Riverside College
Widnes & Runcorn

MINUTES OF THE QUALITY & STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 27TH FEBRUARY 2024 AT 4:30PM AT KINGSWAY CAMPUS

Present:	Michele Bacon	External Governor, Chair
	Karen Banks	External Governor
	David Copeland	Staff Governor
	Jayne Edwards	External Governor
	Tom McInerney	External Governor
	Lucy White	Student Governor
	Sarah Worsley	Student Governor

In Attendance:	Thalia Bell	Deputy Principal (Curriculum)
	Alison Barker	Programme Manager Apprenticeships
	Alan Brown	Assistant Principal (Quality
	Catherine Shaw	Clerk to the Governors

1.   APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE
There were no apologies for absence.

2.   DECLARATION OF INTERESTS
David Copeland and Sarah Worsley declared an interest in agenda item 11.

3.   MINUTES *(previously circulated)*
3.1   **To approve the minutes of the previous meeting held on 30th November 2023**
The Committee reviewed the minutes from the previous meeting.

Resolved - The minutes of the meeting held on 30th November 2023 were **approved** as a correct record.

3.2   **To review the action log and to consider any matters arising from the minutes**
(previously circulated)
The action log and any matters arising were considered by the Committee.

Resolved - The Committee **noted** that all actions had been completed.

Alison Barker, Programme Manager of Apprenticeships joined the meeting.

4.   CURRICULUM PRESENTATION
Alison Barker delivered a presentation on apprenticeships. The Programme Manager highlighted the following aspects within her presentation:
- Achievement rate 2022/23 was 63.5% against the national average of 48.5%
- Current retention rate was 80.2%

- Number of new starts in 2023/2024 to date was 207, compared to the total number of new starts in 2022/2023 which was 169
- Currently the total number of apprentices was 460 across 15 areas.
- The College engaged with small and medium enterprises (SMEs)
- Growth was evidenced across the whole of the apprenticeship offer and in particular relating to (i) Health and Social Care and (ii) Business.
- 2023/2024 introduction of new standards for (i) Level 2 Beauty, (ii) Level 2 Autocare and (iii) Level 2 Welding
- Expert Training Provider – Riverside College was one of only 13 training providers nationally to have been awarded this status having met specified criteria
- Apprenticeship Wellbeing Conferences – these had included apprentice and employer feedback relating to numerous topics, such as:
  - Learning support and inclusion
  - Mental health
  - County lines
  - Professional standards and relationships
  - Online safety
  - Drugs and alcohol
  - Money management
- The Apprentice Annual Awards Evening took place in February and was a hugely successful event

Karen Banks and Lucy White joined the meeting.

A discussion took place with several questions being raised and responded to. The Programme Manager provided greater detail regarding some of the challenges encountered which included (i) retention issues on longer programmes (some being four years) due to students gaining employment (ii) end point assessments not completed due to gaining employment, (iii) complex administrative processes from apprenticeship enquiry to enrolment. During discussions there was a focus on success rates and ways to improve pass rates. In response to a question raised the Deputy Principal confirmed that an ethical approach was taken to ensure apprenticeships progressed onto sustainable employment.

A Governor commented on the successful working practice with the NHS Trusts and asked whether there were opportunities to extend best practice to other apprenticeship areas. The Deputy Principal advised that this was taking place, particularly in respect of engineering apprenticeships.

Resolved: The Committee
(i)   **noted** the contents of the presentation
(ii)   **requested** that the slide deck be circulated to all Board Members

The Programme Manager for Apprenticeships was thanked for her very informative presentation and she left the meeting.

