

ACADEMIC STANDARDS COMMITTEE



WEDNESDAY 25 SEPTEMBER 2013

GATESHEAD COLLEGE

Report: Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 19 June
2013

Author: Clerk

Action: Approve

Status: Open

Present: David Mitchell (Chair)
Gail Etherington
Darren Heathcote
Vivien Shipley
Allan Steele
Richard Thorold

In attendance: Tracy Ashcroft
Judith Doyle
Gillian Forrester
John Gray
Gwyneth Jones
Kevin Marston
Angela O'Reilly
Tim Poolan
Andrew Robson
Clare Sample (Clerk)
Kevin Smith

1. Welcome/Apologies

David Mitchell welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies for absence were received from Keith Cann-Evans, Tom Cantwell and Mark Taylor.

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 declarations of interests.

2. Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 17 April 2013

Following two amendments, the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 17 April were accepted as a true record.

Matters Arising

Members were informed that two presentations from the meeting on Wednesday 17 April had been circulated with this month's papers. Members were reminded that if presentations were to be used in meetings they should be circulated prior to the meeting in future.

3. Performance Report

Judith Doyle, the Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality presented a Performance Monitoring Report to the Committee. She explained that the data had been put together in a slightly different way. Whilst in the past predictions had been cautious, in the last few weeks many students had completed their work and the data is almost a true reflection of what the final picture will be. The achievement rate this year is slightly higher than last year. There has been a sustained increase in long level success rates. 'All Long' 16-18 rates are predicted to rise from 81% to 85%. LL1 is predicted to rise from 84.8% to 91%. LL3 is predicted to be 82% against a national rate of 80%; it is the first time in a number of years that LL3 has been above the national rate. 19+ had issues around LL3 mainly around access provision. This is predicted to be 76% which is not as good as the College would want it to be. The report includes a new set of data comparing Retention at the end of year one data (for two year courses) over the years. Most noteworthy is that overall retention at Year 1 has risen to 96% in 2012/13. SSA1 has shown a significant improvement to 96.7% and this is mainly due to the effectiveness of the Management Improvement Strategy.

Following a question from a member, JD confirmed that when the table said 'n/a' this is because the two year course has now been removed. JD explained that this improved figure for end of year one will impact on the LL3 results.

A member asked why the RAG rating only applied to certain courses. The member was reminded that it was agreed at the previous meeting that only 'All Long' courses would have the RAG rating system.

A member said that there had been significant improvement in Learn to Learn and this affects the 'All Very Short' courses. Andrew Robson, Strategy Manager, Quality and Performance, explained that the prediction model does not work so well with the very short courses. The member commented that whilst the results were very good the College would need to be cautious that national rates are going up.

Overall the rate of improvement has increased significantly and the Governors were very encouraged by this.

A-Level and GCSE Provision

It was pointed out that in this table the overall success rate for 16-18 in 2011/12 was in fact 84.6% and not 94.6%. The 16-18 A/AS Level predictions are an improvement on previous years. There are issues around 19+ with success rates predicted to decline significantly to 60% for AS Level. The problems are in certain areas e.g. A Level Law and a decision has been made to withdraw this course. All students currently learning will be able to complete their course.

With GCSE's, 16-18 Maths and English have predicted success rates of 79% for 2012/13, up from 69% in 2011/12, but are still below the national average of 82%. There are similar issues with Maths GCSE at 19+. A member suggested that the College compares itself against all Colleges and not just FE Colleges for GCSE and A Level. She also pointed out that what matters for comparisons with Maths and English is the high grades (i.e. A-C grades) and retention figures and the success rate is not all that important.

JD explained that the majority of 19+ students attend evening classes or part-time day courses. The College is looking to explore a sharing of best practice with Middlesbrough College. Retention in this area is very strong.

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JD explained that part three of the report related to individual SSA's. Following a question from a member, it was confirmed that SSA 11 – Social Sciences included the access provision which is now gone. It was noted that within SSA 12 – Languages, Literature & Culture, 16-18 is only just below the national rate and 19+ is 5% under. Andrew Robson explained that there is a slight improvement on the 16-18 figure and the national rate is particularly high in this area.

The Chair expressed a high level of satisfaction with the way that the data is presented and noted the success and improvement that has already taken place with the figures.

