

MINUTES OF THE QUALITY & STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 26TH NOVEMBER 2024 AT 4.30PM AT KINGSWAY CAMPUS

Present:	Katie Anderson	External Governor
	Michele Bacon	External Governor
	Karen Banks	External Governor
	David Copeland	Staff Governor
	Millie Hargate	Student Governor
	Councillor Tom McInerney	External 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 - <i>Agenda Item 6</i>
	Simon Ellershaw	Head of Digital Learning - <i>Agenda Item 5</i>
	Ged Hanley	Assistant Principal (Systems Development & Funding)
	Andy James	Assistant Principal (Curriculum, Riverside)
	Catherine Shaw	Clerk to Governors

The Clerk welcomed all attendees to the meeting and extended a warm welcome to the new Student Governor and members of the wider Senior Management Team (SMT).

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies as all members were present and the meeting was quorate. The Clerk advised that Stephen Parkinson (newly appointed co-opted member) had stood down for the duration of his temporary contract of employment at the College which had been entered into subsequent to his appointment.

2. **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

Michele Bacon declared an interest in agenda item 6, as recorded in the register of interests.

3. **APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR 2024/2025**

Michele Bacon was appointed as Committee Chair in accordance with procedure.

Michele Bacon took the Chair

4. **MINUTES** (*previously circulated*)

4.1 **To approve the minutes of the previous meeting held on 18th June 2024**

The Committee reviewed the minutes from the previous meeting.

Resolved - The minutes of the meeting held on 18th June 2024 were **approved** as a correct record.

4.2 **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.

5. CURRICULUM PRESENTATION

Simon Ellershaw, Head of Digital Learning delivered a presentation on 'Artificial Intelligence (AI) College Strategy.' He highlighted the following aspects within his presentation:

- The meaning, various types and examples of AI
- The College response in terms of its strategy; including training, staff and student usage
- Use of specific software, such as Teachermatic and Co-Pilot
- Ways in which AI can support Governors

The advantages and disadvantages of AI were discussed with a particular focus on risk management, in terms of safety, data security and potential plagiarism. Numerous questions were asked and responded to. Members of the SMT provided examples of how it was being integrated into working practices and the benefits in reducing many administrative tasks. Discussions concluded with a consensus that it would be beneficial for a training session to be offered to all Board members, given the high-profile nature of AI and the rapid pace at which it was evolving.

Resolved: The Committee

- (i) **noted** the contents of the presentation
- (ii) **requested** that the slide deck be uploaded to GovernorHub for all Board Members to access
- (iii) **requested** for the Clerk to liaise with the Deputy Principal (C&Q) and Head of Digital Learning in facilitating an AI training session for Board Members

The Head of Digital Learning was thanked for his informative presentation and he left the meeting.

Donna Elston, Head of Student Services joined the meeting.

6. STUDENT SUPPORT

6.1 **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:

- The RAG-rated College action plan with assurance that this was subject to continuous monitoring
- Open cases stood at 429 which represented a considerable increase from the previous year
- Areas of concern included the extent of suicide ideation/attempts, domestic abuse, neglect and sexual abuse

Governors expressed concern in the escalating and serious number of open cases and received assurance that support was available to staff dealing with some very distressing matters. The Head of Student Services responded to questions raised regarding the impact that the increasing workload had on staff, together with some adaptations which had been implemented resulting in 'smarter' working practices.

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

6.2 **Bursary** (*previously circulated*)

The Head of Student Services presented a report on the College bursary. She advised that the increased income thresholds had helped in assisting a greater number of disadvantaged students to access bursary funds to support their learning. It was reported that financial assessments were conducted based on personal circumstances and course requirements prior to entering into support agreements. In the last academic year 1125 applications were assessed, however many had been declined due to insufficient supporting evidence being provided, as per the guidelines.

In response to several questions raised, the Head of Student Services advised the Committee that those students who didn't have access to a laptop and/or wi-fi were provided with access to both by the College to ensure their studies were not impeded. Governors were also assured that assistance was provided to learners and/or parents where there was any confusion regarding the types of evidence that were required to support the application.

