

MINUTES OF THE QUALITY & STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 11TH MARCH 2025 AT 4.30PM AT KINGSWAY CAMPUS

Present:	Michele Bacon	External Governor
	Millie Hargate	Student Governor
	Councillor Tom McInerney	External Governor
	Steph Power	Staff Governor
	Sarah Worsley	Student Governor

In Attendance:	Ben Barton	Vice Principal (Head of Centre, Riverside)
	Alan Brown	Deputy Principal (Curriculum & Quality)
	Donna Elston	Head of Student Services
	Ged Hanley	Assistant Principal (Systems Development & Funding)
	Andy James	Assistant Principal (Curriculum, Riverside)
	Kendra Kirby	Interim Head of Foundation Studies
	Catherine Shaw	Head of Governance

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received and accepted for Karen Banks (External Governor). The Head of Governance had been notified that Katie Anderson (External Governor) would be late arriving to due to traffic congestion.

2. **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

Interests were declared and **noted** as follows:

- Michele Bacon - agenda item 5.1, as recorded in the register of interests
- Millie Hargate – agenda item 7.1
- Sarah Worsley – agenda items 5.3 and 7.1

3. **MINUTES** (*previously circulated*)

3.1 **To approve the minutes of the previous meeting held on 26th November 2024**

The Committee reviewed the minutes from the previous meeting.

Resolved - The minutes of the meeting held on 26th November 2024 were **approved** as a correct record.

3.2 **To review the action log and to consider any matters arising from the minutes** (*previously circulated*)

All action points had been completed and there were no matters arising from the minutes that did not feature on the agenda.

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

4. CURRICULUM PRESENTATION

- 4.1 Kendra Kirby, Interim Head of Foundation Studies (FS), delivered a presentation on the provision of Foundation Studies at the College. She focused on five key areas, namely (i) raising the profile of FS, (ii) the quality of teaching, learning and assessment (TLA), (iii) improved facilities within the learning environment, (iv) team support and (v) next steps.

A discussion took place with a focus on the recent development review that had been undertaken to inform the quality of teaching, learning and assessment standards. This had provided a firm evidence base and whilst it presented high challenge, it also provided a valuable collaborative and empowering opportunity for the FS team.

In conclusion, several Governors advised that they had either recently visited the FS Department at the CRMZ site or had spoken to learners' parents at College events, with Governors reporting positively of their experiences.

Resolved: The Committee

- **noted** the contents of the presentation
- **requested** that the slide deck be shared with all Board members
- **requested** that their thanks be conveyed to the staff and students in the FS Department for their continued hard work in driving forward improvement

The Interim Head of Foundation Studies was thanked for her very informative presentation and she left the meeting.

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

This agenda item was linked with the preceding item at 4.1

Resolved: the Committee **noted** the contents of the report following the visit made by Michele Bacon, SEND Link Governor.

Donna Elston, Head of Student Services joined the meeting.

5. STUDENT SUPPORT

- 5.1 **Safeguarding** (*previously circulated*)

The Head of Student Services presented a report on safeguarding issues and drew the Committee's attention to the following key aspects:

- There had been a further significant increase in safeguarding cases. Areas of most concern included suicide ideation/attempts, domestic abuse, neglect and sexual abuse
- Increased involvement in multi-agency meetings with participation at 19 strategy meetings that had taken place to date in this academic year
- The College had received an increased number of referrals from the police in respect of Operation Encompass notifications
- The increased reports of ketamine use in the borough was concerning and the College was working closely with the Local Authority in its attempts to support young people with substance misuse.

Governors expressed concern regarding the escalating number and complexity of open cases. In response to a question raised, the Head of Student Services provided an

update regarding the prevalence of students with known eating disorders and the support provided. During the discussion a Governor enquired about the level of information provided by schools to the college throughout the transition process. The Head of Student Services advised that this varied considerably. Where very little or no information was provided, this delayed support being made available for the learner. The College continued to work with schools on the importance of concise, relevant information being shared upon transition to College where additional support had previously been identified.

Resolved: The Committee **noted** the contents of the report and commended the team for their continued hard work in supporting vulnerable learners.

5.2 **Safeguarding Link Governor Update**

Cllr Tom McNerney (Safeguarding Link Governor) commended the College in its safeguarding practices and the support provided to disadvantaged learners. In addition to the preceding agenda item, he advised that the College had worked successfully with partner agencies to develop a Young Women's Group in Halton over a course of eight weeks. Based on their experiences the aim was to enable the young women to have an input on the types of support services that would assist them.

