

## **Curriculum & Quality Committee**

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### **Approved Minutes**

Minutes of a Meeting of the Committee held on Monday 6 November 2017 at the Thurrock Campus at 6.00 pm.

Present: Mrs G Williams (in the Chair)  
Mr B Brooks  
Mr L Fraser  
Mr T Knight  
Ms A O'Donoghue CBE

In Attendance: Ms S Lane (Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality)  
Ms K Mulvey (Vice Principal, Student Services and Adult Programmes)  
Mr R I Millea FCA (Clerk to the Corporation)

The Clerk took the Chair for the first three items on the Agenda.

#### **1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Paul Griffiths, David O'Halloran and Maya West.

#### **2. Declarations of Interest**

Members confirmed that they had no declarations of interest relating to items on the agenda.

The Clerk notified his interest as Clerk to Chelmsford College and Company Secretary of Essex Shared Services Limited.

#### **3. Election of Chair and Vice Chair 2017/18**

The only nomination for Chair of the Committee for 2017/18 was Mr D O'Halloran, who was duly elected unopposed.

At this time, the Committee did not consider it necessary to appoint a Vice Chair of the Committee.

Mrs Williams then took the Chair with the agreement of the Committee in Mr O'Halloran's absence.

#### **4. Welcome to new Committee Members**

The Chair welcomed Mr Lewis Fraser (HE Student Governor and recently elected President of the Student Union), recently appointed to the Board, as a Member of this Committee.

## 5. Urgent Business

There were no items of Urgent Business.

## 6. Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 28 February 2017

The Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 28 February 2017 were **APPROVED** and **SIGNED** by the Chair.

The Committee **NOTED** that, due to the Ofsted Inspection in May 2017, the Committee Meeting scheduled for 15 May 2017 was cancelled. Where necessary, the Board undertook curriculum scrutiny in the intervening period.

## 7. Matters Arising

The Clerk **REPORTED** that the Board had approved the following documents at its Meeting on 20 March 2017:

- Annual Safeguarding Report
- Partnership Agreements with University of East Anglia and the Open University
- Response to the HE Annual Provider Review

A training session for Governors on the Promonitor System was provided before the last Board Development Day. A presentation on the College's new diagnostic software will be presented to Governors for the next Meeting of the Committee showing how to drill down into the student data on the 'live' dashboard.

**ACTION: CLERK**

## 8. Final Learner Performance for 2016-17 (Paper CQC.17.09)

The Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality **PRESENTED** this Report giving details of the final outturn on achievement by students for 2016-17. There are no outstanding results.

The key points of the Report are as follows:

- College Overall Achievement Rate including English and Maths is 78.1% which is 3.1pp above last year.
- College Overall Achievement Rate excluding English and Maths for 2016-17 is 84.7%, a 0.2 pp improvement on the previous year (ProAchieve National Average 87.0%)
- GCE A Level and GCE AS Level Achievement below national averages.
- Study Programme Achievement for 16-18 year olds has increased at Entry/Level 1 by 7 pp and at Level 2, by 14.1 pp on the previous academic year. The pace of improvement at level 2 is driven by learner achievement at GCSE English and Maths and Functional Skills English and maths, which although getting better, is still a considerable challenge. Level 3 performance is down on last year by 2.1 pp but is affected by the drop in 'A' level achievement.
- Adults – programme achievement at Entry/Level 1 close to NA and above the NA for Level 2 – much improved on previous years at both levels.

- Apprenticeship Achievement is above national averages for both Overall (by 3pp) and Timely (by 1pp)

The Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality was asked by a governor about the poor A Level results last year. It was explained that A Levels were incorrectly coded on the ILR last year. Students should have been enrolled on a linear two year programme but this was not done at the correct time, and resulted in some students being enrolled on 2 year programmes who had achieved AS levels and had not returned. This resulted in retention rates being incorrectly recorded.

When this error was identified, all students were transferred to the correct designation but it was too late to change the data entry for ESFA purposes as the deadline had passed. As a consequence, the data was skewed and this affected retention and therefore overall success rate. Given that students do three A Levels, this compounded the effect.

The Principal & Chief Executive informed the Committee that the College has written to the ESFA regarding this issue, explaining what happened and therefore why our A Level results appear to be below minimum standards.

A governor asked what action will the ESFA take, in the light of this issue. The Principal & Chief Executive explained that the College had already received a Notice of Concern as were below minimum standards and we will remain below minimum standards again this year. The College has met with ESFA officers and they are content with the position but our outcomes will have to improve for next year.

A governor asked whether the College knows the actual pass rate for A Levels as the data provided to the Committee has not been cut in this way. The Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality believed it is about 96% which is around National Average. The precise information will come to the next Committee Meeting.

