



CURRICULUM AND QUALITY STANDARDS COMMITTEE

THURSDAY 25 NOVEMBER 2021

Report: Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 15 September 2021

Author: Clerk

Action: Approve

Status: Open

Present: David Mitchell (DM) (Chair)
David Alexander (DA) (Principal & CEO)
Carol Davenport (CD)

In attendance: Deni Chambers (DC)
Jeremy Cook (JC)
John Deary (JD)
Tracy Foreman (TF)
Helen Hepple (HH)
Ivan Jepson (IJ)
Kevin Marston (KM)
Andrew Robson (AR)
Suzanne Slater (SS)
Chris Toon (CT)
Darren Heathcote (DH)
Richard Ward (RW)
Emma Moody (EM) (Clerk)
Suzanne Clark (SC) (Minutes)

CQ/54 Welcome / Apologies / Conflicts of Interest

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received from Sarah Stewart and Aneela Ali. Andy Cole, whose may become a co-optee of the committee, was not available to attend the meeting.

There were no conflicts of interest declared. Members were reminded to declare any conflicts that arose during the meeting.

CQ/55 Minutes of the last meeting dated 19 May 2021

The Chair highlighted that the previous minutes should be marked as open. Save for this amendment, the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 19 May 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

CQ/56 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

CQ/57 2020/21 Year to Date Performance – Education and Training

The report was presented by Andrew Robson, Assistant Principal – Standards & Performance.

AR reminded the Committee this was another unusual year due to the pandemic and how it had disrupted learning. There were positives, including project choice, but also challenges, including Maths and English and the ability to undertake more practical based programmes. Adult achievement had been impacted in particular during lockdown. As had functional skills. CT commented that the anticipated figures presented in table 5 had been concluded following "bottom up" discussions although may be slightly underestimated. This would be confirmed in due course.

The Chair acknowledged that due to the pandemic it was difficult to make year on year judgements as data available is not as comprehensive as in previous years. He expressed his appreciation and commended staff for the work undertaken in very difficult circumstances. He added that learners should be congratulated on their performance.

The Chair asked that the committee be updated in relation to any particular areas of focus/challenge and the recovery plan in place for these as the College emerges from covid and into more regular working patterns. CT stressed the importance, over the next month, of identifying the root cause of any performance issues and whether these could still be attributed to covid. There has been some discussion recently in relation to high needs provision as it is felt that learners have not had the experience of previous years however this is not evidenced in the data. It is very difficult to identify key areas of weakness without understanding the context. There have been some issues with rail provision in particular. This was due to the programme being disrupted by lockdown. The course was a short 6-week programme and some learners chose not to return when classes recommenced. It was stressed that looking at the data alone, without understanding the narrative, does not give a full picture.

AR advised that data for both 2019/20 and 2020/21 was affected by the pandemic. The last year where data was not affected was 2018/19. There is good work taking place and the team are looking to ensure that the same interventions are happening whilst responding to the pandemic. The priority needs to be on getting back to a position where the team can take a longer-term view, without planning for further lockdowns, and full student attendance is expected.

The Chair recognised the importance of getting back to this level of normality as soon as possible indicating that some areas may need a specific COVID recovery plan. DA reiterated that whilst the previous 2 academic years were far from normal, the data shows very good levels of performance and he felt it would be interesting to compare this to other providers in due course. DA added his appreciation for the work undertaken to secure such strong outcomes.

In response to a request from the Chair, CT gave an update on enrolments for 2021/22. Whilst plans had been made for growth in this area, based on a high recruitment trend, this growth has not materialised. It is currently expected that full-time learner numbers will be similar to that in 2020/21. The College's entry requirements have not changed and there is a view that they are realistic and allow young people to achieve. Other recruitment lines look fairly positive with the exception of adult learner loans. There has been a reduction in this area equivalent to two group sizes. It is planned to undertake further marketing activity to secure additional learners. CT explained that the original

2021-22 growth projection was based on demographic data which has previously been a very good indicator. The Chair felt that the focus on ensuring that learners are enrolled onto the right provision was absolutely right and proper. A member recognised this as a real challenge agreeing that it is right to focus on ensuring that learners are on programmes where they will succeed. It was felt that this is something to continue to monitor.

