

ACADEMIC STANDARDS COMMITTEE



WEDNESDAY 20 NOVEMBER 2013

GATESHEAD COLLEGE

Report: Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 25
September 2013

Author: Clerk

Action: Approve

Status: Open

Present: David Mitchell (Chair)
Keith Cann Evans
Tom Cantwell
Judith Doyle
Gail Etherington
Darren Heathcote
Mark Taylor

In attendance: Gillian Forrester
John Gray
Gwyneth Jones
Emma Moody (Clerk)
Tim Poolan
Andrew Robson
Mark Thompson

1. Welcome/Apologies

David Mitchell welcomed everyone to the meeting. He explained that there were now two vacancies on the Committee as Allan Steele had retired from the Board in June 2013 and Vivien Shipley had resigned a few weeks ago. The Clerk indicated that these vacancies would be reported to the Governance and Search Committee meeting taking place next week.

2. Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 19 June 2013

The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 19 June were accepted as a true record.

The Chair commented on the reference that 'the College is looking to explore a sharing of best practice with Middlesbrough College' mentioned on page 2 under A-Level and GCSE Provision. He informed the Committee that the Board of Governors had agreed for Gateshead College to enter into a federation type of arrangement with Middlesbrough College at a Special Board Meeting on Thursday 19 September 2013. He assured members that this arrangement would not affect the identity and sovereignty of Gateshead College and indicated that it would bring possible benefits to both colleges.

The Principal advised that Work Based Learning Reports would continue to be presented to the Committee. The Chair advised that Work Based Learning would be covered at the next meeting on 20 November 2013 and that there was a Teaching & Learning Report on today's agenda.

3. Matters Arising

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

4. College Performance Report

The Principal introduced a report on Performance Monitoring and explained that it followed the format which Governors had found useful in previous reports. The focus was on the likely outturn figure for 2012/13. Predicted data was aligned and there were 20 working days to close off the data; there was a significant amount of data on the system.

Andrew Robson, Strategy Manager: Quality & Performance said that the report had been produced in a standard format. The purpose of the report is to provide members of the Committee with information that will allow them to monitor the quality of the learning experience provided for students on publically funded college-based courses. The findings table summarises overall predictions and compares to National Rate and over three years.

Predictions showed that Success Rates for each category and age group are forecast to be above the most recently available National Rates with the exception of Long Level 3 19+ provision. One area has gone up a little bit in terms of predictions since the figures produced in June 2013. The 2012/2013 Predicted Success Rate for Long Level 3 19+ was 76% but had now increased to 79%. Poor retention on the HEFC programme (an HE Access course) impacts significantly upon this area. Changes are proposed for this programme in 2013/14.

A member enquired whether extra numbers would impinge on the College's performance. The Principal replied that the College had about 150 more 16-18 learners and they had looked carefully at resource and space for the extra students. If this number was exceeded they would have to look at whether it would impact on the quality.

The final position for A Level and AS Level are included in the report; one or two areas have action plans in place to address problems and iron out areas of inconsistency.

The retention figures shown in the Retention and Achievement Summary are confirmed. The percentages are an indication of the current level of achievement. The report also contains data on each Subject Sector Area and at the back of the document are tables relating to Apprenticeships and other Work Based Provision. These figures showed a very positive picture, particularly in relation to apprenticeships, which showed an improving trend for work based learning. (Andrew Robson highlighted that the graphs at the back of the document were faulty as the lines should not be joined up).

The Chair said that there was a very significant improvement on Success Rates on Long Level 3. He expressed concern about A Levels as there was obviously a worsening performance in some categories. The figures were different to the predictions. Andrew Robson replied that the process was easier for programmes which were 'portfolio based' but harder for A Levels where performance on the day was not as easy to predict. Thorough 'mock tests' needed to be done to a greater extent and more regularly. Areas of greatest weakness are IT A Level and AS Level 3 – Psychology. This year there will be a more vocational route for IT Learners. They were aware of the areas not performing so well and action plans were in place.

