

ACADEMIC STANDARDS COMMITTEE



WEDNESDAY 7 MARCH 2012

GATESHEAD COLLEGE

Report: Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 23
November 2011

Author: Clerk of the Corporation

Action: Approve

Status: Open

Present: David Mitchell (Chair)
Keith Cann Evans
Tom Cantwell
Darren Heathcote
Brian Rapkin
Mark Taylor
Richard Thorold

In attendance: Chris Andreou
Muriel Callaghan
David Cleary
Jackie Doxford
Judith Doyle
Gillian Forrester
Sally Hargreaves
Gwyneth Jones
Tim Poolan
Andrew Robson

1. Welcome/Apologies

David Mitchell welcomed everyone to the meeting. He commented that it was his first meeting as Chair of the Committee and introduced Mark Taylor as a newly appointed member of the Committee. Apologies for absence were received from Gail Etherington, Alan Reynolds and Allan Steele.

The Chair invited members to declare any interests on any item on the agenda. No interests were declared at this stage in the meeting; however, members noted that should the direction of debate on any item result in a potential conflict of interest, this should be indicated during the meeting. Members were also reminded to advise the Clerk of any changes to be made to declaration of interests.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 15 June 2011

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 June 2011 were accepted as a correct record.

3. Matters Arising

Review of GCE A Level and AS Provision – The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality commented that the outcomes for 2010/2011 from the College's A level provision were excellent. Improved performance at A Level is reflected in the SSAs to be

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considered as part of the Self Assessment Report. A report on A Level provision will be prepared for discussion at the March 2012 meeting.

Entrepreneurial College – The Principal provided a brief update on the Entrepreneurial College.

4. Self Assessment Report 2010/2011

Overview of Process

The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality introduced a report which gave an overview of the Self Assessment process. She explained that the grades listed in the report were proposed grades which would need to be discussed. There is a renewed focus on outcomes for learners with jobs and progression to Higher Education. National Rates are growing in some areas but not in all. Gateshead College is setting its own standards with an overall success rate of 82% which is 3% higher than the average rate. The College has improved in comparison to last year.

The Principal said there was a need to be clear about data. The Gateshead College data is 'clean' and has been audited. The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality commented that some colleges measure their data in different ways, often resulting in high success rates which can mean that Gateshead College is comparing itself against something which is not comparable.

The Chair commented that the review of the SAR by the Committee was not an exercise in window dressing but a real tool to help the College. It was noted that the SSAs to be considered were those where there was need for the proposed grades to be discussed before they were finalised.

Subject Sector Area Reports

SSA 1: Health, Public Services and Care

In 2009/2010 this area had been graded as Good Grade 2 because it had an 86% success rate (6%) above NR and appeared to be making significant improvements. However these appeared not to have been embedded. The overall success rate for this area is 80% against an NR of 85%; achievement is 91% against an NR of 93% and retention is 88% against an NR of 91%.

Performance in 2010/2011: teaching and learning is strong (89% good or better); significant issues with underperforming courses, there was improvement in 2009/2010 but now falling away with 5% below NR and 6% below last year's figure in this area. The Head of Department had recently retired and the Head of Teaching and Learning Development was currently installed as Interim Head of Department.

Analysis of issues: high levels of staff absence have affected continuity for learners; student recruitment process not sufficiently rigorous; context of high benchmarks (but not a key factor).

Areas for Improvement: radical interventions by Head of Teaching and Learning Development: rebuilding team so they perform effectively; staff are keen for changes to take place; increase pool of part-time staff and address continuity issues; prioritise course management.

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A member of the Committee enquired why there were such high levels of staff absence. The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality replied that the sector had a history of high levels of absence, two individuals involved had left through voluntary redundancy in summer 2011. It was a contradiction as staff there were still working hard. The Principal commented that it was disappointing; he had personally defended SSA 1 in 2010 and had hoped to see a move from a strong Grade 2 to Grade 1 but now it was a weak Grade 3. This is a big department with over 900 students accounting for around 10% of the College's provision and it is not acceptable for it to continue to operate at this low level.

