

MINUTES OF QUALITY & STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 22ND JUNE 2021 VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Present:	Michele Bacon	External Governor (Chair)
	Karen Banks	External Governor
	Jayne Edwards	External Governor
	Tom McInerney	External Governor
	Jessy Sodimu	Student Governor
	Ryan Turner	Staff Governor
In attendance:	Thalia Bell	Deputy Principal
	Alan Brown	Assistant Principal (Quality)
	Jo Hall	Head of Engineering (Cronton) (minutes 162 to 178)
	Chris Sikorski	Staff Governor (Observer)
	Lesley Venables	Clerk to the Governors

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

162 Apologies for absence were received from Sherroll Martin (Student Governor).

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

163 No declarations of interest were received.

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 2ND MARCH 2021

164 **Resolved** - That the minutes of the meeting held on 2nd March 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

MATTERS ARISING

165 The Committee received a list of actions resulting from the previous meeting and noted that these items had either been completed or were featured on the agenda.

PRESENTATION – GREEN ECONOMY & SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY

166 The Head of Engineering (Cronton) gave a presentation on the College's response to addressing skills gaps within the Green Economy and aligning its strategy to local, regional and national priorities for education and training on carbon reduction and sustainability.

167 A gap analysis of the skills required by the Green Economy had highlighted three areas for development: leadership, new technologies and established skills in a Green context. The College had started to update its curriculum to enable existing workers to retrain in new technologies and to enable employers to replace an ageing workforce.

168 Nationally, there was a significant gap in company skills profiles for Science, Technology, Engineering & Maths subjects (STEM) and also a shortage of further education lecturers with a background and/or training in Green issues. It was noted that the College's

IDEA Centre already offered courses in 12 out of the 16 sectors identified in the Skills for Green White Paper.

169 The College was represented on the Local Enterprise Partnership Built Environment Board, which provided strategic leadership for the region and focused on the development of business and education. The LEP's strategy encompassed 4 'pillars': environment & energy; economy & regeneration; people; and place.

170 The aim was for the North West to be the first low carbon industrial cluster by 2030. A number of infrastructure projects would contribute towards this target, such as Hynet and the Mersey Tidal Project.

171 A bid had been submitted under the Government's Skills Accelerator Fund to enable the College to fill the skills gaps in the Green Economy including HND programmes (Levels 4 and 5) and a new HNC course in Digital & the Built Environment. The College's existing curriculum had been redesigned and reviewed to align it to the Green agenda, with some courses being removed from the overall offer.

172 Students were also being given the opportunity to work with local employers on live projects, such as the design of the Stonebridge Cross Green Village.

173 A governor asked whether any projects involved the Halton community, to which the Head of Engineering responded that the College was working with Halton Housing Trust on future house design and retro-fitting green technology to some of its properties. There was also a high level of outreach work with local schools.

174 Following a question on staff training to enable delivery of this new curriculum over the next 5 years the Deputy Principal reported that this formed part of the collaborative bid from local colleges to the Government's Skills Accelerator Fund. If this was unsuccessful the College intended to use the training programme offered by the Education Training Foundation centring on T Level qualifications.

175 Governors acknowledged that the proposed Level 3 programmes would meet the criteria for assessment but asked about other qualification levels. The Head of Engineering commented that the companies involved in the Stonebridge Cross project were looking to engage with schools in particular.

176 The College was working on a range of qualification units, which provided good opportunities, despite the complexities of delivery, and these had been mapped to qualifications on Engineering and the Built Environment to offer progression routes to higher levels.

177 The Committee queried the ambitious targets of the Association of Colleges' Climate Change Roadmap and whether this impacted on the College's own environment, transport and travel processes. Governors were advised that the policies and procedures required for compliance with the Roadmap were not too dissimilar to those already adopted by the College. The next stage would be raising student awareness across the organisation, but it was recognised that embedding the principles would be much more challenging.

178 It was agreed that some of the student bids on Green Technology projects would be presented to a future Committee meeting for information.