5.   **SAFEGUARDING**
5.1   **To receive a report on safeguarding matters in 2023/2024 to date**
       The Deputy Principal presented a report on safeguarding issues and drew the Committee's attention to the following key aspects:

- Wellbeing – 758 referrals in total had been made with areas of concern encompassing anxiety/low mood, sexual assault/abuse, bereavement and eating disorders.
- Safeguarding – 434 referrals in total had been made with areas of concern including suicide ideation/attempts, domestic abuse, learners subject to 'child in need' intervention and learners subject to child protection plans.
- Local and national risks - these included IT/cyber incidents, neglect, deprivation, terrorist/extremist behaviours, mental health issues, transition challenges from some Alternate Provider Schools
- The RAG-rated College action plan was presented with assurance being given that this was subject to continuous monitoring.

During a subsequent discussion the Deputy Principal referred to a challenge that had been reported at the previous meeting whereby there had been an expectation that the College would lead on intervention plans. She advised that this continued despite instances where social services were key partners and likely to be better placed to co-ordinate delivery of the overall action plan.

Resolved: The Committee **noted** the contents of the report.

5.2 **Safeguarding Link Governor Update**
Tom McInerney presented this update in his capacity as Safeguarding Link Governor. He confirmed that a recent meeting had taken place with the Deputy Principal (Curriculum) and highlighted the following aspects:
- The number of safeguarding and wellbeing referrals continued to rise.
- Despite some cases being both challenging and complex, staff were working extremely hard to support identified learners alongside partner agencies such as the police and social services.
- Suicide rates and ideation were very concerning.
- As evidenced in the 'Have Your Say' student survey 99.9% of learners reported they felt safe in College.

In conclusion, the Safeguarding Link Governor commended the tremendous work being undertaken by the College in supporting vulnerable students.

Resolved: The Committee **noted** the contents of the report.

6. **CURRICULUM MATTERS**
6.1 **Governance Update – Accountability Agreements and Local Skills Duty** *(previously circulated)*
The Clerk referred to the updated guidance which was published by the Department for Education (DfE) in December 2023 and highlighted the following key areas:
- The Accountability Agreement focused on the College's offer in the year ahead and how it intended to support local, regional and national needs. The annual statement was to be informed by the College's longer term strategic plans and the outcomes from the Local Needs Duty.
- The DfE had removed the need for colleges to publish two separate documents and a single return was required to fulfil both requirements.

- The College's Accountability Statement had to be submitted by 30th June 2024 and must be approved by the Board. This was an essential stage in respect of the release of funding.
- There was a requirement for the College to publish its Accountability Statement including the outcomes of the Local Needs Duty on the College website by 1st December 2024.

Resolved: the Committee **noted** the contents of the report and updated guidance.

6.2 **To receive a monitoring report on curriculum performance**
The Deputy Principal provided an update to the Committee consisting of key performance indicators (KPIs), curriculum priorities and recruitment to date in respect of the current academic year. The following key aspects were highlighted with anonymised data, where applicable:

16-18 Cohort
- Overall attendance was recorded at 89% which was an increase of 1% compared to this point in time in 2022/2023. Lower attendance levels within the Entry Level, Level 1 and Level 2 programmes were a cause for concern. An emerging issue had been identified regarding students who had previously studied with an alternative provider, whereby attendance levels remained a cause for concern though had substantially improved compared to patterns throughout their secondary education.
- Overall retention was recorded at 94.8%, which was an increase of 1.6% compared to 2023/2023 at this point in time.
- Retention by Curriculum Area – all had increased with
- the exception of Business Development.
- Curriculum Planning and Reforms – preparation relating to the curriculum offer for 2024/2025 had commenced. The offer was broadly the same as the current academic year, though national changes to the Level 3 reform had started to impact the College's offer, such as Digital Built Environment becoming a T Level qualification.
- Maths and English Update – results from the resits were impressive with 90 learners achieving grade 4 or above. An overview was provided regarding the Government's introduction of 'the conditions of funding for Maths and English learners' with plans to impose a minimum weekly teaching time of three hours per week for English and four hours for Maths.
- Enrolment – the College had received in excess of 400 applications compared to data in 2023/2024 and therefore the application process had been closed. Interview evenings were taking place to meet with all applicants. Growth in student numbers appeared to be evenly split between Kingsway and Cronton campuses.