RESOLVED to note the contents of this report

4. Work Based Learning – Presentation of Performance Report

Tracy Ashcroft (TA), Head of Group – Engineering & The Built Environment, agreed to present the report and data as Kevin Lewis, Strategic Leader – Apprenticeships, was unable to attend to the meeting. Tracy explained that she had looked at trend analysis which confirms historical and predicted figures. In the overall summary there was a dip in performance in 2011/12 but the national rates had also dipped in this year. The predicted data is showing a recovery in the majority of areas. Tracy believed there were three main areas that caused this dip:

- 4.1 A growth in numbers for that year.
- 4.2 There was a major issue with Future Strategies – the main employer, Southern Cross, became insolvent and the apprentices working for them were unable to complete their apprenticeships. This provision has now been brought back in-house.
- 4.3 SSA 15 – Business, Administration and Law dropped significantly and this was due to the provision offered by people employed by the RAF who were deployed to places outside England (often in confidence). This will be addressed by utilising the process for recording “breaks in learning”.

This department is still and always has been above the national rate. They are confident that predicted data shows improvements for this year.

Tracy explained that she had put together a further report that afternoon broken down into SSA's, again this data shows a dip in 2011/12. She pointed out that some SSA's only have one learner (hence the figure of 0% in timely in SSA8 – Leisure, Travel and Tourism).

JD said that she was confident that staff knew where the issues were and they have strategies in place already to deal with them.

The Chair asked a question regarding Retail and Commercial. TA said she would need to research this and report back to the Committee.

A member thanked Tracy for her concise, interesting and useful presentation. She commented on the impact around the Plumbing provision. She was also concerned regarding Intermediate 16-18 and Advanced Adults. It was agreed that it would be worth revisiting these areas at future meetings. Following a further question from a member, TA confirmed that the largest numbers of Nissan apprentices feature in the engineering section but they do fit into other SSA's as the College provides many different types of apprentices to Nissan.

A member thanked Tracy for the useful explanation about the background to the figures e.g. the situation with Southern Cross. He found this very helpful in understanding the data. The Chair suggested that in future it would be helpful to have a case study around what causes the downward spikes in the data. He thanked Tracy Ashcroft for stepping in and presenting the report and data on behalf of Kevin Lewis.

RESOLVED to note the contents of this report

5. Critical Friends Review Report

JD explained that the Critical Friends had been brought in during April and May 2013 to provide an external view point. The College wanted a view on whether the strategies were working. They also wanted to highlight any areas of concern. JD felt there was no point in sending the Critical Friends into areas which they knew were already good. She reported that all Critical Friends found that the Intervention Strategies were making an impact. They looked at SSA 5 - Construction, SSA 7 – Hair and Beauty, SSA 9 – Creative and Cultural and SSA 15 – Business, Administration and Law. They carried out teaching observations and also looked at Leadership Management and Self-Assessment. Every Curriculum Manager worked with the Critical Friend even if their area was not under scrutiny. JD was pleased to see that the report includes an honest and open list of issues.

The members were very encouraged by the decision to use Critical Friends and the reports that they have provided. They were interested to know what the managers thought about the experience. It was noted that the managers had come out of this in a very positive light. The reports were recognised as very beneficial and demonstrated good leadership. It was a clear indication that the College had really moved forward. However, there were some common themes emerging.

SSA 5 – Construction Tracy Ashcroft presented a summary of this report. She described it as one of the most beneficial experiences she had had as a manager. She was encouraged that everything that the Critical Friend had unearthed was something that they were already aware of and had strategies in place to deal with. The key focus areas were around SARs, learner tracking, value-added and destinations. Tracy explained that she had been piloting cross-fertilisation of different departments with good profiles. She gave the example of the sports department which has the same profile of student as SSA 5 and they do particularly well. She had invited a staff member from sports to work with them and they had gained new ideas and new approaches. Following these reports she felt that her staff fully understood what ‘good or better learning’ looked like. She has one grade 4 teacher leaving at the end of the month and there are now only two grade 3 teachers in the team. She has introduced a buddy system. The Critical Friend has been back into the College to assist since the report was written.

Tracy has been informed by the Critical Friend that her SAR needs to be more concise. She did a 500 word summary of the SAR with the Critical Friend which she found helpful. The course reviews will also be more concise.