Resolved: The Committee

- (i) **noted** the contents of the report
- (ii) **requested** a further bursary report in-year

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

The Head of Student Services informed Governors' that the College prioritised student wellbeing in developing its enrichment activity programme and gathered feedback to ensure learners' needs were being met. She provided an overview of the various activities on offer and also some wider initiatives such as:

- Mental Health and Safety Initiatives – local and national issues were addressed with the support of guest speakers. This included an impactful presentation on knife crime
- Enrichment and Community Activities – Enrichment Fairs and a significant number of fundraising events

During the discussion that followed, the Deputy Principal (C&Q) advised that where appropriate, College counselling students were assisting in using their acquired skills in supporting vulnerable learners. To date, this had worked well and helped address waiting times to access counselling sessions given the increasing demand for them.

Resolved: The Committee **noted** the contents of the report and requested a further update in-year regarding the support being given by College counselling students.

The Head of Student Services was thanked for her reports and she left the meeting. Also, the Vice-Principal (Head of Riverside) briefly left the meeting.

7. COLLEGE'S SELF ASSESSMENT REPORT (SAR) 2023/2024
To recommend approval of the SAR 2023/2024 and Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) 2024/2025 to the Board *(previously circulated)*

The Deputy Principal (C&Q) presented a comprehensive report and highlighted the following aspects:

- Grade – overall grade remained as outstanding, as evidenced in the published Ofsted Inspection report in April 2024
- The College's vision, values and strategic aims, performance data in each subject, quality assurance processes, equality and diversity key performance indicators and safeguarding provision
- The College's financial health remained at outstanding and enabled the College to provide exceptional education quality

In conclusion of the SAR, three areas for improvement were identified and formed the basis of the QIP. These were to (i) to further improve the quality of education for learners in the Foundation Studies Department and to ensure they make progress at the rate of which they were capable (ii) further improve the quality of education for the small minority of programmes that were not yet outstanding and (iii) further build on the improved achievement rates for students on study programmes.

Governors requested a progress report regarding the Foundation Studies Department. The Deputy Principal (C&Q) informed the Committee that improvements had been evidenced and it was of critical importance that these were sustained. In response to a question raised, the Deputy Principal (C&Q) explained the reasons for the slow pace in improvement to date and the Committee received assurance that there was a laser focus on raising standards to ensure learners made the progress in line with their capability.

A Governor raised concern in connection with the outcomes and attendance levels of learners enrolled on courses via Power in Partnership (PiP subcontractor). The Deputy Principal (C&Q) advised that this was subject to close monitoring by the SMT. The Clerk confirmed that this aspect had also been addressed in detail at the recent Finance and Resources Committee meeting, whereby Governors received assurance that the action was being closely monitored by the SMT. In response to another question raised, the Deputy Principal (C&Q) provided background information associated with the decrease in retention rates for vulnerable groups of students.

Resolved: The Committee **recommended approval** of the SAR 2023/2024 and QIP 2024/2025 to the Board.

8. QUALITY ASSURANCE

8.1 Student Voice and Internal Audit Report *(previously circulated)*

The Deputy Principal (C&Q) advised that an online 'First Few Weeks' survey had been conducted in late September and was completed by almost 1600 learners, which represented a significant increase compared to the previous year. The key findings were highlighted.

It was reported that Student Representatives had been appointed for each year group and that representative meetings with the Programme Management Team were scheduled to take place throughout the year. A Principal's breakfast event had been

trialled at the Kingsway campus in 2023/2024 and following its success this was to be extended to the Cronton campus.

In her capacity as the Chair of the Audit Committee, Karen Banks referred to the very pleasing outcomes from the Learner Voice internal audit undertaken in July 2024. At its meeting on 23rd September 2024 the Audit Committee received substantial assurance that the areas of the control environment tested were designed and operated effectively with no significant weaknesses. She advised that the Committee was impressed with the holistic approach to the student voice and how it was embedded at the College. In respect of the one recommendation that had been made Governors were assured that the SMT looked into subject areas where there was a lower than expected response rate to student surveys. Opinions were sought and received from both Student Governors.

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

The Vice Principal (Head of Centre, Riverside) re-joined the meeting.