Jo Hall left the meeting at this point.

COVID-19 UPDATE

179 Governors received for information an update on COVID-19 issues since March 2021.

180 The Deputy Principal reported that, following Government guidance that had reduced the restrictive measures to combat COVID-19, the total number of positive cases since June 2021 was 17, 15 of which related to students and 2 to members of staff. Both groups were encouraged to test themselves twice weekly at home using Lateral Flow Tests (with the exception of some Foundation Studies learners, who were tested on site) and this would continue over the summer holiday period for those returning in September.

181 Governors expressed their appreciation of the hard work undertaken by staff over the past year to address the challenges of the pandemic.

TEACHER ASSESSED GRADES

182 The Assistant Principal presented a report on the process for Teacher Assessed Grades, which had replaced the normal summer examinations for many courses.

183 Governors were informed that the Joint Curriculum & Qualifications guidelines had been followed to devise a robust system, with supporting evidence and moderation for each student's grades. There had been a strong element of challenge to curriculum staff, particularly where the proposed grades exceeded levels for 2019/2020.

184 All grades had now been submitted to individual awarding bodies and requests had started to be received to sample some of the data and associated evidence. An appeals process was in place to address any potential maladministration, but any challenge by students or their parents to the actual grades had to be submitted to the appropriate awarding body, rather than to the College.

185 The Committee noted that the grade profile for A Levels and GCSEs was broadly in line with 2019/2020 and that BTec qualifications showed a similar pattern to previous years.

186 The complexity of the process and the efforts of staff were acknowledged by Committee members. A detailed report on the outcomes would be presented to the Board's October 2021 meeting.

CURRICULUM REPORT

187 The Deputy Principal presented a report on performance against key curriculum indicators.

188 Applications for 16-18 year olds for 2021/2022 had increased from 1947 in 2020/2021 to 2299 for Cronton (mainly due to growth in A Level provision of 226), but had decreased from 733 to 644 at Kingsway. It was felt that the latter was due to the inability for the school leavers to sample the College's courses prior to enrolling as the number of COVID-19 cases in the Borough meant it was not safe to do so at the current time.

189 Enrolments in Hospitality and Hair & Beauty had been impacted by the pandemic. Basic Skills enrolments appeared to be strong and courses in Engineering and Construction had substantial waiting lists.

190 Governors were advised of several new national funding streams that were designed to increase the number of adult learners. The Life-Time Skills Guarantee was aimed at Level 3 learners in key industry areas and these were provided free of charge. This would affect the amount of student loans and, potentially, the number of offers in the future. The College already provided some courses from the approved list, including AAT Accounting, Counselling, Plumbing, Electrical and Engineering.

191 Despite the challenges of the current year, the College had achieved its funding targets for the Adult Education Budget for both the Liverpool City Region and ESFA strands.

192 In conjunction with other LCR colleges and the Merseyside Chambers of Commerce, a bid had been developed for the Strategic Development Fund of the Government's Skills Accelerator initiative. If successful, the bid would enable the College to build a new Green Agenda curriculum for adults.

193 Current enrolment numbers for apprenticeships indicated that the most popular areas were Engineering and Construction, with considerable growth in Health & Social Care and Business & IT. The pandemic had caused 16 apprentices to be placed on a break in learning and a further 4 individuals had been made redundant. Apprenticeship starts had increased significantly compared to the national average, with the main areas of expansion in Construction, Engineering, Care and Customer Services.

194 A governor asked whether the number of apprentices due to enrol on Catering programmes had increased compared to 2020/2021. The Deputy Principal responded that levels were similar and applications had been received mainly from 16-18 year olds joining directly from school. Adult enrolments in this subject were starting to increase slowly, but this area had been affected severely by the COVID-19 pandemic.

195 Performance against key indicators for Higher Education courses continued to be positive, with a retention rate of 94% and 91% attendance.

196 The College had received formal approval to deliver the HND Performing Arts (Technical Pathway) Media Make-up, which would provide a local and cost-effective progression route from September 2021.