Resolved: The Committee **noted** the contents of the report provided by Cllr Tom McNerney, Safeguarding Link Governor.

5.3 **Student Wellbeing and Enrichment** *(previously circulated)*

The Head of Student Services informed Governors' that the College continued to prioritise student wellbeing in developing its enrichment activity programme. She drew the Committee's attention to:

- Mental Health and Safety Initiatives – local and national issues were addressed with the support of guest speakers and topics had included (i) healthy relationships and (ii) 'Think Drive'
- Counselling Service Pilot - two placement counsellors (College students) were providing a beneficial service across Riverside and Cronton campuses for a small number of students who had previously been triaged by the Wellbeing Team

A Governor asked whether student wellbeing concerns were greater at Cronton than Riverside. In response, the Head of Student Services provided an overview for comparison purposes. In respect of Cronton, she highlighted (i) reporting of low level anxiety related issues, (ii) larger class sizes and intensity of some study programmes, (iii) increased number of students diagnosed with autism requiring additional support and (iv) an increasing number of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHP). The Head of Student Services confirmed that the College had partnership links with specialist schools to share best practice and strategies used to help students with complex needs.

In response to a question raised by a Governor, the Head of Student Services informed the Committee of the range of enrichment activities offered to HE students at the College. Throughout the discussion, it was agreed and accepted by the College Management Team (CMT) to further promote the activities on offer to this cohort of students.

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

5.4 **Bursary** *(previously circulated)*

The Head of Student Services presented a report on the College bursary. She advised that 1208 applications had been assessed in the current academic year to date.

Unfortunately a substantial number had been declined, due to insufficient evidence being provided to support the application, as per the guidelines. The Head of Student Services confirmed that assistance continued to be provided to learners and/or parents where there was any confusion regarding the types of evidence that were required to support bursary applications. She also highlighted the following from her report:

- There had been a reduction in the number of adult students accessing bursary due to withdrawing from their courses
- New guidance for 2025/2026 had been introduced which included changes to the 'care to learn' process. Any implications arising from the revised guidance were currently being explored

A Governor asked whether the bursary could be used to pay student transport costs where travel was not free. It was confirmed that subject to the student being eligible for bursary, it could be used for these purposes.

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

The Head of Student Services was thanked for her reports and she left the meeting.

6. **CURRICULUM AND FUNDING**

6.1 **Annual Accountability Agreements and the Local Skills Duty** *(previously circulated)*

The Committee considered the Board's responsibilities regarding its three yearly 'duty to review' in compliance with the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022.

A discussion took place regarding the potential ways in which the Board's responsibilities could be effectively discharged.

Resolved: The Committee **recommended approval to the Board** for a Working Group to be established which would consist of a selection of cross-committee members and senior managers to undertake the review for onward reporting to the Board.

6.2 **Accountability Agreement 2025/2026** *(previously circulated)*

The Deputy Principal (C&Q) advised that was currently in draft format and was to be presented at the next committee meeting for scrutiny and subsequent recommendation for Board approval. The Committee was informed that the submission date to the Department for Education (DfE) was 30th June 2025.

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

7. **QUALITY ASSURANCE**

7.1 **Learner Voice** *(previously circulated)*

The Deputy Principal (C&Q) informed the Committee that the outcomes from the 'Have Your Say' student survey had been analysed and highlighted the following findings:

- 3228 students responded to the survey, against a target of 2500
- Almost all satisfaction levels had improved compared to the survey results in 2023/2024

- Most notably there had been a 2.6% increase in the number of students who agreed that 'should they have a problem, there was a staff member they could talk to'
- Vocational and Adult Programmes - whilst the result remained strong, SMT was focusing on the reduced satisfaction levels relating to exam and external assessment preparation
- Any negative comments were to be followed up by SMT

Several questions were raised by Governors and responded to by the SMT. Additional information was sought and provided relating to (i) the minority of areas where there was an adverse differential compared to the previous survey results, (ii) any emerging trends and (iii) any EDI-related issues.

Resolved: The Committee

- **noted** the contents of the report
- **agreed** for future learner voice reports to incorporate key elements of discussions at Student Representative meetings

7.2 **Curriculum areas subject to the College's special measures and closer monitoring processes** *(previously circulated)*

In summary the Deputy Principal (C&Q) informed the Committee that progress continued to be evidenced in the minority of curriculum areas that were subject to the College's special measures and closer monitoring processes, albeit at varying levels. The Deputy Principal provided an overview of the improvements that had been made relating to individual curriculum areas and also informed Governors where the pace of improvement remained a concern and actions to be taken. In one area the Committee was advised of some staffing issues regarding individual personal circumstances unrelated to work, whereby cover was being provided.