8.2 **Closer Monitoring Curriculum Areas** *(previously circulated)*

The Deputy Principal (C&Q) explained the College's approach and rationale when categorising the minority of lower performing curriculum areas into either (i) closer monitoring, or (ii) special measures.

In summary:

- One subject area had been moved from special measures to closer monitoring as improvements had been evidenced
- One subject area remained in special measures
- Three areas had moved into closer monitoring in 2024/2025
- Five areas had been removed from closer monitoring following satisfactory improvements having been made

A Governor requested additional information regarding the action plan to address the pace of improvement and culture in the Foundation Studies Department. In response, the Deputy Principal (C&Q) provided an overview of the support and challenge that was consistently taking place. There were plans for the SMT to undertake a week long review, akin to an Ofsted 'deep dive.' The Deputy Principal (C&Q) reiterated that improvements were being evidenced, though acknowledged the pace had been disappointing due to a number of challenges that had been encountered and those were explained.

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

8.3 **Walkthrough Observations** *(previously circulated)*

The Deputy Principal (C&Q) informed the Committee that the walkthroughs undertaken in October 2024 aimed to assess various aspects of the learning environment. This included campus facilities, quality of provision, behaviour and standards, student identification and the sharing of good practice. As part of the process responses from had been collated for both benchmarking and monitoring purposes.

In response to a question raised concerning some student behavioural issues observed during a walkthrough, the Deputy Principal (C&Q) confirmed that this had largely

resolved and advised that no formal disciplinary processes had been initiated this term in that particular curriculum area.

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

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

In relation to 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 reduction in the number of concerns raised compared to the previous year, though seven of those had escalated to official complaints and were robustly investigated. The majority of official complaints related to exam access arrangements.

A Governor commented that whilst it was disappointing for any organisation to receive complaints, given the size of the College and breadth of its provision the number of complaints remained low.

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

9. **MONITORING OF KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

9.1 **Attendance, Retention and Enrolment** (*previously circulated*)

The Deputy Principal (C&Q) referred to the data contained within the report and cross-referenced it to the contents of the SAR at agenda item 7. Headline data was summarised as follows:

- Overall achievement rate – this had increased by 1.1% in 2023/2024, reversing the decline in 2022/2023
- Overall attendance data – this remained steady at 88% in 2023/2024, though early indications predicted a stronger position in 2024/2025
- Enrolment 2024/2025 – this had been excellent for all areas of provision with the exception of recruitment of adult learners; the latter being a priority area of focus in the current academic year

Improving attendance levels was a focal point of discussion and it was noted that this had dipped in relation to apprenticeships. The Assistant Principal (Curriculum, Riverside) provided an overview of various initiatives that had been introduced to address any emerging issues concerning lower than expected attendance and/or punctuality levels. Whilst this continued to be monitored, to date 'golden ticket' initiatives were proving to be effective.

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

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

Within his report, the Assistant Principal (Curriculum, Riverside) informed the Committee of the overall achievement data as a key performance indicator for EDI over two academic years. He highlighted the following aspects from the report:

- Gender Achievement Gap – females outperformed males, widening the gap to 2.2%
- Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) – learners outperformed their peers, narrowing the gap from 5.9% to 2.9%

- High Needs Funding Decline – Achievement rates for students receiving High Needs funding decreased, with a widening gap for those with learning difficulties or disabilities
- Vulnerable Groups – achievement rates dropped for Children Looked After and Young Carers

During the discussion that followed, Governors sought further information regarding the drop in achievement rates for Children Looked After and Young Carers. In response, the Deputy Principal (C&Q) advised that an analysis had been undertaken. Whilst it related to a fairly small cohort, staff recruitment had taken place which included the appointment of a designated tutor for CLA. Where students had withdrawn from courses, predominantly this was due to finding employment given the challenging economic climate.

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

10. **EXTERNAL PRIORITIES** *(previously circulated)*

The Vice Principal (Head of Centre, Riverside) informed Governors that the current key areas of reform included:

- Pause and Review of Post-16 Qualifications at Level 3 and below
- Curriculum and Assessment Review (CAR)
- Apprenticeships
- Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)
- National Skills Strategy and Regional Long Terms Skills Plan

The Vice Principal provided an overview of each of the reforms in terms of aims, potential implications for the College and timelines for completion.