197 The National Student Survey (NSS 2021) had now closed and had been completed by 91.07% of eligible Riverside College students. The results would be published nationally in July 2021.

198 The College had recently received £21289 from the Government's HE Hardship Fund, most of which had been distributed to students whose household income was below £22,000. Since April a further £5,555 had been allocated to support students who were experiencing financial hardship or required help in accessing teaching remotely.

199 The 2019/2020 Access & Participation Plan monitoring return had been submitted to the Office for Students by the due deadline of 16 April 2021. This outlined the ways in which the College had used HE tuition fees above the basic fee amount to promote widening participation.

200 Applications for HE courses for 2021/2022 were currently 21 lower than the same time last year. It was anticipated that this would improve as a result of a social media marketing campaign and a live open event.

201 A total of 141 High Needs students had been funded by the local authority in 2020/2021. There had been a significant increase in applications for the next academic year.

202 The Deputy Principal reported that the number of safeguarding cases identified to staff had fallen by about 25%. Management was concerned that, due to students attending classes remotely for the majority of 2020/2021, it had not been possible to pick up many of the issues that would normally have been evidenced from face-to-face contact.

203 The College's curriculum plan had been reviewed recently. It was noted that growth areas included Engineering and Health & Social Care, and that many Counselling courses were now free under the latest Government initiative. Technical (or 'T') Levels would be introduced from 2021/2022 in Early Years, Health & Social Care, Business & the Built Environment and Engineering Maintenance & Operations. Qualifications under the Test and Learn Pilot project would commence in September 2021.

204 The Committee was advised of a recent Internal Audit report on Curriculum Planning, which had resulted in a grading of 'substantial' assurance and no recommendations for further action.

COMPLAINTS 2020/2021

205 The Committee received for information a report on complaints received in 2020/2021, of which the total number was 7. The Assistant Principal advised that staff had been reminded of the importance of following the College's established policy on complaints. The Quality Department provided oversight and ensured consistency of the policy's application.

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY

206 The Committee received a report on Equality and Diversity for 2020/2021. The College's profile indicated a positive trend of improvement impacting on all areas of the protected characteristics. A variety of strategies had been implemented to support the achievement of all learners, especially those from Widening Participation postcodes, which was evidenced in the data.

207 The gap in retention between students from WP and non-WP postcodes was evident in all categories and had been negatively impacted by the pandemic. Although management felt that this could partly be explained by COVID-19 issues (particularly a lack of online access to learning and reliable IT equipment), further investigation indicated that WP learners had found it difficult to remain in College due to a significant increase in the number of families on benefits which had forced many to gain employment. This was evidenced in the case of 19+ males, where the retention gap exceeded 5%. Students had also withdrawn due to childcare pressures associated with the pandemic.

208 In-year retention for female 16-18 students was slightly lower than that for males (93.3% compared to 94.5%). However, it was slightly higher for the 19+ female cohort at 96.7% compared to 93.4%. The majority of the latter issues concerned Level 2 and 3 White Males and would be discussed further by the College's Widening Participation Group.

209 The retention rate for BAME learners was lower than their White British counterparts by 2.9% for 16-18s. However, for adults, retention of BAME learners was above that for White British by 2.2%. This was against a larger cohort of BAME students, but it was noted that these learners made up only a small percentage of the overall College population.

210 For learners with Additional Learning Support needs the retention gap at 16-18 was minimal. However, for 19+ learners this increased to 5.3%. The Deputy Principal reported that this was due to the interruption of learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, together with the fact that many had underlying health conditions and had requested different patterns of learning.

211 Retention differences between learners without and with disabilities and difficulties were 0.9% for 16-18 year olds, which increased to 2.7% for those aged 19+. The high level of additional support measures for this group during the year had meant that the gap had not widened as a result of the pandemic.

