

# ACADEMIC STANDARDS COMMITTEE



WEDNESDAY 20 JUNE 2012

GATESHEAD COLLEGE

**Report:** Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 7 March  
2012

**Author:** Clerk of the Corporation

**Action:** Approve

**Status:** Open

**Present:** David Mitchell (Chair)  
Keith Cann Evans  
Tom Cantwell  
Gail Etherington  
Darren Heathcote  
Alan Reynolds  
Allan Steele  
Mark Taylor

**In attendance:** John Deary  
Jackie Doxford  
Judith Doyle  
Gillian Forrester  
Sally Hargreaves  
Gwyneth Jones  
Kevin Marston  
Tim Poolan  
Andrew Robson

## 1. Welcome/Apologies

David Mitchell welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies for absence were received from Brian Rapkin and Richard Thorold.

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 23 November 2011

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 November were accepted as a correct record.

## 3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising which were not substantive items on the agenda.

## 4. Curriculum review outcomes to date

The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality introduced a report updating the Committee on the outcome of recent Curriculum Reviews. The report detailed the Curriculum

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Reviews which had taken place to date during the academic year 2011/2012 and included the teaching and learning observation data which had arisen from the reviews. She explained that following a request from the Board, a strong focus had been placed on Observation of Teaching and Learning, and already there had been almost as many observations than for the whole of the academic year 2010/2011. Six curriculum areas had been observed so far this academic year: Leadership and Management (October 2011), Health, Care and Early Years (November 2011), Business (December 2011), Creative Industries (January 2012) and Engineering/Manufacturing (February 2012).

In summary, there were some very high performing areas observed early in the academic year. The first four areas observed all achieved above last year's College rate of 80.5% for Good or Better observations. The College performance at one point was approximately 86% Good or Better Observations. Of particular note was the performance of the Teaching and Learning team where all 5 staff achieved Grade 1. This was the first time this had happened in a Curriculum Review.

The Committee noted that curriculum areas within underperforming self-assessment areas (Health, Care and Early Years in SSA1, Leadership and Management and Business within SSA15) had performed well in Teaching and Learning observations. This reinforced the view formed in self-assessment that Teaching and Learning was not the primary area for development within these SSAs.

Recent reviews (Creative Industries, Engineering/Manufacturing) have identified 13 staff performing at Grade 3 and 2 staff at Grade 4. The disproportionate number of Grade 3 reviews in these areas is a concern and has impacted upon the overall College performance, bringing Good or Better observations down to 76% for the year so far. The majority of the low grade observations were for Associate Lecturers. Members noted that there has been a huge growth in 16-19 provision in Creative industries and new staff have joined the College who need training in 'the Gateshead Way' and it is expected that the 2011 position in terms of observation grades will be reached by the end of the year.

Gillian Forrester, Head of Teaching and Learning Development commented upon the timeliness of the reviews and the need for new teachers to be given time to develop the appropriate mindset. She explained that it is particularly difficult for part time staff and that the process takes longer than for full time staff. However, the vocational experience of part time staff is essential to fulfil the requirements of the curriculum. The Chair expressed the view that the quality of teaching and learning is at the heart of what Gateshead College does. He added that in some colleges Governors know very little about what happens in the classroom and that to maintain the Gateshead difference there is a need to concentrate on the improvement of teaching and learning and to build on it. Whilst the observation results may be based on a snapshot in time they provide a basis on which to build.

The Chair informed the Committee that he had attended the national Association of Colleges Strategic Governance Summit in London at the end of February 2012. There had been a presentation from Ofsted on Teaching and Learning, which is a key area for assessment in Ofsted inspections and a college cannot be 'outstanding' if teaching and learning is not outstanding. It was noted that under the incoming inspection framework Ofsted will replace 'satisfactory' with 'needs improvement'. He commented on the review of the College's Teaching & Learning provision which had taken place in November 2011 and praised the 100% achievement.

It was noted that in response to the number of Grade 3s in recent reviews, the College is planning to run a variation of the 'Support Programme for New Teachers' targeted at these curriculum areas. This support programme has a track record of raising staff performance

to at least Grade 2. Further reviews are planned for this academic year including two large curriculum areas self-assessed in 2010/2011 at Grade 1 and it is expected that this will result in a movement of the proportion of high grade observations to previous levels.

**RESOLVED to note the contents of the report**

**5. Quality and Improvement Plan progress monitoring:**

**Area 1 – Health, Care and Early Years**

Andrew Robson explained that this was an area with most concern. Self Assessment had identified a number of issues resulting in an action plan. Gillian Forrester, Head of Teaching and Learning Development had acted as interim Head of Department; following the recent management restructuring Sally Hargreaves has been appointed Head of Group.