The Head of Teaching and Learner Development commented that good and outstanding teaching had not been delivered consistently. The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality commented that the fact that staff can perform well but do not do so is a concern; there is a degree of complacency and a lack of self reflection, urgency and rigour. There is also an absence of significant feedback from the learner voice. The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality indicated that the Management Team would be restructured with a new Curriculum Manager being appointed. Until then the Strategy Manager: Quality and Performance, Head of Teaching and Learning Development and herself would be looking after this area. She confirmed that a report on progress on this area would be included on the agenda of future Academic Standards Committee meetings.

The Chair said that 'disappointment' was the word to describe the situation but the proposition was that SSA 1 should be graded as Satisfactory Grade 3 and this was confirmed by the Committee.

SSA 4.1: Engineering & Manufacturing Technologies

This area had been reviewed by the Academic Standards Committee 18 months ago in an attempt to improve performance which had dipped. Three departments contributed (40% Engineering and Manufacturing, 35% National Business Development & Curriculum and 25% Construction). The area was a Good Grade 2 in 2008/2009 and 2009/2010.

The proposal was that the area should be an Outstanding Grade 1 in 2010/2011. It had an 84% success rate which was 6% above NR and was an 8% increase on 2009/2010. 40% of staff had been observed and 77% were good or better over a two year period; 100% of staff observed in 2010/2011 were good or better. During 2010/2011 there had been 15% growth in enrolment numbers; in this context sustaining high achievement rates is difficult but capacity to improve has been demonstrated. There is highly effective responsive employer engagement and partnership work: Nissan technician apprentice scheme - 45% growth; University of Sunderland - five year programme will see a cohort through; curriculum embedded with Employers - Awarded TQS status last year; outstanding progression for Learners - 31/32 students progressed into Nissan programme now being run by SASMI.

Areas for Improvement include: improve success rates on L2 Electrical Installation programme to National Rate; ensure staff with Grade 3 Teaching & Learning observations (currently 4), and new staff, are coached and supported to achieve good or better on next observation to drive department performance to 80% good or better; increase engagement of learners across all modes of delivery through learner forums.

It was noted that action had been taken to combat poor Long Level 2 programme results. The programme does not exist now in its previous format. Significant changes have been made to screen learners to ensure that they are suited to a two year programme. Whilst it is positive that some unemployed people found jobs during the two years the negative is that some were unable to do the course as it involved six examinations which had to be

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completed online. The second year of the new programme will be reported upon next year.

The Chair commented that the improvements against a background of growth were impressive and expressed the view that Good Grade 2 in 2009/2010 should become Outstanding Grade 1 in 2010/2011. The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality indicated that the area was building on previous years and it was most commendable that it had improved by 8% on last year. Summing up, the Chair indicated that SSA 4.1 Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies is a strong area overall and sought the Committee's agreement to an uplift to Outstanding Grade 1.

The proposed Outstanding Grade 1 for SSA 4.1 was confirmed by the Committee.

SSA 13: Education & Training

The Committee noted that SSA 13: Education and Training is a small but growing area in terms of student numbers which has been trying to achieve Outstanding Grade 1. The success rate in 2010/2011 was 94% which was 7% above NR. 184 students enrolled in the area for 2010/2011 and 181 completed their programmes of learning.

Performance in 2010/2011 includes: outstanding teaching and learning (100% of lessons observed graded as good or better); tutors model best practice – all staff have undertaken Teacher Effectiveness Enhancement Programme (TEEP) level 1 training and embedded this within delivery – 3 TEEP trainers within Department; outstanding EV reports for all programmes; excellent student feedback for all programmes; excellent reputation for delivery of initial teacher training – both HE provision and City and Guilds provision; excellent reputation and partnership working in the delivery of Teaching Assistant programmes – L3 programme 100% success rate, L2 programme 87% (+4%); exceptional performance at outreach centre – Sure Start, Blaydon with retention, achievement and success rate; no underperforming programmes within the Department this year. The College was therefore, proposing Outstanding Grade 1 for 2010/2011.