The report was noted.

CQ/58 2020/21 Year to Date Performance – Apprenticeships

The report was presented by Suzanne Slater, Assistant Principal – Apprenticeships and was accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation showing the apprenticeship journey and the College's management of this area.

It was reported that, again, covid had created challenges for apprenticeships. There had been a decrease in the 2020-21 achievement figure since the May 2021 forecasts. End Point Assessments were proving increasingly challenging. Numbers withdrawing were analysed and it was confirmed that the College followed up with every withdrawal.

The Chair recognised that the pandemic had made for a very difficult period for apprentices and the College's delivery teams. He commented on the very positive performance despite these challenges. The Chair was assured by the reported improved management response to apprenticeship delivery. He congratulated learners on their performance.

IJ added that there have been some external factors beyond the College's control in relation to the end point assessment process. This is an issue across the sector which is causing challenges for all providers and there is work still to do in this area.

In response to a question from the Chair, SS advised that there had been no confirmation at this stage on how timely achievement will be measured following the introduction of the end point assessment process. AR reported that data for apprenticeship standards has been excluded from official published data for the last 2 years. CT added that having more clarity around end point assessment is a planned improvement for self-assessment. It was acknowledged that there is still work to do to help trainer / assessors to move from the previous assessment model used to deliver apprenticeship frameworks. IJ advised that end point assessment makes up around 20% of the income relating to apprentices and if an apprentice were to fail the assessment, the employer would be liable to pay for any re-sit. This is an additional challenge. The RW reported that work has been undertaken with employers to ensure they are clear on their specific responsibilities. This will continue and further training will be rolled-out to delivery staff.

The Chair queried whether having less subcontracting provision would ultimately give the College more control in relation to quality and it was advised this would be kept under review.

In response to a question from the Clerk, SS advised that there had been no specific feedback in relation to the 75 withdrawals where it was indicated that the learners had left the employer industry. There was no clear evidence that this was linked to the end point assessment process. The particular areas affected are the areas that have been hardest hit by COVID including retail, manufacturing and automotive. IJ reported that all apprentice withdrawals are considered by a panel. There is rich data in place to support the process and to understand reasons behind the withdrawals at this stage.

The Chair asked whether there were any problems encountered recruiting appropriate staff. SS advised that there are some areas where this is a challenge, particularly in

areas such as automotive and engineering. Some new staff have been recruited in these areas recently and are making good progress.

The Chair indicated that he had an awareness from a later report that customer feedback for apprenticeships is lower than in other areas. He was encouraged to see this as an area of focus for 2021/22.

DA reported that the Executive Team had recently debated apprenticeships in an extended executive meeting. He highlighted the work that had already been undertaken in this area to make improvements whilst recognising that there were further aspects that required focus. The committee was assured that the team will be looking to continue to drive improvements.

The Chair commended SS on her work in this area and, in her last meeting as a member of the Gateshead College team, he wished her well for the future. IJ added that during a recent internal audit, the internal audit team had commented very favourably on the introduction of the apprentice portal which had been led by SS. He also shared his appreciation for the work undertaken by SS.

The report was noted.

CQ/59 Annual Safeguarding Report

The report was presented by Darren Heathcote, Learner Services Manager.

DH reported that staff training and compliance was regularly reported to the People and Remuneration Committee as this fell with that Committee's remit and that an update report would be provided at that forum in September. DH reported that the number of incidents was lower than the previous year, but the severity of issues was greater. **THIS ITEM IS CONFIDENTIAL AND NOT FOR PUBLICATION.** DH felt confident working with the local agencies and reported that the College was well represented at local safeguarding groups.