Sally Hargreaves gave a presentation on SSA 1: Health, Public Services and Care outlining the issues for this area: course management; long-term planning; review of student learning aims; and the need to go back to basics. Systems are needed that are more manageable, efficient and sustainable. High levels of staff absence have affected continuity for learners; the student recruitment process is not sufficiently rigorous; and there is need to look at attainment in the context of high benchmarks. Actions for improvement include: radical interventions by the Head of Teaching and Learning Development; rebuilding the team so that members perform effectively as a team building on the evidence that staff are keen for a change to take place; increasing the pool of part-time staff and addressing continuity issues; and prioritising course management.

Progress has been made in some areas: robust monitoring of key statistics working closely with Funding and Data team; two sets of in-year predictions made by course leaders; some improvement in retention for underperforming courses e.g. AAA0103 National Diploma retention is up from 70% to 76%. All courses have carried out a full analysis of students at risk of not completing and individual student learning aims have been reviewed. It was noted that the level of staff absence has improved by over 6% this term (mostly due to one long term absence – only four days from other staff). The student recruitment process has been improved to include more rigour in initial assessments and follow-up actions in place. There has been increased involvement of course leaders in recruitment events.

Further progress has included an increased pool of part-time staff with four staff recruited; a full review of distribution of workloads and positive action taken with timetabling improvements planned. Eighteen curriculum review observations have been carried out with 83% Good or Better; the Quality Review undertaken on 27 February 2012 was very positive with no actions, evidence of effective certification claims procedures and all assessment decisions agreed/evidence of effective internal verification.

A member indicated that a 6% reduction in staff absence is considered a good effort when it was at a high level. Sally Hargreaves agreed that staff absence was at a high level between June and December 2011 and explained that a development day with the whole team had considered the background to sickness absence. A member commented that sickness absence in this area had been an issue in the past, it had improved and had deteriorated again.

A view was expressed that in terms of retention issues, whilst 76% achievement was better than 70% it was not particularly good. Sally Hargreaves explained that advice and guidance on recruitment had been weak. The plan was to restructure the courses so this

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would not recur from September 2012. The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality indicated that the College management is looking at particular parts of the curriculum; at what is delivered and whether the College should continue to do it. A member suggested putting a strategy in place for looking at why students left courses early; he indicated that it was important to look at what was going on in students lives outside college. The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality advised the Committee that a Strategy Manager for Learning Support had just been appointed.

### **RESOLVED to note the contents of the presentation**

#### **Area 6 – ICT**

ICT had been a Good Grade 2 last year but the Area is being monitored carefully because it has a chequered history. It was previously part of Business and IT but it is now separate with John Deary as the Curriculum Operations Manager for this Area.

John Deary gave a presentation which outlined the areas for improvement for IT: to raise success above National Rate on all levels in IT workshops ECDL by implementing a consistent staffing model; predicted success rate ECDL Part 1 82% (National Rate 72%), predicted success rate ECDL Part 2 88% (National Rate 54%) and predicted success rate ECDL Level 3 70% (National Rate 68%). To provide a wider range of student options at Level 3 by offering different pathways; developing Advanced Apprenticeship provision; predicted success rate BTEC Extended Diploma IT Applications 86% (National Rate 73%) and predicted success rate BTEC Extended Diploma Technical Support 88% (NR 72%).

A member enquired why the National Rates were referred to because they were two years out of date. National statistics were not important as comparisons should be made against the College's own yearly performance. Andrew Robson replied that year on year performance is used and the Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality suggested that it would be useful to show both measures on future slides.

### **RESOLVED to note the contents of the presentation**

#### **Area 15 – Leadership and Management**

Andrew Robson updated the Committee on SSA 15: Business. It was noted that the overall success rate is in line with national picture. Work for Area 15 is spread across different areas of the College. Kevin Marston, Head of Group for Business, Leadership and Management gave a presentation.

AAT: this is a professional accountancy qualification which has a history of underperformance. Poor course management led to disgruntled learners, who are all professional people in employment. The Committee noted that Chris Andreou, Curriculum Operations Manager for Leadership and Management/Business has focused on finding out the issues relating to poor performance and dissatisfied learners. Feedback from learners and impromptu observations on the quality of teaching led to a number of associates being removed and replaced. A coaching and mentoring programme is now in place managed by a full-time member of staff. Learners are now reporting a higher level of satisfaction; however, the programme will be halted at the end of the year if the trend has not been reversed. Predictions on results are not good but they are improving on previous years.

AAT 4 2010/2011 Success 0% (34%\*) with a prediction for 2011/2012 of 35%

AAT 3 2010/2011 Success 68% (70% NR) with a prediction for 2011/2012 of 68%

AAT 2 2010/2011 Success 56% (71% NR) with a prediction for 2011/2012 of 73%

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It was noted that in terms of the National Diploma in Business, students transferred onto the Single Award from other programmes and undertook this programme as an additionality.

AS Law has issues around success rate, retention and achievement. Areas for improvement are: increased monitoring of performance e.g. work scrutiny, performance reviews; if no improvement, review curriculum offer. AS Law current retention is 7 from 8 starts, A2 Law current retention is 3 from 3 starts and these students have already passed and are now working to improve their grades.