The Chair commented that there was work to be done in those areas. The focus was on Retention but now some of the Success Rates were not doing so well.

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A member queried why the RAG rating follows the rule at the start of the report but then does not continue. The Principal explained that only the front table was RAG rated and the end column; the focus was on certain areas – ‘All Long’. The Chair enquired what had been agreed and the Principal replied that from an inspection perspective – 2012/2013 data predicted and inspection data based on 2010/2011/2012, there had been progress as the last inspection had looked at where Gateshead College were in 2010/2011. There were significant improvements but there was still work to be done.

Retention at the end of Year 1 is significantly better than it was in the previous year and there is a strong indication that it will have improved at the end of Year 2. At the end of 2013/2014 there will be an increase further for success of Long Level Programmes.

A Governor enquired whether Andrew Robson was one hundred per cent happy that the percentages contained in the report were accurate (pointing out a discrepancy at SS4). Andrew Robson replied that he would have to check that point.

The Chair commented on the College’s culture and ethos on attendance and wanted to know how the academic year had started with a focus on attendance. The Principal replied that the emphasis on the College was getting people into work. She said that she had got all the staff together in early September 2013 and stressed the importance of putting teaching and learning at the heart of the College. There needed to be an understanding of the importance of attendance and challenging poor attendance. 3,200 students had been added over a period of three days and standards of behaviour and attendance are being looked at. There was a need to be clear putting a mark down on what is expected and teachers being managed to ensure this is happening; staff are clear that there is no debate about this. The Student Governor said that the perception by students and members of staff were of full classes and full attendance. The Principal said that the ‘Code of Conduct – Standards of Behaviour’ were displayed in all classrooms.

RESOLVED to note the contents of this report

5. Self-Assessment Report

The Principal introduced the report on Self-Assessment and explained that it provided an update on changes, developments and progress in relation to improving college self-assessment, in terms of the Self-Assessment process and the resulting documentation. She advised that the draft Self-Assessment Report will be presented at the next meeting of Academic Standards Committee on 20 November 2013.

Andrew Robson, Strategy Manager: Quality & Performance explained that since the last time Ofsted had visited the College in May 2012 there had been a complete revision of the self-assessment process. The process had been made more robust by introducing more rigour and challenge. This had been achieved by beginning the entire process at an earlier point in the college calendar, allowing more time to robustly review and challenge SSA self-assessment reports, allowing more time to check changes are made effectively and allowing the introduction of a formal grading stage where the consistency and robustness of provisional grades is further challenged.

Andrew Robson referred to the table included as an appendix with the report and highlighted the key areas of Self-Assessment improvements which had taken place since the Ofsted Report in May 2012. He advised that an Internal Audit Report on Quality had been completed by Price Waterhouse Coopers in February 2013 and they had recognised that there had been some improvements made in the SAR process. They had made two recommendations which identified other areas to improve which could be built into the 2012/2013 SAR cycle.

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Andrew Robson ran through the actions which had been taken since the Ofsted inspection in May 2012. There were now Weekly Performance Review meetings which identified 'at risk' students and targeted actions directly at them. These meetings also reviewed attendance and other data to identify trends. There had been a re-design of the Course Review and Evaluation process to ensure that every course was more data focused. There had been a re-design of the self-assessment process with an earlier start and additional stages and also a re-design of the data reports using a traffic light system to highlight areas of underperformance. New reports are based on the QSR format which Ofsted use or Pro-Achieve.

Another recommendation made in the Quality report was that the College procured an external 'critical friend' to review in detail the SAR process from start to finish and provide recommendations as to how it can be improved using good practice expectations. They recognised that the College SAR process supported the use of 'critical friends', however none had been used during the self-assessment in 2011/2012 due to the Ofsted visit in May 2012 and changes to the SAR process which were necessitated by this. In April 2013 Critical Friends were engaged to review the SAR process and outcomes and make recommendations. They indicated that 2011/2012 SARs were largely accurate but not sufficiently focused.

