



CURRICULUM AND QUALITY STANDARDS COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 24 FEBRUARY 2021

Report: Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 3 December 2020
Author: Clerk
Action: Approve
Status: Open

Present: David Mitchell (Chair)
Andy Cole (Interim Principal / CEO)
John Hogg
Sarah Stewart

In attendance: Deni Chambers
John Deary
John Gray
Helen Hepple
Ivan Jepson
Kevin Marston
Keith Oxspring
Andrew Robson
Suzanne Slater
Chris Toon
Richard Ward
Emma Moody (Clerk)
Suzanne Clark (Minutes)

CQ/15 Welcome / Apologies / Conflicts of Interest

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received from Aneela Ali and Sarah McBean.

There were no conflicts of interest declared at this stage. Members were reminded to declare any conflicts that arose during the meeting.

CQ/16 Minutes of the last meeting dated 14 October 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 14 October 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

CQ/17 Matters Arising

The Clerk confirmed that she had followed up on the action relating to a lack of commentary in the minutes around the Higher Education, T/328, and advised that as outlined, this was due to no follow up questions being asked and the level of detail covered within the report. Discussion had already taken place on pertinent issues in the preceding discussion. A response was provided to the Chair by email who was satisfied.

The Clerk confirmed that she would work with the Interim Principal / CEO and Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality on the timing for presentation of the curriculum plan highlighting that the Board's winter conference is due to take place in February.

The Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality advised that the threshold to be able to claim additional in-year funding is around 20% so the College would have needed growth of approximately 500 full-time learners in order to approach the ESFA.

It was confirmed that the data table presented as part of the Performance Update at the last meeting has been updated and is included in the self-assessment report.

CQ/18 Self Assessment Report – Process Overview

The Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality presented a report outlining the self-assessment process.

It was confirmed that the process starts in March and runs through April and May to produce course specific review and evaluation. This feeds into an area self-assessment report which then builds up into the cross-college report. The Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality noted the efforts of Assistant Principal, Tracy Foreman, in undertaking a large amount of the work involved in putting the report together. The Chair commented on the consistency of style of the report and also expressed his appreciation for the work undertaken by the report author.

The report was noted.

CQ/19 Education Programmes for Young People

The report was presented by John Deary, Assistant Principal

John Hogg joined the meeting at 9.40am.

The Chair commented that he felt the report on this area was very strong and that many strengths were evident which is very pleasing as this is a large proportion of the College's activity. A member highlighted that there are some weaknesses that are sector wide. Some previous research showed a correlation between teachers who focus on English skills and their own skills and asked whether there is potential to introduce staff development opportunities to address. The Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality advised that there is a requirement for all delivery staff to have at least L2 maths and English. There is a strategy in place for the development of maths and English but the identified improvements required in this area were not possible to implement during the lockdown period. The member felt this approach was a good one recognising the need to have a sensitive focus on individuals, and was encouraged by the committee.

A member echoed the earlier comments that the report was very strong with many strengths including links with employers and improvements in success rates. Focusing on the identified weaknesses which she felt colleagues should be able to tackle in a straight forward way, the member asked whether the area would be judged to be outstanding. The Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality advised that the area was very close to outstanding during the previous Ofsted inspection. The pandemic has had an impact on the ability to make improvements where weaknesses have been identified. It is a very strong area and

weaknesses need to be addressed. The member was interested in whether it was reasonable to set an expectation that they would be looking for this area to move to outstanding in the coming months.

The Chair questioned the statement made within the report about not all learners being aware of enrichment opportunities and asked whether the College is still offering enrichment opportunities. The Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality advised that due to COVID it has not been possible to roll out the level of enrichment he would have wanted. The College has a very strong sport academy and this has been affected although less so than grass roots sport. It had been hoped to roll out a performing arts academy programme but this has been problematic with COVID restrictions. The College is looking to expand the programme where possible. One of the Assistant Principal's advised that staff have many excellent ideas for enrichment but due to social bubbles and restrictions on the mixing of groups this has been difficult to implement thus far. The Director of Student Experience reported that the College has recently begun welcoming back guest speakers using a virtual platform. The Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality concluded that there have been some college wide events including music busker events at the Baltic Campus and these were managed in a way that made them COVID secure. Other opportunities would be explored.

The Committee noted the grade 2, good, rating and approved a recommendation for consideration at the Board.

CQ/20 Apprenticeships

The report was presented by Suzanne Slater, Assistant Principal.

