

**MINUTES OF QUALITY & STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 21ST
JUNE 2022 AT THE KINGSWAY CAMPUS**

Present:	Michele Bacon	External Governor (Chair)
	Karen Banks	External Governor
	Jayne Edwards	External Governor
	Tom McInerney	External Governor
	Ryan Turner	Staff Governor
	Molly Whittle	Student Governor
In attendance:	Thalia Bell	Deputy Principal (Curriculum)
	Alan Brown	Assistant Principal (Quality)
	Sarah Le-Good	Interim Head of Foundation Studies (minutes 127 to 130) – attended remotely
	Jayne Smith	Head of Skills & Enterprise (minutes 115 to 126)
	Lesley Venables	Clerk to the Governors

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

115 There were no apologies for absence.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

116 A declaration of interest was received from Ryan Turner in respect of any matters relating to the College's higher education provision.

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 8TH MARCH 2022

117 **Resolved** - That the minutes of the meeting held on 8th March 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

MATTERS ARISING

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

PRESENTATION – SKILLS & ENTERPRISE

119 The Head of Skills & Enterprise gave a presentation on how this area responded to local, regional and national priorities and the needs of learners and employers. Governors received information on the type of provision covered by the department (including apprenticeships) and details as to how the College was working extensively with local employers to meet current and future skills gaps.

120 Sourcing and implementing work experience opportunities for students was particularly challenging, especially given the number of other competing initiatives that required input from employers. This issue would be highlighted even more once T Levels were introduced more widely in the further education sector.

121 In response to a question about the impact of the longer work placements involved in courses such as T Levels the Deputy Principal reported that some students had opted to become apprentices gaining full-time employment prior to the end of their programme of study. This was exacerbated by the demographic in which the College operated with many families needing the additional income. The Government intended to closely align T Levels and apprenticeships, which meant that, for learners who are potentially disadvantaged, the apprenticeship route would be more appealing. However, the current national debate about de-funding some Level 3 qualifications may mean that some potential students would not be able to gain access to previously accessible courses as a route to university and employment, which was felt to be inequitable.

122 A governor asked how the College encouraged employers to take on apprentices once their courses were completed and was advised that the conversion rate was approximately 90%. Employers highly valued the skills that apprentices gained from studying at the College and staff worked with companies to ensure that both parties benefitted from the experience. The market for apprentices was extremely competitive at the moment and candidates often had a choice of opportunities to pursue.

123 Governors were reminded of the sub-contracting relationships in place with a small number of local training providers. These delivered courses to hard to reach groups and provided progression routes to higher level programmes.

124 The College was a key participant in the Net Zero Northern Alliance, a partnership of further and higher education institutions, the aim of which was to co-ordinate carbon reduction courses. Staff were also working with key employers, such as the Rocksavage hydrogen generation plant, to deliver alternative energy sources and ensure that the current and future workforce were suitably trained in these technologies.

125 The Head of Skills & Enterprise reported that the College was involved in the development of the Local Skills Improvement Plan and was meeting the Skills Agenda requirements set out in the recent Skills & Post-16 Education Act 2022. Ofsted's focus in future inspections would also assess the ways in which colleges were meeting the skills agenda, the breadth of employer engagement and its impact on the curriculum.

126 A governor asked about the level of feedback from employers in relation to College programmes. The Head of Skills & Enterprise reported that, pre-COVID-19, a series of focus groups had been held to obtain comments from employers and that these would be re-introduced for certain sectors. A survey had been issued to the firms with which the College worked and feedback was also obtained through staff on-site visits.

PRESENTATION – EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

127 The newly-appointed interim Head of Foundation Studies provided a presentation on the work she was undertaking with staff on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

128 The College was in the process of creating a specialist offer in Foundation Studies to provide a personalised curriculum experience that met individual aspirations and enabled

progression to meaningful adult lives and, where possible, employment. The first stage was an assessment of staff confidence levels which had taken place in early May, which had highlighted a number of areas for improvement.