An additional 'formal grading' stage has been introduced into the process in September 2013 to check for consistency and provide additional challenge overseen by Senior Management. The focus will be on 500 word summaries for each SSA based on the guidance of a Critical Friend.

The Chair thanked Andrew Robson for his presentation and indicated that the Self-Assessment report would be a focused and succinct document in the future and governors were pleased. He indicated that Curriculum Managers had not sufficiently differentiated for students from different ethnic minority backgrounds. Andrew Robson replied that John Gray, Strategy Manager, Learner & Customer Services, had been involved in a major piece of work collecting data around ethnic origin and gender. 7,000 responses had been received and they were now able to analyse the data. Students had been asked if they thought they would be able to stay until the end of the programme. John Gray advised that work undertaken re: the collection of information had resulted in the College being nominated by Equality North East Awards in October 2013. Gail Etherington, Lead Practitioner – Foundation/LDD/ESOL commented that the work was very interesting; narrowing gaps in achievement re: ethnicity, gender and age.

The Chair asked how the Academic Standards Committee would deal with the Self-Assessment Report and suggested that the next meeting on 20 November 2013 should commence at 3.00pm instead of 4.00pm. He thought it would be valuable if some of the Curriculum Managers could come along to the meeting. The focus should be on areas which needed the most scrutiny and challenge. The Principal agreed there should be an acknowledgement of those areas doing well, but this Committee's time should be spent looking at the areas which require work.

A Governor commented that the Academic Standards Committee was the most important Committee in the College. A full complement for the committee was needed as there were currently two vacancies but this would be addressed by the Governance and Search Committee.

The Chair indicated that he was encouraged by the actions taken to improve the Self-Assessment process.

RESOLVED to note the contents of this report

6. Teaching and Learning Report

Gillian Forrester, Strategy Manager, Teaching and Learning Development, introduced a report which updated the Committee on the developments and improvement strategy in relation to Teaching, Learning and Assessment.

The final position in respect of learner responsiveness has improved since the last report in June 2013 with an increase of good or better judgements from 59% to 63% overall. This is a result of improving grades at re-observation at the end of the year, following a range of interventions to support teachers to improve their performance. Lessons are judged on a “new unannounced process”; what it is really like on the ground for the College’s students.

Additional support needs are also identified at enrolment and through the induction process. Teachers effectively liaise with the Student Support Services team to ensure that appropriate learning support is in place evidenced in the curriculum Course Review and Evaluation documentation.

Care and support for students is strong across the curriculum area. This was supported by feedback from the critical friends review (May 2013). Students report a lot of care and support from teachers.

The College provides a comprehensive advice and guidance service to students through information on the College website and follow up advice and guidance and enrolment events. This is further supported by a comprehensive induction to the College and the learning programme.

Some details are identified in teaching and learning observations on the promotion of Equality and Diversity in lessons and there is much evidence to suggest inclusive learning is taking place.

Progress in respect of eradicating ‘inadequate’ judgements in year has been significant; however, there is still work to be done in this area. The improved performance management process is beginning to have an impact, and will be fully embedded from September 2013.

In terms of strategies for further improvement the Principal has, as part of a newly revised induction programme addressed all new 16-18 students. She has set out her expectations and standards in terms of behaviour, performance, attendance and general attitude. She has also engaged local employers in the process; who have come into college and spoken to students around the importance of attendance and behaviours in the workplace.

The management team continue to evaluate the outcomes of the ‘no notice’ observation procedures introduced at the start of the last academic year. The introduction of the new approach was very much supported by the recent HMI Visit, as a positive move in line with current Ofsted expectations. This new approach did highlight some underperformance within the college.

Individuals who are seen to be underperforming have all been issued with a personalised Action Plan for Improvement which is monitored. Practitioners who have demonstrated a pattern of underperformance have been issued Performance Improvement Plans. These actions are in line with procedures for tackling underperformance in Teaching, Learning and Assessment in the classroom and were revised and updated in May 2013.