212 Governors received detailed information on the types of disabilities and learning difficulties amongst students. A Committee member asked about the impact on special examination considerations of so many learners with dyslexia in 2020/2021. The Deputy Principal responded that the number of students applying for ALS continued to increase substantially year on year, including examination concessions, which required considerable resourcing. Applicants for 2021/2022 were currently being assessed on their additional support needs so that the appropriate measures could be implemented from the start of the academic year.

213 The College had retained 51 of the 56 Young Carers who had enrolled for 2020/2021. Governors noted that many of this group had lost grandparents during the pandemic, which could negatively impact their performance and retention levels. Staff continued to monitor these students closely.

SAFEGUARDING

214 The Deputy Principal presented a report on Safeguarding for 2020/2021.

215 It was noted that there had been a substantial reduction in the number of welfare and concern cases in the current academic year, with a total of 863 compared to 941 at the same point in 2019/2020. Of these, 142 were felt to have met the safeguarding threshold (197 in 2019/2020). Robust tracking of vulnerable students and ongoing cases continued, but the difficulties involved in offering support online instead of face-to-face were noted by the Committee. Home visits had been initiated in some cases to check on particular learners.

216 Following recent incidents highlighted by the national media on sexual imagery and abuse in schools, specialist trauma training had been arranged for staff. All new and existing students would be asked to complete a health and mental well-being questionnaire at the start of term to enable staff to allocate resources effectively on areas of need.

217 The Committee asked about the Well-fit Programme which encouraged young people to engage in exercise and improve their mental health. Funding from Sport England had now ceased, but the College could only afford to retain one of the 3 posts required for the initiative. Feedback from both learners and staff had been highly positive.

218 A governor asked about safeguarding arrangements during the summer break, which was often a difficult time for students. The Deputy Principal responded that there was a reduced provision of service available and individuals with non-urgent issues would be signposted to appropriate agencies. One of the greatest concerns was not having access to free meals, which was a national problem featured in recent media stories.

QUALITYUPDATE

219 The Assistant Principal advised that many of the usual quality measures had been suspended within the year, due to COVID-19. These were now restarting and would include an analysis by the management team of the Ofsted inspection in March 2020 and identification of actions for improvement.

220 Management changes in both Foundation Studies and Adult Basic Skills had recently taken place, partly as a result of the quality processes. Each area was reviewing the breadth of qualifications offered and would be closely monitored in 2021/2022. The Senior Management Team had decided that the “special measures” process would not be reintroduced until 2022/2023, to give each curriculum area sufficient time to bring processes back in line with a normal teaching cycle.

POLICIES

221 The Assistant Principal presented a number of policies that had recently been reviewed as part of the College’s quality assurance procedures. It was noted that the Policy on Equality & Diversity had been reviewed by the Burnetts (College Solicitors) to ensure that it met current legal requirements.

222 **Resolved** - That the Board **be RECOMMENDED** to approve policies on:

Equality & Diversity
Student Discipline
Complaints
HE Student Bursary
Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults

ITEMS TO BE REPORTED TO THE BOARD

223 The Committee identified a series of points that the Chair would report back to the July Board meeting:

- Presentation on the Green Economy & Sustainability Strategy
- COVID-19 Update
- Comprehensive Curriculum Report, which identified high levels of retention and attendance and apprenticeship engagement (against the national trend)
- Reports received on Safeguarding and Equality & Diversity issues, Teacher Assessed Grades and Complaints in 2020/2021
- Number of policies recommended for approval by the Board

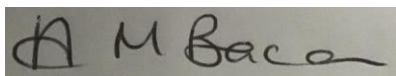
DATE OF NEXT MEETING

30th November 2021 5.00 p.m.

224 It was agreed that, as there was a substantial period of time until the next meeting, a mid-term update would be produced by the Chair, Deputy Principal and the Clerk, which would be circulated to committee members for information.

225 Governors thanked the management team and staff for their efforts during this difficult year.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light gray background. The signature reads "A M Baca" in a cursive, slightly slanted script.

Chair of Quality & Standards Committee

Date:

06/03/2022