DA advised the Committee that the DH has agreed to take up the post of Head of Customer Services and Student Experience advising that there is to be an internal announcement. As part of this, the DH would take on the role of designated safeguarding lead on a permanent basis. The Chair congratulated DH and noted that he had previously been a deputy DSL so was well equipped to take on this role. There was now a larger pool of deputy safeguarding leads so the College had more resource to rely on with skills in this area.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Clerk indicated that it would be appropriate for the report to be presented at the next Board meeting confirming that it had been received by the committee. It was confirmed that the new safeguarding assurance framework will be presented at the next scheduled meeting of the committee. DA suggested that when presenting the Annual Safeguarding Report to the Board, an updated version of the Safeguarding policy, reflective of the DH's new role and confirming other recent legislative updates be also presented for approval. The Chair was keen for the report to be shared with the Board to ensure that governors are reminded of their safeguarding responsibilities and given assurance that work in the College is compliant with legislation. DH confirmed that the policy had been reviewed by lawyers who had advised on some minor changes, but otherwise were content it was compliant.

The Chair asked how prepared the College would be in the event of a terrorism incident and whether there had been any recent discussions in relation to this. DH advised that there had been a recent meeting with counter terrorism colleagues. The College's Health and Safety Manager has very strong links with the counter terrorism teams. The

College has evacuation plans in place and all staff undertake regular mandatory training. The team are planning to undertake some table top exercises in the near future now that staff have returned to working from college campuses. Prior to the lockdown, some specific work was undertaken at Team Valley – that was the last face to face activity. The Chair felt it important to consider this, particularly for the Baltic Campus. Whilst he was keen for the Baltic to remain as open as possible to the public, and keen to maintain the welcoming feel the campus has, he is very conscious of the size of the Baltic Campus and potential threats. DH recognised the need to keep access arrangements under review, particularly based on current local developments. There are ongoing discussions with other local organisations in relation to this, including Gateshead Council. The Clerk highlighted that information and legislation relating to the Protect Duty is likely to be published soon.

Action: Annual Safeguarding Report and Safeguarding Policy to be added to the agenda for the Board meeting in October 2021.

Action: Safeguarding Assurance Framework to be shared with the committee at the next scheduled meeting in November 2021.

The report was noted.

CQ/60 Customer Feedback

The report was presented by Tracy Foreman, Assistant Principal – Employment Edge. TF summarised the areas for improvement and the actions being taken by the college in those areas. TF noted the engagement rates from apprentices and said that the College would look to address this through interventions going forward.

The Chair thanked the TF for the report which he felt had shared very useful information and data. He indicated that he was looking forward to seeing how this feeds into the College self-assessment process.

In response to a question from a member, TF confirmed that the College's careers strategy is aligned with Gatsby benchmarks. The member asked whether additional work was required with staff to make links with careers and subjects clearer for learners. TF confirmed that the strategy is thoroughly embedded across the curriculum. CT advised that engagement with employers has been less than would have normally been the case due to the pandemic, however there has been some excellent work taking place with curriculum teams. DC added that there is a new PSD (personal and social development) schedule in place. The schedule has been fully redesigned with sequencing focused fully on giving learners the employment edge. All sessions are clearly linked to the workplace and careers will also be a key feature.

In response to a suggestion from the Chair, the Clerk confirmed that the Customer Feedback Report was a standing annual item received by the Board and therefore this report would be taken to the Board.

The Chair asked for further details on the College's enrichment offer and was interested in activity included in addition to the sports academy sessions. TF confirmed that Heads of Department had worked with the team to develop a comprehensive plan which also includes dance, music and cooking. It is felt that this is a much wider offer which will suit all interests and tastes. A calendar will be created and will be published. The sport academy offering is showing a greater uptake.

Action: Customer Feedback Report to be added to the agenda for the meeting in October 2021 with confirmation this had been reviewed by the Committee.

The report was noted.

CQ/61 Quality Assurance of Teaching, Learning and Assessment

The report was presented by Richard Ward, Head of Quality Improvement.

The Chair commented positively on the sophisticated model that has been developed and would now be put in place. The Chair was pleased to see an element of observation included, recognising the difficulty in undertaking these during the pandemic. RW confirmed that staff do receive notification of observation the week prior to the observation taking place, equivalent to what would be given for inspection. In addition to observations though, there are regular learning walks taking place. In response to a question from the Chair, RW confirmed that data from observations will continue to be summarised and reported to the committee in a format which showed the results of observations more visually (as per previous reports). A trend analysis of information collected from the learning walk process will also be undertaken and reported. Whilst staff on the EnhancED programme do not have formal observations, they do have regular check-ins with their programme lead and progress will be RAG rated. This will ensure that their performance can be quantified and presented to the committee as there will continue to be a rich data set in place. The Chair welcomed this clarification as evidence collected will support the team in evaluating whether the model is appropriate. The Clerk recognised the importance of having this data relating to performance to inform judgements as part of the self-assessment process.