The Chair commented that this area was important both to Gateshead and to the College. The outcomes are beyond outstanding; high outcomes in very difficult circumstances. A member commented that he was impressed by the very high retention rate. The Committee noted that the area has an impact on the wider College; any member of staff who joins without teaching qualifications is referred to for appropriate training.

The report proposed Outstanding Grade 1 for SSA 13: Education and Training and this was confirmed by the Committee.

SSA 15: Business, Administration & Law

The Committee noted that SSA 15: Business, Administration and Law delivers a broad range of provision across five different departments: Business & IT; Academy of Leadership & Management; A Level Academy; Amacus; and Contracts & Partnership Team. A detailed breakdown shows that 32% was delivered by the Contracts and Partnerships (Business & Innovation Team); 37% delivered by Business & IT; 9% by A Level Academy, 7% by the Academy of Leadership & Management and 7% by Amacus. In 2009/2010 the area was a Good Grade 2.

Key strengths include: 76% success rate (1% above NR); 84% retention rate (5% above NR); 100% success rates for 18 courses (104 learners); 70% increase in customers (2009/2010 = 579; 2010/2011 = 983); outstanding results for Very Short courses 98%

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success rates. However, there is a clear distinction between the long courses and short programmes.

Areas for Improvement include: AAT – online exam system introduced autumn 2010, forced re-sits and lowered student motivation; staffing and absence affected continuity for learners; poor success rates due to intensity of programme. The solutions would be representation to AAT; change to delivery schedule of courses and increased staffing resource. National Diploma in Business – students transferred onto Single Award from other programmes; students undertaking this programme as an additionality; the solution would be a more robust recruitment process. AS Law – issues around success rate, retention and achievement; the solution would be increased monitoring of performance e.g. work scrutiny, performance reviews and if no improvement, there would be a review of the curriculum offer. CMI level 5 – customised programme for employers, requires change of learning aims for many learners; need to improve scheduling and timeliness of this process; the solution would be to extend the course length.

The proposal in the report was that SSA 15 should move from Good Grade 2 in 2009/2010 to Satisfactory Grade 3 in 2010/2011. There was discussion on the capacity to improve and on what needed to be done. Views were expressed that designating capacity to improve as Grade 3 was an indication that the College lacks the managerial capacity in this area to improve. There was discussion on the problems resulting from the complexity of the SSA and the inclusion of IT related programmes.

The report proposed Satisfactory Grade 3 and this was confirmed by the Committee.

The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality said there was good capacity to improve. The Principal commented that there was a need to resolve the issues with Business & IT as this was the third year in a row in which it had not had good results. AAT has had a significant impact as part of SSA 15.

SSA 14: Preparation for Life and Work

The Committee noted that SSA 14: Preparation for Life and Work is a huge area which had 4668 enrolments in 2010/2011. Considering performance in 2010/2011 it was noted that this area had a success rate of 84% (5% above NR) and a retention rate of 93% (2% above NR). There were 2,194 full time students on NCFE Level 1 Learning to Learn induction which had achieved an outstanding success rate (85%) and retention rate (94%). There had been outstanding success rates with Partnerships with Premier Performance Training Skills for Life: 292 learners; 100% success rates +17% above National Rates; high progression into employment and excellent employer links on all employability courses.

Foundation Skills had made an outstanding +14% improvement in success rate from being 11% below NR in 2009/2009 to 3% above NR in 2010/2011. There have been outstanding improvements in success rates on numerous courses, especially significant growth/outstanding 100% success within Learning Difficulties and Disabilities courses; outstanding +15% improvement in Foundation Skills retention rate from being 15% below NR in 2008/2009 to achieving the NR in 2010/2011; outstanding and highly effective support for a large number of vulnerable or low level literacy learners to ensure that courses are completed successfully.

Functional Skills – outstanding success rates for cross college Functional Skills, literacy and numeracy for 992 learners with 89% success + 5% (NR 84%), excellent retention rates for this group with 98% retention +2% (NR 96%); outstanding achievement for the group with 91% achievement +5% (NR 86%); good success rates for 16-18 year olds

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Functional Skills, literacy and numeracy of 91% + 6% (NR 85%); outstanding success rates for NEET Employability courses of 100% +12% (NR 88%).