The Chair commented that he recognises the strengths identified within the report and he felt that there were some good outcomes for apprentices. He felt it was clear that the College sets high expectations and that students feel safe which is assuring and indicated that the comments made reflect very much the feedback from Ofsted following the last inspection. The Chair asked what progress has been made since the inspection and what needed to happen for the area to be judged to be good. The Assistant Principal advised that there is a piece of work required to embed the revised systems and processes put in place. There is also work required around culture and some performance management is felt to be necessary to ensure people were operating at the required level. The Assistant Principal confirmed that she hoped that the self-assessment report for 2020/21 would be presented at grade 2 for this area. The Chair was encouraged by this and asked when an Ofsted visit is likely to take place. The Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality indicated that recent communications suggest that Ofsted will commence monitoring visits in the new year. The College is due to have a 2 day monitoring visit and he would expect this to happen prior to Easter with a full inspection as quickly as Ofsted are able to, possibly in the summer term. The Chair stressed the need to be able to demonstrate good and consistent progress around apprenticeships when re-inspected.

A member commented that he was reassured by the response given by the Assistant Principal around the cultural piece of work required as he felt there is a definite cultural threat and some management of this is needed. He commented that he felt the grade was appropriate indicating that weaknesses need to be addressed gradually and this will take time. The evidence presented suggests that the area is moving in the right direction. The Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality indicated that there has been a very definite shift in this area and apprenticeship standards are far more rigorous than they were meaning that trainer assessors are working in more of a teaching role than the previously. Work is taking place with staff to address this shift. The Interim Principal / CEO reinforced the comments made and outlined that apprenticeships are always the biggest and most difficult area for quality improvement, sometimes due to the length of the programme. Ofsted will be starting to inspect in the new year but will have a backlog in the system. The College needs to be prepared for a monitoring visit in the next term and potentially re-inspection in the summer term but it was acknowledged that this may not happen until 2021/22.

A member commented that as a college which takes pride on providing learners with the employment edge and having strong relationships with employers she felt it was an anomaly that apprenticeship provision doesn't perform as well as education and training programmes. She felt that this was a critical area for improvement and that high standards should be set. She added that for this area not to achieve a good rating for 2020/21 would be very difficult to accept. Colleagues need to maintain the emphasis and momentum on improvement activity currently taking place.

The Director of Business Development advised that it has been somewhat of a challenge to get employers to engage with the work taking place around culture. This work has an impact on the way the employers are used to working with delivery staff. He recognised that this can be frustrating and require a lot of chasing highlighted that the cultural changes required are not just in College but with partners.

The Clerk asked whether, in the spirit of collaboration, the College has been able to take any learning from other organisations who do this area of work well. The Assistant Principal advised that she has recently been working with New College Durham. There has been a lot of sharing of information. The College's journey around systems and processes has been shared and they were very impressed by this. It was recognised that they are in a stronger position culturally. Assistant Principals are working together and providing support to implement stronger processes and systems and bring staff on board with these changes. The Chair indicated that the team have the support of governors who have a desire to improve and in due course achieve a grade 2. The Chair asked for an update on apprenticeships at the next meeting.

Action: Report on apprenticeships to be provided at the meeting in February 2021.

The Committee noted the grade 3, requires improvement, rating and approved a recommendation for consideration at the Board.

CQ/21 Provision for Learners with High Needs

The report was presented by Helen Hepple, Assistant Principal.

The Chair commented that he was in no doubt that this is a very strong area. He was very pleased to see feedback from learners about how well learners are supported. The Chair asked about behaviour management strategies and whether the growing complexity was being impacted on by COVID. Does the College need to get external advice and support on behaviour management to manage these learners. The Assistant Principal advised that the College will be looking to deliver of a programme around managing challenging behaviour and will be looking at the range of training opportunities available. The identification of individual learning needs is improving. A range of programmes will be looked at dependent on the needs of learners. The Chair felt that external advice may be useful, particularly in relation to autism, and encouraged the team to look beyond the College's resources.

A member asked, given the recent tough decisions made in relation to restructuring the workforce, is there adequate support services for counselling and other support. The Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality advised that additional support workers have been recruited as it was identified that there are more learners who require support. The College also has a tier 2 mental health nurse working with learners. The member was assured by this response. The Director of Student Experience added that following the restructure the manager for this area now has responsibility for curriculum delivery staff and learner support and this is felt to have been a significant improvement.