129 Areas of concern focused on using appropriate language, maximising opportunities to promote EDI and Cultural Wealth within the curriculum and using “lived experiences”. A governor questions what key performance indicators could be used for the Committee to monitor progress and was advised that these would be developed once the curriculum review had been completed.

130 It was felt that governors would also benefit from EDI training, including an element on unconscious bias and this would be built into the programme of events for 2022/2023. Resources on items such as the “social model” of inclusion would be shared with governors as appropriate to improve their own knowledge in this area.

CURRICULUM REPORT

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

132 Applications for 16-18s for 2022/2023 were down slightly overall, particularly for A Level courses, possibly as a result of inflated teacher assessed grades used during the pandemic. In-Borough figures had continued to increase and these usually had a higher conversion rate to actual enrolments, however, the number of out of Borough applicants had decreased slightly compared to 2021/2022. Adult applications had also decreased compared to 2021/2022, with the most significant fall in Access programmes; however, HE applications showed an improved position. A governor queried whether the situation on applications was due to the buoyant employment market and was advised that this was partly the reason, together with the lack of flexibility on new Level 3 programmes which prevented some students from having part-time jobs whilst studying.

133 Achievement of the targets for the Adult Education Budget (AEB) continued to be challenging. However the College had already met its LRC target, including an additional 100K in year growth request. ESFA-funded AEB was projected to meet the target.

134 The number of apprenticeship starts had increased significantly compared to the national average and was currently 232 (214 at the same point in 2020/2021). This was across all curriculum areas, with high levels of growth in Construction, Engineering and Health & Social Care. Achievement rates (overall and timely) had fallen slightly due to the impact of COVID-19 which had caused some delays in completing end-point assessments.

135 In response to a question about meeting the needs of employers the Deputy Principal reported that staffing in some areas and the high level of space utilisation were causing some concerns. A small number of posts had been advertised several times (such as Brickwork and Electrical Engineering) and the College was in the process of training suitable applicants and attracting staff with recent industrial experience. This position seemed to be replicated nationally within the further education sector.

136 Retention on higher education courses had increased by 2% since 2020/2021 (96%) and overall attendance was 89%. Applications for 2022/2023 were 271, an increase of 29 compared to the same time last year.

137 A significant amount of new curriculum developments were had been created and would be implemented over the next couple of years, including 4 new T Levels and Test & Learn courses in green technologies. However, it was noted that T Levels could not be used for adult students and that the regulations for the AEB funding stream were becoming more complex each year. Loans would be required for Level 3 qualifications in the future, which may prove prohibitive for some learners. The College was continuing to raise these concerns with Government through the Association of Colleges.

138 The Committee was advised of the Department for Education's proposals to de-fund a number of Level 3 programmes currently offered by the further education sector, which could disadvantage some students.

139 A total of £8m had been allocated for degree level apprenticeships and governors asked about the impact of this initiative on further education courses. The Deputy Principal responded that there was some overlap with existing qualifications but that this was also considered a good opportunity to provide progression routes to higher education and to forge more sustainable partnerships with universities.

140 The Committee asked about the financial impact of the proposed de-funding of Level 3 qualifications compared to HNC/HNDs, but was advised that it was difficult to make a true comparison due to the substantial differences in bandings and, therefore, funding between qualifications. Management felt that it was likely that A Level applications would continue to increase in the future and that a hybrid course made up of A Level and BTec elements could provide a solution for other students.

141 In response to a question on the possible re-classification of FE colleges by the National Statistics Office as public sector organisations the Deputy Principal commented that this would provide Government with greater control of colleges and was intended to minimise the number of colleges entering formal intervention in the future. The Clerk added that the proposal could have serious implications for the independence of FE corporations and their powers.

COMPLAINTS 2021/2022

142 The Assistant Principal presented a report on complaints in 2021/2022. The College had received a total of 22 complaints and concerns, only one of which remained open, and 5 compliments. It was agreed that some of the comments in the compliments would be shared with the Committee at its next meeting.

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

143 The Committee received a report on Equality, Diversity & Inclusion for 2021/2022. 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.