SSA 7 – Health and Beauty Angela O’Reilly, Head of Group, Service Industries and Retail, summarised this report. Her experience with the Critical Friend was slightly different. They talked about the learner journey. The Curriculum Operations Manager was included in the whole process. Overall, it was acknowledged that they had improved over three years particularly in Beauty. Seven observations were completed, two were grade 3 and the remainder were grade 2. It was found that the staff had high expectations; they were motivated; had keen students and there was some good use of E-Learning (but this was also an area for improvement). One weakness was that some of

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the teaching was mechanistic. The lower graded teachers stuck rigidly to their lesson plan even though there were opportunities to enhance learning. There was an issue of consistency with e-ILPs. There is a new system called 'On Track' being developed. In terms of monitoring progress the department now have a system that sits on Moodle and is RAG rated. The team have already had a training session with curriculum leaders, in relation to CREs and SARs about key judgements and they have looked at Ofsted reports for other colleges.

Following a question from a member, Angela confirmed that the department had also shared good practice with other departments. The grade 3 staff have a mentor provided by Gillian Forrester's Teaching and Learning Development team. One of the grade 1 teachers has been videoed and shown to other departments as an example of best practice, including the construction staff.

A member referred to the Literacy & Numeracy Skills section of the report and highlighted that 70 out of 347 learners had achieved a higher Functional Skills Level. She thought this was too few students and this was something which should be returned to at a future meeting.

Another member commented that the report showed that progression was good within the session but not from one level to the next. Angela explained that the Critical Friend was referring to progression into the workplace. She and her team have developed her work placements. It is recognised that they need to be useful and valuable and meaningful to the learner. They need to be linked to the units of teaching but it is also about getting the learners 'work ready' and developing their communication skills and other softer skills. It is recognised that the College salon is still just a simulation and there is no substitution for the real world.

SSA 9 – Creative and Cultural Kevin Smith, Head of Group, Creative and Cultural, presented this report. Kevin reported that he found this an invaluable experience and found the Critical Friend to be very professional. He explained because of the size of SSA 9 they focused on the weaker areas such as Art and Design, Games, Photography and Music Technology. In general terms, the predicted success rates show a significantly improving picture. Three areas were highlighted:-

- 5.1 Teaching and Learning – 55% of the observations were 'good or better'. There were nine observations in total. Only one was a grade 4 and again this was about mechanistic delivery (staff 'playing safe'). Staff needed to be more proactive with the questions they ask. Their Lead Practitioner is outstanding and he has been engaged to work with the grade 3 and 4 teachers. The Curriculum Operations Manager is giving support and coaching. The curriculum teams will lead on learning issues and key issues.
- 5.2 Students' standards and behaviours – It was apparent that certain behaviours and actions are condoned such as lateness, drinking and eating in class, using mobile phones and wearing headphones. It has been made clear to the staff that this will come to a stop in September 2013 and higher standards will be enforced for the forthcoming year.
- 5.3 Quality implementation - This was in relation to how curriculum leaders described their courses compared to the reality.

Many of these issues were known already and there was good guidance provided about actions going forward.

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The Chair commented on the negative student feedback relating to Musical Theatre. Kevin explained that this was due to a forthcoming performance at the time of the visit and students were nervous. This situation has been dealt with. Another member asked what the problem was that had been identified with the Art Room in the Theatre. Kevin explained that it had a glass wall and it is difficult to stick things on to. The other issue is that the Theatre can be split into two which gives flexibility but is not always adequate for the purpose.

Kevin explained that the Critical Friend has already been back to the College to assist. JD also explained that she has already tasked the whole College with setting higher standards for students. The intention is to lead from the top. They will tighten up the induction and ask employers to come in and explain to students what is expected in the workplace, the intention being that punctuality and respect for others will be instilled into the College to make better students in the workplace.

SSA 15 – Business, Administration and Law Kevin Marston, Head of Group, Business & Technology presented this report. This area had been graded 4 last year and Kevin explained that he wanted to approach it to see whether the QIP is having the effect he had hoped for. The data is showing a marked improvement. The information in the SAR is accurate but lacks some analytical data. Kevin also wanted honest feedback from the Critical Friend and to test the management in this area. One of the significant improvements was the appointment of a new Curriculum Manager with focus. A number of underlying issues came out of the exercise, the Critical Friend identified some “comfy sessions” where attendance was not challenged. They need to adopt a more business-like approach. Kevin has been working with local employers and inviting them to come in with the intention of providing students with business acumen.

One of the Critical Friend’s observations was that the department has been implementing all of the strategies and if this continues the department should be a strong grade 3 by the end of the year, hopefully becoming a grade 2 the year after.