Another member commented that this is an area where the college performs well and she would like to understand how performance in this area is appreciated by other agencies the College works with. The Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality advised that the College is well known for its provision in this area and contributes to a national forum. Many referrals are received as the College is recognised for getting these young people into work. Funding

for this provision is complex. The Chair indicated that he is also the Chair of Governors at a local special school who are currently having new school built in Gateshead. He advised that he is very much looking forward to when the children can visit the College and the building of a positive working relationship. The Chair recognised the positive results for the learners in this area.

The Committee noted the grade 1, outstanding, rating and approved a recommendation for consideration at the Board.

CQ/22 Adult Learning Programmes

The report was presented by Deni Chambers, Assistant Principal.

The Chair felt that this was also a particularly strong area. A member recognised the risk around AEB in relation to this provision. This is a risk across the sector and the member felt that everyone needed to be cognisant on the element of uncertainty. It is an area being closely scrutinised by the government in terms of finance. He felt that the judgement was accurate. The Interim Finance Director asked whether subcontracted activity was included within the report. The Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality confirmed that SORA have contributed to the report and their success rates in relation to AEB are over 95%.

The Interim Principal / CEO indicated that adult education provision will differ significantly across the sector and suggested that the narrative in the report be strengthened or that this could be captured within the strengths and weaknesses. He also made reference to the achievement rates in the report stating that he was interested in how this compares with the same provision type in other colleges. The Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality advised that the tables included articulate that in almost all areas rates are above national rate. He agreed that the narrative could be updated to reflect and articulate the impact COVID has had on adult learners.

A member highlighted the element of uncertainty currently in the sector which will further be exacerbated by the economic downturn. She felt that progress into employment will likely be more difficult and asked how the College can ensure that it is best placed to respond to the challenges and opportunities that this may bring. The Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality advised that historically the College has worked with INTU on its sector based retail academy where there will be a definite impact. Construction and digital sectors are really strong and they now want to provide short sector-based academy programmes. The College is well placed to deliver this. The College can find people to fill vacancies and this is now less challenging than in was prior to lockdown due to the downturn. The College will create programmes to give people the tools and techniques to work in sectors where there is a need. The Assistant Principal advised that the team are currently looking at what needs to happen in year by way of curriculum intent sessions which review opportunities for those whose skills need to be broadened. There are also bootcamps for securing appointments onto apprenticeships vacancies and this work is constantly evolving. The member was very encouraged by the response given recognising that it is a very challenging time but there may also be some opportunities.

The Clerk asked whether the response to COVID has had an impact on adult learners questioning whether adults are now back in College and able to fully engage. The Assistant Principal confirmed that there were challenges that impacted on the latter part of the previous year. The College is now better informed and the team have been able to put mechanisms in place to give learners better access to provision. The Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality added that there was a very strong start in subcontracting work. The College was oversubscribed for Access to HE programmes and there is also a very strong demand for ESOL courses. Adults are responding very well to a blended learning approach.

The Chair recognised the strengths and challenges in this area indicated that he was very encouraged for the future.

The Committee noted the grade 1, outstanding, rating and approved a recommendation for consideration at the Board.

CQ/23 Quality of Education

The report was presented by Andrew Robson, Assistant Principal.

The Chair commented that this was a very broad reaching judgement area. He felt that the proposed good grade was a fair reflection and requested clarification on the impact on quality of the College's financial position. The Assistant Principal confirmed that at the previous inspection, Ofsted had identified the financial position as a risk to the quality of provision. He advised that quality has not been impacted on at this point in time indicating that the team will continue to work hard to avoid any impact on quality despite financial recovery ongoing. Another member stated that when the College does receive a further visit or inspection this could be a real opportunity to show how the challenges have been overcome and confirm that there has not been a decline in quality. Other members were very much in agreement with this view and commended the staff for maintaining this.

In response to a further question from the Chair, the Assistant Principal advised that HR provision goes through an approval process where challenge is given to ensure that it is appropriate. The Chair indicated that when considering HE provision the College should look at opportunities for partnership or collaboration with other providers.

The Committee noted the grade 2, good, rating and approved a recommendation for consideration at the Board.

CQ/24 Behaviour and Attitudes

The report was presented by the Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality.

The Director of Student Experience outlined changes being made to the student disciplinary system where staff would be asked to provide information on what steps they have taken to challenge student behaviour rather than simply submitting a concern for someone else to deal with. The new system that will be launched also includes a change whereby Heads of Department are asked to assign appropriate staff to manage concerns as this is not always best placed for it to be the curriculum leader.

