and well-supported, commencing with inductions for students and parents. Accountability for individual students would be addressed for 2025/2026.	
105	A further area for improvement was improving achievement levels for young people and apprentices. The performance report discussed earlier provided assurance that the College was on-target to achieve the key priorities for 2024/2025 and this approach would continue for the rest of the year and beyond.	
106	A robust quality and compliance cycle had now been developed and would be implemented shortly, which fully aligned to the College's business planning process. Governors received information on the recent restructuring of the Quality Directorate, which would be fully introduced in September 2025. CPD for staff would be undertaken on an annual basis, with regular	

	reminders for the completion of any outstanding courses. It was reported that qualifications and the profile of the student cohort had changed and that the College's provision and support mechanisms needed to be updated so that they were fully aligned.	
107	The Committee received the draft KPIs for each year of the Corporate Plan, progress against which would be monitored at each Learning & Quality meeting. A governor questioned whether an attendance benchmark expectation had been set and was advised that consultations had taken place on this with the Student Union. Financial incentives such as a prize draw for 100% attendance were being considered, together with any mitigating circumstances for absence.	KL
108	The Committee agreed with the allocation of responsibility for monitoring the KPIs to particular committees. It was felt that innovation should be included as this was a future growth area for the curriculum and given the need to transform some College processes through digitisation. The Deputy Principal responded that the Annual Duty to Review process was a measure of how the College was meeting local, regional and national priorities and that the recent Curriculum Efficiency & Financial Sustainability exercise had included curriculum design and innovation.	
109	An Artificial Intelligence Strategy was being developed for approval by the Corporation and staff were involved in industrial updating and upskilling throughout the academic year. Governors noted that qualifications often lagged behind technological developments, which made it difficult to ensure that the curriculum was relevant to the world of work and provide students with the most up-to-date information.	
110	In response to a question about the balance between achieving the enrolment targets and ensuring students had the necessary entry qualifications, the Deputy Principal reported that this was a cultural issue and highlighted the importance of regular CPD for front-line staff. In the past such behaviour had been driven partly by the fear of under-performance on enrolment targets. Alternative pathways would be explained to learners without the requisite qualifications to retain them at the College whilst enabling them to progress to higher levels of study.	
111	Resolved – That, subject to any further amendments, the allocation of responsibility for monitoring each KPI be approved	
TEACHING, LEARNING & ASSESSMENT		
112	Governors received for information a report on Teaching, Learning and Assessment, which set out the new emphasis on 'walk-throughs' conducted by Curriculum Managers in their respective areas and had improved oversight. All visits were now recorded and the number undertaken had increased significantly. A summary of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching practice had been included in the report.	
113	The robust, proactive process had meant a higher level of confidence in assessing areas of responsibility, a more consistent approach and direct engagement with the teaching and learning process. Areas for improvement could be identified quickly and interventions introduced. Additionally there had been a positive impact on management and teaching quality in terms of informed and targeted discussions during team meetings, the ability to set	