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The Teaching and Learning Development Team continue to provide a wide range of CPD support. The College held two Teaching and Learning Development days on 26 and 27 June 2013, this included a Moving On session delivered by external consultant and practising inspector, Janice Crowley. The feedback from this event has been excellent with 97 teachers attending one of four sessions over the two day period.

A new student expectation has been produced, details of which have been shared with Curriculum Operation managers to ensure their support in implementation in the new academic year. The new student expectations have also been communicated within the new Student Handbook for September 2013.

In the last academic year, the use of 'Forskills software' was introduced as a pilot project to allow the College to undertake detailed initial and diagnostic assessment of literacy and numeracy. This software system has been used throughout the year to monitor individual distance travelled. Final year evaluations show that the use of the system has been inconsistent across the College. There is some evidence of very good practice in some areas and some areas where focus on this key aspect of performance has been insufficient to see acceptable progress. The College has revised its approach to the use of the Forskills software package this academic year and a very clear message about consistent use across the College has already been communicated to staff.

A central team of Maths and English specialists has been recruited to the College to deliver bespoke sessions to develop core skills and to prepare students for suitable qualifications. A team of specialist practitioners have been recruited over the summer period and a team of 10 new teachers have been put in place for the new academic year. The central team will provide support to all staff within the College to achieve more successful outcomes for students for Maths and English including delivery of GCSE and functional skills programmes of learning. The Chair queried if having these specialists would lead to a risk of having only a few specialists who were relied on in these areas. Gail Etherington said that there was a clear expectation that this would not happen. Staff knew that the key focus was on these areas, as they were areas that OFSTED would be looking at.

The College continues to provide high quality initial teacher training opportunities for all staff new to the profession and college. This curriculum area continues to be led by the Strategy Manager, Teaching and Learning Development to ensure outstanding practice and a clear link between provision for new and existing teachers.

The Chair concluded that it was a comprehensive report covering a lot of areas; real students and real members of staff. A Governor referred to the 97 teachers who had attended the Teaching and Learning Development days in June 2013 and asked what proportion of staff this equated to. The Principal replied that this was equivalent of two-thirds of teachers. Gillian Forrester indicated that she wished she had said the development days were compulsory. The teaching and learning was available on video and also on CPD 'online'.

The Principal commented that even though Teaching and Learning had been graded as 3 Teaching Support was grade 1. Darren Heathcote, John Gray, Gillian Forrester, Andrew Robson and Tim Poolan have been working together as one team which has been beneficial.

[discussion redacted]

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Gillian Forrester advised that teachers with inadequate performance would be re-observed within one month if they were graded as 4. She said that teachers would be given every opportunity to improve their performance. The Chair said that he welcomed Curriculum Managers having the opportunity to be pro-actively walking around and picking up on problems early rather than not.

The Chair suggested that Teaching and Learning as part of the SAR process should be discussed at the next meeting. *Gillian Forrester indicated that she would provide a brief update.*

RESOLVED to note the contents of this report

7. Ofsted Supportive Visit Feedback

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8. Internal Audit Reports

The Principal introduced two Internal Audit Reports on Quality and Learner Engagement which had had been completed by Price Waterhouse Coopers and which had been signed off by the Audit Committee at the meeting in July 2013.

The Chair referred to the one recommendation identified in the Learner Engagement report completed in June 2013 which said that learner engagement should be discussed at each Academic Standards Committee meeting; he said he was content that this was being done. Auditors had looked through the Board and Committee minutes and found that student governors had not said anything but this would be addressed this year.

As regards the Quality report completed in February 2013, the Chair advised that guidance notes for Self-Assessment had been updated. A number of Subject Sector Areas (SSA) had been presented at this Committee but some areas had not been presented at all. He did not want the Committee to cover every single SSA at the meeting in November 2013. The College SAR process had supported the use of the 'critical friends' as recommended in the report.

9. Any Other Business

There were no items for discussion.

10. Date of Next Meeting

The Chair indicated that additional time would be needed at the next meeting to discuss the Self-Assessment Report 2012/2013 and suggested bringing forward the start time to 3.00pm.

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 20 November 2013 at 3.00pm.