Adults
- Overall 19+ full time attendance was recorded at 85% which was a decrease of 2% compared to the previous academic year at this point in time. Overall 19+ part time attendance was 88%.
- Overall retention on full time courses was recorded at 97.5% which was an increase of 1.2% compared to the previous academic year. Retention on part time courses was 98%.

<u>Higher Education (HE)</u>
- Outstanding / Good Practice – HE attendance was 90% and retention had increased by 1%. A successful annual review with Staffordshire University to had taken place and the partnership continued. Very positive 'Have Your Say' student survey results. No areas of concern had been identified.

<u>Learners with High Needs and Special Educational Needs (SEND)</u>
Key highlights from the report included:
- In 2023/2024 the College had 157 high needs funded students against 144 places (plus an additional 10 places for subcontractors, Power in Partnership). A total of 186 students had an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) across the three campuses.
- Two additional staff (1.6FTE) had been recruited to implement EHCP processes cross college, together with a specialist teacher.

<u>Apprenticeships</u>
- 207 new apprentices had been enrolled in this academic year to date, compared to 175 in the whole of 2022/2023.
- Overall retention levels were positive and an improvement on the previous year.
- The College was one of thirteen colleges awarded the status of being an 'expert training provider.'
- The enrolment process for apprentices remained overly complex and time-consuming for both the College and the employer. As an expert training provider the College was hopeful that by working directly with the DfE it could influence positive changes to processes in order to reduce the administrative burden.

<u>Skills and the Accountability Agreement</u>
- Impact on the curriculum was of primary importance
- Identification of key stakeholders across all areas of provision within categories of (i) civil, (ii) employers, (iii) education and (iv) community
- Examples of the breadth of engagement across the curriculum and evidence of instances where the curriculum had been changed in response to local skills needs following collaboration with employers; referred to as 'gem reports'

An in-depth discussion took place and clarification provided regarding the content of gem reports and fulfilling the Board's requirements as published in the statutory guidance, as addressed within the preceding agenda item. It was agreed that the Deputy Principal was to record a podcast on stakeholder engagement and the duty to review required by the Board.

Resolved: the Committee
- **Noted** the contents of the report
- **Agreed** for a podcast to be recorded for onward circulation to all Board members in connection with stakeholder engagement and the 'duty to review.'

6.3 **In-Year Retention Data** *(previously circulated)*
The Assistant Principal delivered a presentation which focused on current retention levels, trends and in-year predictions. The following aspects were highlighted:
- The spikes and reasons for withdrawals throughout the academic year

- 2023/2024 – based upon the reduction in withdrawals during Term 1, the data indicated that a greater number of students were on the right course supporting quality advice and guidance.
- Point in time comparisons indicated that retention was stronger in the current academic year for two-year programmes.
- All key performance indicators suggested improved outcomes in respect of retention.

During discussions a Governor queried the drop in 19+ attendance levels. In response, it was confirmed that there was a higher withdrawal rate on courses where learners had enrolled on free courses. The Assistant Principal advised that the College had recently overcome some previous challenges with the successful recruitment of English and Maths teachers and staffing was currently strong in these curriculum areas.

In summary, the detailed analysis indicated that retention rates had improved in the current academic year, compared to data at this point in time in 2022/2023.

Resolved: The Committee **noted** the contents of the report.

7.   LEARNER VOICE – HAVE YOUR SAY STUDENT SURVEY *(previously circulated)*
The Assistant Principal presented and highlighted the following aspects from his summary report:
- Overall there were positive outcomes and improvements compared to 2022/2023 across all programme types
- Very high completion rate
- A very high proportion of students felt safe in College, as reported by the Safeguarding Link Governor at agenda item 5.2
- Compared to 2022/2023 there had been a 2.3% increase in those students who reported they received regular and supportive feedback from teachers

A discussion took place. A Student Governor confirmed that survey participation was actively promoted across the College. The Committee received assurance that any negative comments had been followed up by the Senior Management Team (SMT) and an action plan had been formulated to address any low satisfaction rates.