	specific development goals during one-on-one sessions with teaching staff and changes to curriculum and teaching methods where appropriate	
114	Governors were advised that the completion of Annual Developmental Observations was significantly behind schedule for the 2024-2025 academic year, due to the Ofsted inspection and a delay in the resumption of observations post-inspection. The observation process had now restarted and management was confident that as many observations as possible would be completed before the end of the academic year.	
115	In response to questions about the number of staff who had not received observations, the Assistant Principal Quality reported that only 12 to 15% had been undertaken to date, out of 60% of staff who fell within the scope of the process. A proposal had been submitted recently to SLT for consideration for a 2 year risk-based observation cycle.	
116	The College was using walkthroughs to support staff before developmental observations took place. English and Maths was trialling this system and a Quality Review Action Tracker had been devised to enable management to monitor progress.	
117	In line with other colleges in the sector, a model of using 'un-seen' observations had been introduced, which was having a positive effect, was more impactful and less stressful for teachers. It prioritised professional growth and reflective practice over performance-based assessments and was aligned to the Education & Training Foundation (ETF) Professional Standards (with the College cited as a leading example in the sector).	
118	The student induction survey for 2024/2025 had highlighted an overall satisfaction rate of 98%, which was 2.13% higher than 2023/2024 and exceeded the identified target of 96%. However, 1000 fewer students had participated in the survey and the Quality Team was working with staff to encourage an improvement in engagement by asking students to complete the survey in class.	
119	Governors noted high levels of positivity on student safety on-campus and teaching and assessment. A high proportion of students were aware of British Values (97.29%) and there had been a 10% increase in knowledge of the risks of extremism and radicalisation (Prevent Duty) (91.47%). A number of areas for improvement had been identified, including the use of Moodle and Home Access, the influence of Student Voice on changes within the organisation, work experience requirements and safety travelling to and from the College. An action plan had been prepared to address any negative responses greater than 3% and would be monitored through the Student Voice Committee.	
120	Governors received information on the rationale for the 22 programmes currently in the Course Monitoring process and the actions to be taken. A summary of future workforce development activities was also provided.	
121	The Chair commented that during the recent Ofsted inspection the inspection team had raised the issue of A Levels and how these fitted into the College's profile. Management was asked for an assurance that walk-throughs were taking place in this area and reported that this was the case and that the College needed to determine how it wished to position its A	

	Level offer in the future, particularly as there was a sizeable cohort of staff on a hybrid teaching timetable, some of whom had not taught to examination level for a number of years.	
	CURRICULUM UPDATE	
122	The Committee received for information an update on curriculum developments in 2024/2025, plans for future years and recent policy announcements from the Government, which may impact on strategy and curriculum design, but still involved a degree of uncertainty.	
123	The initial reason for expanding A Level provision was to mitigate the potential withdrawal of other Level 3 qualifications, which could expose the College to a total risk of £925K. However, the need to switch to T Levels or longer qualifications such as A Levels had now been reduced due to amendments in Government policy.	
124	Over the past 2 years a number of A Level programmes had been placed in the Course Monitoring process, due to factors such as poor attendance and achievement levels. There had been a variation of success across A Levels, which had small class sizes and low progression rates.	
125	The risks for this area included the expensive delivery model which required significant investment, the fact that outcomes could not be determined until the end of a 2 year programme, staff recruitment for some disciplines was challenging and there was a high level of competition for students amongst other local institutions. However, there were also advantages in relation to growth opportunities, stability of the curriculum and improving levels of social mobility.	
126	The Committee concluded that a detailed business case for expanding A Level provision was required and should be presented to a future meeting,	KL/RB
127	Proposals on 16-19 Achieving Together provision outlined that this area was becoming a blend of other interventions and contained a similar cohort of learners including some students with SEND. It had been suggested that in 2025/2026 this provision would form a 'foundation intervention' level, which could be followed by a 2 year Level 2 programme to match the different profile of learners.	
128	The College was discussing how the 14-16 Achieving Together provision could focus less on behaviour management and more on improving resilience and confidence amongst students. Delivery and management of this area was a challenge and its relatively poor contribution rate was likely to worsen. Governors agreed that there were other alternative providers in the locality who may offer more suitable programmes.	
129	The proposals in the report suggested that this provision could be expanded, but it was uncertain as to its viability in the long-term, given the high level of resourcing required (and, therefore, costs) and the need for a separate space within the College environment.	
130	The Committee felt it was important to ensure successful outcomes for students on AT programmes. In response to a question about progression, the AP Curriculum reported that only 29% of students enrolled on further higher level courses. A wider strategic discussion was required on the benefits	