**ACTION: VP, C&Q**

A governor asked whether students are offered 2 A Levels plus BTech if they are struggling with three A Levels. This was confirmed and it is believed this should be of benefit to students and to our success rates.

A governor asked if the AS Level is of any use to students e.g as a practice level but the Principal responded that it is not complementary with the A Level itself so internal mock exams are of more value as they should better provide help for students. For this reason we are offering very few AS qualifications this year, majority of students are on 2 year linear 'A' levels.

The Principal & Chief Executive stated that the College needs to focus on Value Added. It is true and has been for a long time that the College does not attract the highest achieving students to do A Levels due to the competition from local independent schools and high performing grammar schools. However, it is important to add value to students' progress and be able to demonstrate that added value.

The student governor observed that there are national marking problems with GCSE which has affected the course the College can offer those students given uncertainty about the validity of GCSE marks. It is noted that a lot of students are challenging their marks.

A governor asked how many learners did Apprenticeships last year as the figures are not included in the Report. This will be corrected in future years but in 2016/17, there were approximately 1500 such learners. This puts the performance into context.

The Report was **NOTED**.

## **9. Current Learner Performance – Retention/Attendance/Learner Numbers 2017/18 (Paper CQC.17.10)**

The Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality **PRESENTED** an up to date Report on progress to date. Members were reminded that the 16-19 student number target set by the ESFA is 5352.

### Retention

The Committee noted that retention rates for this year, at this stage in the year, for 16-18 learners is 100% as any withdrawals have been actioned before the 42 day period, the ESFA funding rules census point.

The KPI for 2017/18 is set at 92%.

A governor raised the issue of accuracy of our registers and recording of retention and attendance given the problems that existed last year. The Principal & Chief Executive stated that we are satisfied that there is an accurate position this year.

A governor also asked whether staff are consistent in counting attendance. The VP, C&Q responded that staff have been fully briefed and understand what is required of them. The governor then asked 'do we believe them' – The VP, C&Q stressed that registers are a prime source auditable document and staff can be dismissed if they do not follow the rules of their completion. There is no cast iron guarantee but we are confident of the accuracy of the registers and that staff know their duty.

### Attendance

College attendance stands at 86.4%, with punctuality at 97.98%. The KPI target for this year for attendance is 90% (last year 85.34%)

It was reported that there are unmarked registers at the moment so 86.4% may not be fully accurate as yet.

It was reported to the Committee that there are some issues with the Unit E system. The Director of MIS is working on it and is correcting glitches as he comes across them. Last year was plagued by a poor system and the implementation of the new system was not handled well by MIS so there are still issues with the information but with the new team in place they are reducing significantly.

### Learner Numbers

The College has not yet reached its 16-18 learner allocation of 5352 for the 2017/18 year with current enrolment totalling 5196, some 156 short of the allocation.

The current enrolment does not include 252 learners with Collaborative Partners and 83 High Needs Students.

Analysis is being done to determine reasons for student withdrawals and to try to re-engage with them through short programmes during the year.

Planning is in place to implement an enhanced curriculum offer for the rest of the year to meet the needs of learners and ensure that student target numbers are met. These include 16-19 Traineeships and short programmes for those who are NEET.

There is believed to be about 1500 home schooled learners in Southend and Thurrock and funding can be claimed directly from Government for such learners. These are students who were not suited to mainstream school for a variety of reasons (e.g. bullying, did not fit in) and other students where the parents elected to home school them. The College is planning to run a pilot this year to see if this route is viable, as an additional area of work for the College.

The Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality stated that final 16-19 numbers will be available by the end of this week and this will give us the number on which 16-19 income for next year will be calculated under the lagged funding model. It is likely that the College is likely to be around 150 short of the 16/17 allocation. This will mean a reduction of around £600K in our income next year (2017/18) which is disappointing as the plan had been to over recruit this year on a net basis. It is the case that the College did recruit beyond the target but there have been too many withdrawals prior to the census date.

Governors asked about why this was happening. The Principal explained that this year we had seen lots of students who had been contacted by their school with lower offers and many had decided to return to school. It is now a very competitive market.

The Principal & Chief Executive stated that for the future the College needs to up its game in ensuring that applications convert to enrolments and that enrolments are sustained in the early weeks of the academic year to minimise attrition. This would include initiatives like transferring students to different courses if initial course not working out.

A governor asked about the enrolment process and the timing of that process in order to try and minimise risk of failing to recruit allocated numbers. Management responded that the College is moving enrolment next year to start in May rather than as late as the summer holidays. This will give students certainty, limit the likelihood of them being enticed back to school or, if their grades are not as good as hoped, transfer them to another course.