CMI Level 5 is a customised programme for employers, requiring a change of learning aims for many learners; scheduling and timeliness of the process need to be improved. A solution would be to extend the course length.

In response to a question from a member on whether the College's results were accessible to prospective students and whether that could result in the College losing potential learners to other colleges the Deputy Principal indicated that the information was not used for marketing purposes. She commented that there are great concerns that articulate professional people are unhappy with the quality of provision offered by the College which could be very damaging in terms of reputation. Another member enquired whether accountancy firms would be able to provide statistics on the levels of attainment at other colleges. The Chair commented that a large number of students were doing the AAT course despite it being poor. Kevin Marston indicated that one of the long-term aims was to increase the number of students, currently 168 learners but 200 are expected next year. There is a disparity of numbers who succeed but not how many students on the course.

### **RESOLVED to note the contents of the presentation**

The Chair commented that it would be good to hear about some different Areas at the next meeting in June 2012. He expressed his thanks to the staff who had given the presentations.

## **6. A level progress report**

The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality introduced a report updating the Committee on progress and performance within the A level Academy. This followed the underperformance in this area identified at the end of 2010/2011. The Committee had requested that A level provision in the College be kept under review and supported the Executive decision to seek partnership arrangements which would result in quality improvement.

Alongside a focus upon strong IAG and selection processes, the A level Academy team has worked with learners to drive up exam results and success rates and these efforts have had a tangible impact on learner performance. The outturn results for 2011/2012 showed AS retention up 12% to 90% (3% above National Average), A2 retention up 1% to 94% which equalled the National Average; AS achievement up 18% to 87% (7% above National Average) and A2 achievement up 10% to 96% (2% below National Average of 98% - 2 failures in total); AS success rates up 25% to 79% (7% above National Average) and A2 success rates up 9% to 90% (1% above National Average); AS High Grades up 6% to 21% just missing the National Average of 23% (there were no Y12 re-sit opportunities which may have improved this figure) and A2 High Grades up 12% to 37% (4% above National Average).

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The College's partnership pilot with Cardinal Hume Catholic School was launched in September 2011 with around 50 learners from Gateshead College undertaking AS classes there. All Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Maths and Further Maths learning at AS level are delivered in the School's facilities by their staff. Care was taken to seek learner feedback early in the process and this is updated regularly to ensure that any issues are handled in a timely manner. Feedback is generally good and the School has commented favourably about the management of the partnership.

The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality informed the Committee that the performance of the A level Academy had significantly improved at the end of the last academic year. The Academy is now performing at a much higher level; predictions for this year suggest that success rates will also be high. The performance of the team continues to be closely monitored.

The Chair commented that the improvements in A level results were an encouraging story for the College.

### **RESOLVED to note the contents of the report**

## **7. Entrepreneurial College**

The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality gave an oral report and presentation updating the Committee on the Entrepreneurial College. She explained that the aims of an Entrepreneurial College were to transform the way learning is delivered, focus on outcomes, and curriculum modernisation to secure the future of Gateshead College. A series of 8 curriculum pilots is planned which will involve a mixture of levels, age groups and disciplines. Progress will be monitored via video case studies, written case studies and success rates. The Learner Voice will be listened to via learner surveys, video interviews and Teaching and Learning observations.

Recent activities included 60 groups of learners from Gateshead College who had participated in 'Market Makers' developing products to take to market and in competition with other colleges. Gateshead College was successful in winning the competition with a 'Wag Bag' which is designed to carry the kit required by a pet dog on holiday. It was noted that students will be attending a four day Entrepreneurial Event in Liverpool at which Richard Branson will be a keynote speaker in the coming week. An update on the event will be given at the next meeting of the Academic Standards Committee on 20 June 2012.

The Chair commented that it was great to see real examples of an Entrepreneurial College in action and how the students were enjoying it. A member indicated that it would be better to see students gaining employment. Another member advised the Committee that from September 2012 it will be a requirement that a key information set for all HEFCE funded courses including details of success rates and employment rates is included on the College website. This will include details of how many students are employed 6 months or 18 months after the end of the course. The Chair indicated that the Entrepreneurial College would give opportunities for all students at all levels and ages.

### **RESOLVED to note the contents of the presentation**

## **8. Attendance and Retention Monitoring**

The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality introduced a report which updated the Committee on current levels of learner retention and attendance and showed how current levels compare with previous years. The report included details of student attendance by age group and overall for 2008/2009, 2009/2010, 2010/2011 and 2011/2012 to March

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2012. It also included details of student retention over the same period. It was noted that the results show an improvement on the previous year's data both in terms of retention and attendance.

Considering various aspects of the report in detail members noted that attendance overall is currently 87% which is an increase of 1% on the previous year; retention overall is currently 94% which is an increase of 3% on the previous year. Members indicated that the improvements, particularly in retention were pleasing and they hoped that the improvement would be sustained.

**RESOLVED to note the contents of the report**

**9. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

**10. Date of the next meeting**

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 20 June 2012.