Action: observation data to be collected and reported to the Committee adequately in time for SAR meeting.

The report was noted.

CQ/62 Higher Education Update

The report was presented by Richard Ward, Head of Quality Improvement.

The Chair recognised the level of work involved in delivering an HE offer. He questioned how important it is to have an HE offer in terms of the overall College profile. CT advised that a number of colleges have now moved into the HE market. The economy with HE is very different and whilst there is a good financial return on programmes, there is no intention to compete with HE neighbours, either locally or nationally. The College is able to provide a good experience around technical education. CT confirmed that he was comfortable that the College's offer at levels 4 and 5 is in curriculum areas of strength and offer a good experience for learners. Some programmes have high needs learners who have internally progressed from lower level provision; this may justify retaining such provision even if on paper, performance looks poor. The College's HE provision can act as a stepping stone in preparing these learners for university. The Chair acknowledged that the College's bespoke offer meets the needs of learners. DC reported that delivery of HE programmes was challenged as part of the College's business planning process to fully understand why the College should continue to deliver this. Assurance was given that the team are comfortable with the portfolio offered and that the resources needed to deliver quality provision are in place.

The report was noted.

CQ/63 Local College Collaboration Matrix

The report was presented by Chris Toon, Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality.

DA highlighted that collaboration was a key area of focus identified by both the ESFA and FEC. The matrix shared confirms that the College does already collaborate with others. This collaboration needs to be more tangible and visible to support future plans and opportunities. The matrix has been shared with the ESFA. The Clerk agreed on the importance of reinforcing the collaboration taking place as there was a clear perception externally that the College operated in isolation from others.

In response to a question from a member, CT advised that there is no crossover between the College's Maths Centre of Excellence project and the maths hubs operating in schools. The College's project is focused on identifying new strategies for young people who have struggled previously with maths.

The Chair indicated that he would be interested to see examples of how collaborations are enhancing the learner experience and the positive impact they are having. He would be interested to see how it is making a difference and suggested that case studies could be completed and shared.

DA confirmed that as part of his introduction to the College and the region, he has spent significant time speaking with other local principals and it is known that the College is interested in collaborating and working with others.

The report was noted.

CQ/64 Risk Register

The report was presented by Jeremy Cook, Deputy Principal: Finance & Resources. This Committee was reminded of the need to periodically review the risks allocated to it, within the context of the whole risk register, and consider them and the adequacy of mitigations in place.

The Clerk suggested that the Committee may wish to periodically focus upon of the risks the committee has responsibility for. There may be risks where the committee feel assured by reports already presented, however, for some identified risks, the Committee should ask itself how it assures itself of the mitigation strategy in place. The Chair advised that the full risk register was not something that the committee had received previously outside of the board, although it did consider risk in the context of the reports it received relevant to its remit. DA reported that the College has recently appointed a new internal auditor and discussions will be taking place to agree the programme for the next year. A piece of work will be undertaken to review the register and the College's approach and attitude/appetite to risk management. Assurance frameworks will also be developed. In response to a question from the Chair, the Clerk advised that the standard reporting template introduced includes a specific section on risk. The Clerk agreed to circulate a note to report authors to ensure that any risks, including those linked to the register, are clear within reports.

The Chair questioned whether Ofsted and the potential for another failed inspection should be included in the register as an area of risk. CT confirmed that a review of the register is planned that will refocus some of the risks. The inclusion of Ofsted related risk will be a consideration.

DA reported that the Executive team have attempted to focus on mitigations for the risks. Currently, the risk register continues to focus on the risks that have emerged over the previous 12/18 months and there will be a need to review these going forward.

Action: Clerk to circulate note to report authors to ensure the risk section of reports is complete and links to the risk register where appropriate.

The report was noted.

CQ/65 Any Other Business

There was none.

CQ/66 Date of the next meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Thursday 25 November 2021 at 10.00am.

The meeting closed at 12.15pm.