Resolved: The Committee **noted** the contents of the report.

8.   QUALITY ASSURANCE
8.1   **To receive a report on curriculum areas subject to closer monitoring** *(previously circulated)*
The Assistant Principal advised the Committee that five curriculum areas were subject to close monitoring by SMT in 2023/2024 and a further two were subject to a 'special measures' level of monitoring. Out of the seven curriculum areas, progress was evident in all of them, albeit at varying levels and pace. The Committee was advised of the action plan to ensure all curriculum areas made timely progress. The plan included recruitment of Functional Skills Tutors. In response to a question raised, the Assistant Principal advised of instances where there had been challenges in the recruitment and retention of suitably skilled staff which remained a national challenge.

Resolved: The Committee **noted** the contents of the report.

8.2 **Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Link Governor Report** *(previously circulated)*

Michele Bacon presented this update in her capacity as SEND Link Governor. She confirmed that a meeting had taken place on 7th February 2024 with the Deputy Principal (Curriculum) and the Head of Foundation Studies & Learning Support. A summary of the outcomes was presented relating to:

- The College's accessibility plan
- Data relating to EHCPs and High Needs
- Quality improvement objectives and targets
- Quality First Teaching
- Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) and the measurable impact in the Foundation Studies department

Resolved: The Committee **noted** the report.

9. **EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION (EDI) ANNUAL REPORT RELATING TO STUDENTS** *(previously circulated)*

The Deputy Principal (Curriculum) presented this report which related to the EDI measures for the College against retention and attendance data in respect of:

- Age
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Widening participation and bursary
- Learners with high needs and/or an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP)
- Learning difficulty or disability
- Vulnerable learner characteristics

The analysis demonstrated that as retention had improved across the College, this had also impacted positively across the full range of the protected characteristics. Attendance had also improved across the College which had a similar effect, with the exception of attendance in respect of two categories, namely SEND and Learning difficulty/disability. Further scrutiny has shown that lower levels in these two areas were localised across Entry and Level 1 learners.

The Committee was advised that all staff had the opportunity to attend transgender training as part of the staff Health and Wellbeing day on 21st November 2023.

Resolved: the Committee **noted** the report.

10. **POLICIES** *(previously circulated)*
10.1 **Learner Involvement Policy**

The Committee considered the proposed amendments to the Learner Involvement Policy.

Resolved: The Committee **recommended approval** of the Learner Involvement Policy to the Board subject to the following amendment at paragraph 3.1.3 to read 'Feedback from complaints will be used to ***inform*** the student and stakeholder experience.'

11. **FE SECTOR UPDATES** *(previously circulated)*

The Chair provided an update from the Quality and Standards Committee Chairs' Network meeting which was held online on 5th February 2024 and hosted by the Association of Colleges (AoC). She highlighted the following aspects:
- Curriculum reform and potential challenges
- GCSE English and Maths resits and increased teaching times – impact on SEND learners
- National challenges regarding retention on two-year programmes
- Quality processes – triangulation to ensure accuracy and effectiveness
- Promotion of the learner voice

Resolved: the Committee **noted** the report.

12.   ITEMS TO BE REPORTED TO THE BOARD

Resolved – in addition to a summary report the following items were to be presented to the Board at its next meeting on 18th March 2024:
- Safeguarding Update
- Apprenticeships Update
- Student Attendance and Retention
- 'Have Your Say' Student Survey

16.   DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS
Resolved - The Committee **noted** the following meeting dates:
- Board – 18th March 2024 at 4.30pm
- Quality and Standards Committee – 18th June 2024 at 4.30pm

The meeting was closed with the Chair thanking all attendees for their participation.

Signed: …Office Copy signed by Michele Bacon…………………………….

Chair of Quality and Standards Committee

Date: …18th June 2024……………………………………………………………