144 The gap in retention between students from Widening Participation (WP) and non-WP postcodes had decreased slightly for 16-18s from 91.8 % in 2020/2021 to 91.6% and had increased by 0.4% for 19+ students to 92.4%.

145 Retention for learners receiving Additional Learning Support had improved for both age groups from 93.3% to 95.5%, with a 0.8% increase for learners not accessing ALS. For those learners with a disability or difficulty there had been a slight improvement in retention (0.4%) for 16-19s and a higher increase for 19+ (3.1%). In response to questions about this outcome governors were informed that the COVID-19 Catch-up Fund had supported learners to higher levels of achievement and retention and that student needs had been identified earlier in the academic year.

146 As outlined under an earlier agenda item the College was committed to creating a specialist offer in Foundation Studies, matching personalised curriculum experiences with individual aspirations, and enabling students to progress to meaningful adult lives and to employment, where possible. The first stage of this strategy was a confidence assessment of staff in this area, in early May 22. A governor asked how the results would be disseminated and was advised that an action plan would be developed, which would be presented for information to the Committee's November meeting.

147 The Committee felt that it would be useful for governors to receive information as to how the College would fulfil its ambition to be sector-leading in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). The Deputy Principal commented that the new Interim Head of Foundation Studies had already made a significant impact and that there was a healthy level of challenge amongst staff. The team had welcomed having a SEND specialist in place.

148 Areas of concern on EDI included inclusion and language, culture capital lived experiences, the continuing impact of COVID-19 and the potential changes to be implemented as a result of the Government's SEND Green Paper. All of these items would be addressed as part of the review of Foundation Studies/EDI.

SAFEGUARDING

149 Governors received for information a report on Safeguarding for 2021/2022. It was noted that there had been 981 health and well-being referrals, 425 of which had met the safeguarding threshold. This represented a significant increase in the number and complexity of cases being dealt with by staff. It was noted that there had been a particular focus on sexual violence/sexual harassment during the year, which would continue in 2022/2023. The Committee also commented on the scale of suicide ideation incidents and commended the staff for their work in this area.

150 The College was currently recruiting two mental health workers, which should make a positive impact on the level of support available for students, however, the market for such staff was highly competitive.

151 Governors were advised that the one Prevent incident involving a former student had now been concluded and the College had been praised by the Police for the way in which the case had been handled by the Head of Programme Management and her team.

152 A recent safeguarding audit by the College's Internal Auditors (ICCA) had graded the College's provision as providing a 'substantial' level of assurance and had resulted in no recommendations for further improvement.

QUALITY UPDATE

153 Governors received a summary of the curriculum areas currently in the College's internal 'Close Monitoring' process. Future reports would include the number of students in each curriculum area.

154 The Committee received information on the outcomes of recent whole College Student Feedback Survey (February to April 2022) and noted that there had been a total of 1,684 responses. Satisfaction levels were high for questions on the quality of teaching and assessment (92.9%) and on recommending the College to another person (92.5%). A total of 98.1% of students said they felt safe in the College

155 The Assistant Principal advised that approximately 25% of students had indicated that they did not feel suitably prepared for their examinations. Further analysis of this outcome had shown that this was due to their own study habits rather than the College's support mechanisms and this was substantiated by comments from the student governor.

POLICIES

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

- Equality & Diversity
- Student Disciplinary
- Complaints
- Higher Education Bursary

ITEMS TO BE REPORTED TO THE BOARD

157 The Committee identified a series of points that the Chair would report back to the July 2022 Board meeting:

- Presentations on Skills & Enterprise and Foundation Studies/EDI
- Comprehensive Curriculum Report, which indicated improvements in student outcomes
- Reports received on Safeguarding and Equality & Diversity issues
- Details of outcomes of student surveys received for information
- Policies recommended for approval by the Board

MEMBERSHIP ISSUES

158 As this was her final Committee meeting, the Chair thanked Molly Whittle for her contribution during 2021/2022.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

29th November 2022 5.00 p.m.

Signed: Office copy signed by Michele Bacon (Chair)
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Chair of Quality & Standards Committee

Date: 29th November 2022
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