Resolved: The Committee:

- **noted** the contents of the report
- **agreed** to continue to monitor FS progress via the Development Review Action Plan

7.3 **Complaints and Compliments** *(previously circulated)*

In relation to official complaints received the Committee was informed of (i) the number received, (ii) nature, and (iii) the outcomes. In his summary, the Deputy Principal (C&Q) advised that there had been a slight increase in the number of concerns raised compared to the previous year, though to date these had not escalated to official complaints.

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

8. **MONITORING OF KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs)**

8.1 **Attendance and Retention** *(previously circulated)*

The Deputy Principal (C&Q) referred to the headline data contained within the report and provided a summary as follows:

- 19+ - KPIs were lower than expected, though no quality issues had been identified. Enrolment took place all year round and continued to be closely monitored

- HE – retention was very high compared to the sector average
- Overall attendance – this had increased by 2% in-year and currently stood at 90%
- Overall retention – to date this has improved in most areas compared to the previous year, including apprenticeships. HE Access courses and a minority of A Level areas were being closely monitored

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

8.2 **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)** *(previously circulated)*

Within his report, the Assistant Principal (Curriculum, Riverside) advised the Committee that the purpose of the report was to inform Governors of the current in-year retention data as a key performance indicator for equality, diversity and inclusion over three academic years. He highlighted the following aspects from the report:

- Gender – overall female students had a 0.42% lower retention rate than male students
- Widening Participation (WP) – retention was 2.5% lower than non-WP students which identified a narrowing trend
- Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) – the gap in retention rate had narrowed to 1.44% with BME students having a higher retention rate
- High Needs Funding (HNF) – Retention rates for students receiving High Needs funding was 0.4% higher than those that were not HNF
- Children Looked After (CLA) – retention rate was 5.2 % lower than those that were not CLA and reasons provided
- Young Carers (YC) – the College had seen an increase in the number of young carers. In-year retention was currently 3.6% higher for YCs

In conclusion the Assistant Principal assured the Committee that SMT continued to conduct frequent assessments to monitor the progress and address any emerging trends.

During the discussion a Governor suggested that student suspension/exclusion data be Included in future KPI reports, where relevant.

Resolved: The Committee

- **noted** the contents of the report
- **agreed** for future KPI reports to include data relating to student suspensions and exclusions

9. **FE SECTOR UPDATES**

Changes to the Education Inspection Framework (Ofsted) and update on the national Curriculum Pause & Review process

The Deputy Principal (C&Q) presented updates on (i) the Pause and Review process and (ii) the proposed new Ofsted scorecard.

It was noted that the detailed outcomes from the Pause and Review process would be included in the overarching 'Curriculum Reform' presentation which was scheduled for delivery at the next Quality & Standards Committee meeting. The Committee was advised that a consultation process was open until 28th April 2025 in relation to the proposed changes to the Ofsted inspection framework.

Resolved: The Committee

- **noted** the contents of the presentation
- **requested** that the slide deck be shared with all Board members

10. POLICIES

10.1 Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults (*previously circulated*)

The Committee considered the relatively minor amendments suggested to this policy to include references in the introduction to (i) the Care Act 2014 and (ii) Voyeurism (Offences) Act 2019.

Resolved: The Committee **recommended approval** of the Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Policy to the Board.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None

12. ITEMS TO BE REPORTED TO THE BOARD

Resolved – the Committee approved for the following items to be presented to the Board at its next meeting on 24th March 2025:

- Safeguarding Update and the Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Policy
- Overview of the Foundation Studies curriculum presentation
- The ‘Duty to Review’ in connection with the Accountability Agreement

13. MEETING REVIEW

In accordance with the approved action plan resulting from the external board review in 2023/2024 Committee Members were asked to review the effectiveness of the meeting with any comments to be forwarded directly to the Head of Governance by 18th March 2025.

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

14. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Resolved - The Committee **noted** the next meeting as follows:

- Quality and Standards Committee – 17th June 2025

The meeting was closed at 6.45pm with the Chair thanking all attendees for their participation.

Signed: Office copy signed by Michele Bacon

Chair of Quality and Standards Committee

Date: 25th June 2025