The Committee **RECEIVED** the Report, **NOTING** the current level of student enrolment, retention and attendance for 2017-18 and that the retention rates are based on the total number of learners that started a programme of study at the College as a percentage of the number of learners who are still on the course after 42 days.

#### **10. Academic Performance Targets 2017-18 (Paper CQC.17.11)**

The Principal & Chief Executive and the Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality jointly submitted a paper outlining the proposed academic targets for the College for 2017-18, together with headline achievement against the key targets set for 2016-17.

Members carefully reviewed the performance for the year just ended, noting the movements over the previous year, and the proposals for this year proposed by the Senior Leadership Team, focusing on whether the targets are both realistic and aspirational.

In framing these targets, Members were conscious that National Rates for 2016-17 will not be available until February/March 2017 and judgements as to the Targets for 2017-18 draw on the National Rates for 2015-16.

The proposed overall College retention target for 2017/18 is 92% and the Attendance Target is 90% (2016/17 actuals: retention 90.9% and attendance 85.34%). These targets are challenging, especially for attendance where attendance at English & Maths remains a significant issue.

A Governor asked about Valued Added. The College is still awaiting Value Added outcomes for last year.

It was agreed that it would be useful for there to be a Presentation to the Board on Value Added at the January 2018 Board Development Day and how we measure it to evidence our contribution to the progress of students. Only certain courses have external value added scores but we set our own achievement targets for students, below that level. Ofsted will not accept such internal data but it does provide some reassurance to our success in improving Teaching Learning & Assessment and ultimately, outcomes for students.

**ACTION: CLERK**

The Committee **NOTED** the performance against targets for 2016/17 and **RECOMMENDED** the targets proposed for 2017/18 be approved by the Board at its Meeting on 4 December 2017.

**ACTION: CLERK**

#### **11. Findings from Departmental Reviews (Paper CQC.17.04)**

The Clerk to the Corporation **REPORTED** verbally on Department Reviews which took place recently as part of the College Quality Improvement cycle.

The Meetings included review of teacher practice and provided evidence of performance management and specific target setting for immediate short term improvement. Tracking of learner progress, work placements, target setting and SEN progress were all discussed and evidenced.

The Clerk spelt out positive outcomes from the process and the Areas for Development derived from brief Reports from a number of governors who attended the Reviews and the actions taken after the Meetings, summarised as follows:

- Good plans for future activities and enthusiastic involvement of staff
- Department Review process comprehensive, informative and constructive
- Ability to participate and ask questions
- Would benefit from 'live' data which governors can access remotely (**training session has been given for this and it will be rolled out shortly – see 7 above**)
- Ability to meet students
- Good strategy and plans for English & Maths recognising the challenge involved
- Positive direction of travel in difficult and underperforming area
- Stability of staff in some areas
- Organisation in start-up weeks not that good according to students
- Overall, greater positivity

These findings and observations have reported their observations through to the Vice Principal, Curriculum & Quality, who has disseminated them to Departmental staff. In all cases summarised above, governors have met with some students as

part of their visit to the College for the Reviews. It was **AGREED** that it should be standard practice that Governors should meet students informally before the department Review Meeting.

Governors mentioned that they did not think students were 'cherry picked' and they felt the students who met were representative were open and frank in their comments. It was further noted that a number of governors collectively met with a group of students immediately before the October Board Meeting in Basildon.

The Board **NOTED** the Report.

**ACTION: CLERK**

## **12. HE Matters** (Paper CQC.17.13)

### HE Enhancement & Improvement Strategy

This Strategy was **PRESENTED** by the Principal & Chief Executive and complements and supports the HE Strategy 2017-20 which has been approved by the Board and will assist the College in meeting its HE related obligations (regulatory and otherwise). It is designed to ensure the College will improve quality of provision and student engagement and retain validation from our three HE partners and guarantee HEFCE funding in the future.

The Strategy embraces a number of key principles, those with the highest priority are Principles 5, 7 and 8. The main reasons for this are due to

- Impending annual Annual Provider Review (1 December 2017)
- HEFCE Verification Process in 2017-18
- Approach to implementing the HEFCE APR action plan (9 June 2017)
- HEFCE Annual Provider Review in 2018-19

The three Principles mentioned above cover data and information, embedding the verification process and adopting a strategic approach to quality assurance.

Enhancement is a bottom up process deriving initially from the concerns and requirements of students saying what they want to improve their experience.

The Principal & Chief Executive said that this document went to the two new validating universities and to HEFCE as part of the provider review, and they were content with it.

The Committee **RECOMMENDED** that the Strategy be approved by the Board at its next Meeting on 4 December 2017.