Work Based Learning – Tracy Ashcroft presented this report. The Critical Friend not only visited the students but also many employers and all of the College sites. There were a lot of very positive comments. The issues raised were as follows:-

- The accuracy of the SARs was an issue. One person tended to own the SAR and there was not enough input from others. This has now changed.
- Need greater focus on teaching, learning and assessment as part of learner tracking and review process.
- There needs to be more monitoring of apprenticeships. Reviews need to be more challenging. A new progress management system is to be introduced.
- There needs to be more emphasis on equality and diversity. Kevin Lewis is going to sit on the board of Equality North East.

JD suggested that department heads should bring an update to meetings in the future. One of the members commented that there were common threads across the departments e.g. more focused SARs, a really strong focus on teaching and learning, issues re attendance and punctuality and all teachers having high standards regarding behaviour. Another member agreed with these areas and in addition would include progress, value-added and English and Maths.

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JD explained that, in relation to SARs, the Critical Friends agreed in the main with the College's judgements, the issue was that they were too wordy. The SARs need to be sharper. The plan is to work with Middlesbrough College when reviewing the SARs before the Governors get to see them. The Chair requested a short report on how the College was managing the SAR process for the September 2013 meeting and for the Board.

RESOLVED to note the contents of this report

6. Teaching and Learning Update Report

JD explained that this report was about standards of Teaching, Learning and Assessment and how the College goes about improving them. Gillian Forrester, Strategy Manager, Teaching and Learning Development explained that the report had been written to give the Governors a flavour of the journey that had taken place since the Ofsted inspection in 2012. One of the main changes has been the internal observation process. A major change was moving to unannounced observations this year. This was a brave move but it gives a true flavour of day to day teaching rather than teachers putting on their best performance. 163 internal observations have been undertaken this year. The fact that they are unannounced observations in itself creates the need for more re-observations which increases the number. The fact that the wording for grade 3 has changed means that the College has changed the way that it performance manages underperforming staff and this in itself also creates extra work. The new system provides a more accurate measure but the real benefit is in what happens afterwards. Staff are provided with very individual support.

The biggest shift is to the accountability of all department heads and the use of Curriculum Operations Managers. It is evident that they now have a better understanding and this will be key when Ofsted next visit the College.

GF explained that the system highlights many issues that they already knew about. She was very proud of the fact that 10 paired observations had been carried out with 10 paired grades. They are still looking for grades to improve in September 2013.

One member indicated that she was very reassured that there is a good understanding of what is required but thought that 10% of teachers being grade 4 was still too high. The Chair enquired whether the strategy was still 'fit for purpose' a year on and would it need revisiting. GF responded that the Critical Friends have been very supportive of the strategy but said that the College needed to keep going with it, be patient and the results would come.

Another member commented that the Committee had heard about Teaching and Learning but it had not heard much about Assessment. GF said that Assessment was picked up through teaching and learning observations. The observers also look at marking and constructive feedback given to students. The observations are not just about the teacher's performance, it is also about timetabling and the suitability of the rooms as this all goes towards good teaching.

The Chair said that at the next meeting he would like a report on the wider teaching and learning strategy and not just on teaching and learning observations.

RESOLVED to note the contents of this report

7. Attendance Report

Judith Doyle presented the report on Attendance. She explained that the College are not making as much improvement as they had hoped. There is a decline in attendance. It is evident that the decline is national as more students are now learning outside of the classroom. It is not the whole reason but it is certainly a factor in the decline. She acknowledged that the College need to keep working on this because there has not been enough improvement so far.

The Chair commented that he hoped that the cultural change towards high standards would help in this area. He agreed with JD that this was not where the College wanted to be and there was still the need for improvement.

JD said that the minimum expectation of attendance will be increasing to 92% and the Governors were all in support of this move. A member acknowledged that it was quite a big development issue for staff to raise standards by September 2013.

RESOLVED to note the contents of this report

8. Internal Audit Reports

It was agreed that the Internal Audit Reports on Quality and Learner Responsiveness would be reviewed at the next meeting in September 2013.

9. Any Other Business

There were no items for discussion.

The Chair thanked all of the staff for all of their help throughout the year.

The Chair thanked Richard Thorold for all of his help and support to the Committee as he is due to retire from the College on 31 July 2013.

The Chair also thanked Allan Steele for his contribution over the 24 years that he has been associated with the College. Allan is due to stand down as a Governor at the end of June 2013.

10. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 25 September 2013 at 4.00pm.