In response to a question raised, the Vice Principal confirmed that the College continued to meet local skills need. The Chair outlined the importance of this in relation to the Accountability Agreement and government funding. The Committee was advised that stakeholder engagement remained strong, both with local employers and across the Liverpool City Region (LCR).

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

11. **LINK GOVERNOR REPORTS**

11.1 **Safeguarding** *(previously circulated)*

In his capacity as Link Governor, Councillor Tom McInerney reported that there had been a seamless transition with Donna Elston taking over from Thalia Bell, as the Designated Safeguarding Lead. Having previously been the Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead, the Head of Student Services was highly knowledgeable and competent in all aspects of safeguarding. The health and wellbeing of staff dealing with some highly complex cases was discussed and the Link Governor remained satisfied that support mechanisms were in place.

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

11.2 **Special Educational Needs & Disability (SEND)** *(previously circulated)*

In her capacity as SEND Link Governor, Michele Bacon referred to her report which was accessible via GovernorHub in relation to her recent visit where she met with Kendra Kirkby (Interim Head of Foundation Studies) and Jonathan Bailey (Head of Cross College Inclusion). The meeting was reported to be very productive with a focus on access arrangements and the quality of teaching and learning. Termly meetings were to take place with subsequent reporting to this Committee.

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

12. POLICIES

12.1 **Safeguarding and Child Protection** (*previously circulated*)

12.2 **Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults** (*previously circulated*)

The Clerk drew the Committee's attention to the roles and responsibilities of the Board in relation to safeguarding and child protection, as detailed in the Keeping Children Safe in Education 2024 (KCSIE) document published by the Department for Education (DfE). She also drew Governors' attention to the role of the designated safeguarding lead, referenced within the KCSIE at para 78. The proposed amendments were considered by the Committee.

Resolved: The Committee **recommended approval** the following policies to the Board:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Policy

12.3 **Teaching, Learning & Assessment** (*previously circulated*)

The Deputy Principal (C&Q) advised that the SMT had reviewed this policy and there were no fundamental changes being proposed since its last approval.

Resolved: The Committee **recommended approval** of the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy to the Board.

13. COMMITTEE SELF-EVALUATION 2023/2024 (*previously circulated*)

The Clerk referred to the draft Committee self-evaluation of performance which provided a narrative on the following aspects of its performance:

- Attendance levels were reported at 75%, against a target of 80%
- Membership details
- Terms of Reference
- Summary of Committee activities during 2023/2024
- Suggested areas for development

The Committee reflected on its performance throughout the 2023/2024 academic year. Suggested areas for development were considered and it was agreed to (i) keep under review attendance and the revised format of the content/length of reports, (ii) termly reports to be presented by Link Governors and (iii) to maintain a focus on improving teaching and learning within the Foundation Studies Department.

Resolved: The Committee **approved**

- (i) the self-evaluation of its performance in 2023/2024
- (ii) for the previously agreed curriculum presentation on 'curriculum reform' to be re-scheduled to the committee meeting in June 2025 instead of March 2025.
- (iii) for the curriculum presentation in March 2025 to focus on Foundation Studies

14. FE SECTOR UPDATES

Letter to College Principals from the Rt Hon Baroness Jacqui Smith, Minister of Skills – 4th September 2024

Resolved: The Committee **noted** the contents of the introductory letter from the Minister of Skills following the recent change in the UK government.

15. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None

16. 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 9th December 2024:

- Safeguarding Update
- College’s Self-Assessment Report 2023/2024 and Quality Improvement Plan 2024/2025
- Update on Curriculum Reform
- Overview of the AI curriculum presentation
- Policies – (i) Safeguarding and Child Protection, (ii) Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults, and (iii) Teaching, Learning and Assessment.

17. 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 Clerk.

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

18. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Resolved - The Committee **noted** the following meeting dates:

- Board – 9th December 2024
- Quality and Standards Committee – 11th March 2025

The meeting was closed at 6.30pm with the Chair thanking all attendees for their participation.

Signed: ...Office copy signed by Michele Bacon.....

Chair of Quality and Standards Committee

Date: 11th March 2025.....