Areas for improvements: Long Level 3 courses that are 5% below NR for achievement are the Extended Project Qualifications taken by Level 3 students in College; Long Level 2 courses for 16-18 year olds which are 6% below NR for success, short courses for 16-18 year olds that are 9% below NR for success and short courses for 19+ learners that are 2% below NR for success are across all three departments.

This area had a lot of vulnerable adults including people for whom English is not their first language and people with learning disabilities.

It was noted that observations of teaching and learning had shown 92% of staff observed to be good or better.

The report proposed Outstanding Grade 1 for SSA 14: Preparation for Life and Work and this was confirmed by the Committee.

Before summing up and moving to the consideration of overall College judgements the Chair enquired whether any members wished to raise any issues about any area not selected for scrutiny by the Committee.

Gillian Forrester, Chris Andreou, Sally Hargreaves and David Cleary left the meeting

Overall College Position

The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality explained that the College is judged in terms of overall effectiveness. The College has an overall success rate of 82% for 2010/2011 (3% above NR and 3% on 2009/2010); teaching and learning remained very strong; most curriculum areas continued to improved their performance year-on-year; three areas are proposed to rise from Grade 2 to Grade 1 and two areas proposed to move from Grade 2 to Grade 3. The College is Outstanding Grade 1 in Effectiveness, Capacity to Improve, Leadership and Management and Quality of Provision. Outcomes for Learners had initially been suggested as being Grade 2 and the Committee was requested to consider this in the light of other decisions made during the meeting.

Safeguarding

The Director of Student Services explained that the grading for Safeguarding had been subject to moderation by the Designated Governor for Safeguarding. The recommendation was that Outstanding Grade 1 status is maintained because of the outstanding arrangements to safeguard learners; learners feel safe, with consideration given to very few negative comments; achievement of LSIS 'Leading the Learner Voice Award' for e-responsibility and anti-bullying work; outstanding support on personal and welfare issues; the Designated Governor provides effective monitoring and challenges procedures; procedures for safeguarding learners are robust and meet Government guidance; a new member of staff appointed to deal with mental health.

Areas for development: ongoing development of monitoring arrangements for subcontracted work.

A member commented that as a mature student studying at the College he had never found any reason to feel unsafe or bullied. He added that having been around College for several years he had no reason to think that there might be problems for younger students and commented that there are avenues to follow if there are any issues. The College is a

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safe environment where it is comfortable to study. Students know they can use surveys and feedback to highlight any problems.

The report proposed Outstanding Grade 1 for Safeguarding and this was confirmed by the Committee.

Outcomes for Learners

The Principal commented that the Self Assessment Report was stronger than 2009/2010 and so he could not see why Outcomes for Learners was proposed as Good Grade 2. The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality explained that self assessment is about dialogue and rigour and that is appropriate for the proposed grades to be scrutinised. She commented on the good UCAS outcomes with lots of students securing places at universities. A member expressed the view that Outcomes for Learners should be a Grade 1 and asked what the significant difference was to make it a lower grade.

The Chair commented that the performance was as good as in previous years and commented that some revision of the text would be appropriate to support the grading as Outstanding Grade 1. The designation of Outstanding Grade 1 was supported by the Committee.

Overall Effectiveness

The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality advised the Committee that the grade proposed for Overall Effectiveness is Outstanding Grade 1. This was supported by the Committee.

Capacity to Improve

The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality advised the Committee that the grade proposed for Capacity to Improve is Outstanding Grade 1. This was supported by the Committee.

Leadership and Management

The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality advised the Committee that the grade proposed for Leadership and Management was Outstanding Grade 1. This was supported by the Committee.

RESOLVED to recommend to the Board that the grades proposed in the Self Assessment Report for 2010/2011 should be approved

5. Other Business

The Chair thanked everyone for their hard work and for pulling together the Self-Assessment Report. He commented that Gateshead College was going from strength to strength.

6. Date of the next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 7 March 2012.