**ACTION: CLERK**

### HE Student Enrolments 2017-18

The Committee **CONSIDERED** a Report prepared by the Dean of HE on the above subject. The 2017-18 recruitment cycle has ended with total number of students over the three year degree courses of 749 against a target of 848, a shortfall of 99 students (45 year 1, 34 year 2, 20 year 3). This will result in a shortfall in the planned budget of £255K for 2017-18 – expenditure is already being reduced in order to cover this budget shortfall.

Student numbers peaked at 1200 in 2012 but has declined due to the changing arrangements for HE including student loans and very competitive Universities. In order to improve recruitment for the future and reverse withdrawals during courses, a

range of measures are being taken across quality and operational aspects to ensure sustainable growth and reduce withdrawals.

It was noted that failure to reverse this trend has considerable LONGER term financial implications on the College.

Forecasts for 2018-19 recruitment will be brought to the next meeting of the Committee with proposals to improve recruitment.

The Report was **NOTED**.

**ACTION: P&CE**

### HEFCE Annual Quality Assessment Return

The Principal & Chief Executive informed the Committee that the above Return (with Action Plan) needs to be submitted to HEFCE by 1 December 2017.

It was **AGREED** that as soon as the Return is completed, it will be sent to the whole Board asking for its approval by email resolution by 24 November so that the Report can be submitted by the deadline of 1 December.

The Return will be formally **APPROVED** at the 4 December Board Meeting.

**ACTION: CLERK**

The committee was informed that the Return forms a pivotal part of the HEFCE Assurance Review process, the satisfactory outcome of which ensures continued HE Funding for the College and HEI/University validation.

The Return focuses on providing the evidence base necessary to demonstrate alignment to the two assurance statements relating to the continuous improvement of the student academic experience, student outcomes and the reliability of degree standards.

### **13. Academic Department Restructure (Paper CQC.17.14)**

The Principal & Chief Executive **TABLED** a paper in which changes to the structure of the academic departments were proposed. Consultation will be completed by end of second week in November with staff and it is intended that these changes will take effect from 1 December 2017. The consultation was been quite positive thus far.

Essentially, the current eight departments will be reduced to five, to provide greater accountability and to make better use of management resources. Cost savings are expected. Only A Levels will remain stand alone.

In addition, a new structure for HE will be established, with all HE staff and students being managed under a new Directorate.

The five new Departments are intended to be:

- Art, Design & Business
- Engineering & Construction
- Health & Science
- Digital Technologies, Media & Performing Arts including ICT
- Service Industries including Sports & Public Services

The Committee **NOTED** the proposed new arrangements to take effect on 1 December.

#### **14. Committee Matters** (Paper CQC.17.15)

##### Terms of Reference

The Clerk **PRESENTED** the Committee Terms of Reference for review by the Committee. Some amendments, to give increased emphasis to HE matters, were proposed and the suggested revised Terms were **RECOMMENDED** for approval to the Board Meeting on 4 December 2017.

The Clerk also **PRESENTED** a document demonstrating compliance by the Committee with its own Terms of Reference during 2016/17.

**ACTION: CLERK**

##### Committee Self-Assessment

The Committee were **REMINDED** to return their completed Self-Assessment forms for 2016/17 to the Clerk, so that a Report can be provided to the Committee at its next Meeting. The Clerk **PRESENTED** a verbal Report on the results of the Self-Assessment for 2015/16, which was carried over from the May Meeting.

All Members returned completed forms for 2015/16 and the overall grade awarded was 1.58 (midway between Outstanding and Good) and the Chair's performance was rated similarly. There were no additional written comments made by Members. All yes/no questions were answered in the affirmative.

##### Governor Links

The Committee noted the 2017/18 Governor Links schedule which was tabled at the Board Meeting on 20 October 2017. It was noted that this may need some amendment following the Departmental Restructure (Minute 13 above).

It was noted that Richard Launder is content to continue being the link on Health & Safety and Capital Projects & Estates.

The Chair will liaise with Paul Griffiths and Hiba Khoury (new governors) as to the Department to which they can be linked.

**ACTION: CHAIR**

##### Report on Academic Board

The Academic Board last met on 23 June 2017 and **NOTES** of the Meeting were presented to the Committee for information.

**ACTION: CLERK**

#### **15. Forthcoming Events** (Paper CQC.17.16)

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided by the Clerk relating to forthcoming events.

#### **16. Dates of Next Meetings**

Monday 26 February 2018 – Southend Campus at 6.00 pm.

Monday 14 May 2018 – Basildon Campus at 6.00 pm.

There being no further business, the Meeting terminated at 7.40 pm.

Signed.....Dated.....