	of AT to the town and research on possible alternative providers needed to be carried out before the Corporation could make any definitive decisions. Consultations with the local authority and feedback from students on their experience of the programme would be included in the final submission to the board.	KL/RB
ADULT LEARNING CENTRE – EDUCATION CASE		
131	The Assistant Principal Adults & WBL presented an overview of the education case for the Adult Learning Centre. Governors were reminded that this would contribute to the regeneration of the town centre, raise aspirations amongst the local population and would align to the Learning & Skills Improvement Plan and the skills needs of the Borough. The new ALC provided a separate facility for adults and apprentices and had good transport links to the outlying areas.	
132	Students would be taught through a combination of full- and part-time classroom and distance learning. The curriculum structure was based on that of The Link, which had a number of Skills Academies, with the management structure yet to be determined pending the outcome of the current transformation process.	
133	Governors were advised that the opening of the ALC may free up learning and social space within the Wisemore Campus. Changes to the location of the College's SEND provision were being discussed as part of a separate project, but there was an assurance that the College would continue to delivery community provision; this would require careful and consistent communication to current and future students and to the wider Borough. The local council and the Combined Authority would be consulted on these plans as both would be commissioning provision from the College in the future.	
134	Management would now be reviewing and testing the financial assumptions relating to the ALC, ensuring that proposed courses matched with labour market needs and finalising the structure.	
135	A governor commented that local universities were keen to work in partnership with the College on Level 4 and Level 5 programmes, for which there had been a reduction in enrolments in HE institutions over the past few years.	
HIGHER EDUCATION STRATEGY		
136	Governors were advised that the Finance & Resources Committee had considered the viability of each aspect of the College's provision as part of its discussions on the Transformation Project, including higher education.	
137	The Assistant Principal Adults & WMB presented for information a summary of the recent review of the College's Higher Education Strategy and the environment in which it operated particularly in light of the introduction of the Government's Lifelong Learning Entitlement.	
138	The next steps would be to define the College's HE aspirations whilst considering financial viability, social mobility and student growth; streamline Level 4+ courses to align with employer needs, removing unviable courses with low enrolments while expanding in key growth sectors; develop modular and blended learning options to align with LLE which would improve	

	accessibility for working adults and local employers; strengthen collaborations with universities to enhance progression pathways and establish a distinct brand for Level 4+ education; establish a dedicated academy to address regional workforce needs in education and training. An assessment of staffing, timetabling, and technology investments would then be undertaken to ensure that delivery aligned with the College's long-term strategic priorities.	
139	Information was provided which RAG-rated each HE programme and made recommendations as to which courses should remain within the College's overall offer and which would be removed from the 2025/2026 curriculum plan. These proposals had been approved by the Senior Management Team and the next stage would be for curriculum planning meetings to test their robustness. All curriculum managers would be asked to review their offer for 2025/2026 by the end of March, which then enabled staffing implications to be determined and students to be offered alternatives to any courses that would not be running. Over a couple of years existing income levels would be replaced by any new courses.	
140	Governors asked that the draft Strategy presented to the Committee's next meeting included an assurance that the College had an appropriate technology and staffing plan to be able to deliver a modern HE curriculum. Management also needed to be mindful that the introduction of the LLE would mean that higher education courses for local students would be more expensive than currently. However, the College felt that the strong links with local universities and the Combined Authority positioned it strongly.	JN/KL
SAFEGUARDING UPDATE		
141	The Committee received a report on safeguarding activities in 2024/2025.	
142	There were still ongoing developments with the automation of the data through the College's MIS team. A safeguarding data dashboard was under development and would be presented to a future meeting. The report presented information by concerns received by type and age of student, by faculty and concern categories. Future reports would include a more systematic breakdown of the types of concerns received.	RJ/CW
143	In Term One the Safeguarding and Wellbeing Team received a total of 2051 referrals, 41% which were related to mental health and wellbeing issues. The age range of students that have been supported was from 14 to 64 years old.	
144	There had been a significant increase in investment in widening the support offered to students, including a change to a relational approach and investing financially in the Safeguarding and Wellbeing team.	
145	A total of 3 Prevent referrals had been made in Term One, none of which were taken further by counter terrorism police. Students were still being monitored for any other behaviour changes or instances of concern.	
DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS		
	1 st July 2025	