The Chair indicated that there is a general assumption that young people are blasé around COVID restrictions and asked whether there are any particular challenges in this area. CT advised that continuous reinforcement is taking place, learners are constantly reminded about face coverings and social distancing but in the main learners are responding positively. One of the Assistant Principals commented that the team were expecting more challenge than that actually being presented. Reinforcement is taking place in PSD sessions with learners. The Interim Principal / CEO echoed these statements and advised that where challenge is required there is a mature relationship and the challenge is accepted. He felt that this is symptomatic of other positive relationships in college.

The Committee noted the grade 2, good, rating and approved a recommendation for consideration at the Board.

CQ/25 Personal Development

The report was presented by Kevin Marston, Assistant Principal.

John Hogg left the meeting at 11.00am.

The Chair commented that he felt there were many strengths identified. The Chair asked how local risks are managed. The Director of Student Experience indicated that at the previous inspection, Ofsted commented that learners were not aware of local threats and

made reference specifically to county lines. Discussions have taken place with Northumbria Police and the College conducted a survey of learners. County lines was not felt to be an area of concern for this area of the UK. Work has been undertaken with curriculum colleagues to focus on how information on local threats can be delivered to learners. The Assistant Principal added that College is also working with local agencies and building this valuable intelligence into PSD sessions. The Director of Student Experience indicated that he is also sharing information on national threats with staff and asking that this is shared more widely when necessary. The Head of Quality Improvement outlined that staff development activities are planned for January 2021 and that these key themes will be included. The Chair endorsed the feedback from the Director of Student Experience indicating that he also receives these regular updates. The Interim Principal / CEO advised that he is also kept very well informed about any areas of concern and the College's management of this is very strong.

The Committee noted the grade 2, good, rating and approved a recommendation for consideration at the Board.

CQ/26 Leadership and Management

The report was presented by the Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality.

A member commented that she accepted the proposed grade and understands the reasons for this but she also recognised that over the last year strong and committed leadership and management has been demonstrated, citing the work to date on the recovery plan. She recognised that there is still work to do but that a significant amount of work had already been undertaken.

The Clerk suggested that the report should demonstrate humility and at this point in time felt the grade to be realistic, but the picture was definitely improving. There is work planned over the next 9 months to ensure governance is further strengthened and permanent leadership is secured. This could be added into the narrative. The Clerk stated that she would be interested to know whether College communication is adequate and whether College staff know about improvements in governance undertaken. The Interim Principal / CEO felt that there was certainly work to be done with staff which is difficult currently due to remote working and an inability to bring staff together. He recognised that there was more that can be done around updating staff so that they really understand the key messages including via roadshows indicating that it may be appropriate to include governors in these. He was keen to stress that the self-assessment report ended on 31 July 2020 and the likely full impact of actions taken will be seen in the 2020/21 report. He indicated that he is very interested in the quality improvement plan and would like to an action around better communication between leaders and managers and governors.

The Chair very much supported the comments made earlier on how staff have responded and how the leadership team has responded to the challenge and refocused. The Chair asked, if a grade of requires improvement is agreed, how will governors know when the College is back at good. The Interim Principal advised that governors are meeting in February for the winter conference and will look at moving towards building a strategy. He felt that review of the quality improvement plan would be a useful topic for inclusion. The Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality indicated that it was on the last day of the inspection when the future risk to sustainable education came through as a key risk highlighted that had there not been a material uncertainty the judgment may have been different.

The Committee noted the grade 3, requires improvement, rating and approved a recommendation for consideration at the Board.

CQ/27 Grading and Approval of the Self Assessment Report.

The Deputy Principal: Curriculum and Quality requested that the proposed that a grade 3, requires improvement, be agreed for the Self Assessment Report and that it be

recommended for approval at the Board meeting on 9 December 2020. The Interim Principal / CEO advised that the inspection framework includes limiting grades and this should be acknowledged. He felt that at this point in time, although regrettable, the proposed judgement was correct. A member recognised that this report was for the period up until 31 July 2020 at which point there was still work to be done. She felt that whilst the judgement should be accepted there should also be confidence that the position can change over the coming months and this committee should continue to monitor that. The Chair recognised the fundamental change since inspection and felt that this should be congratulated. The Interim Principal / CEO indicated that narrative around the journey since July 2020 should be added to the QIP. In the lead-up to inspection the College would be well placed to providing an in-year update which would reflect a higher grade profile. The Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality confirmed that improvement plans are in place to address any weaknesses and are reviewed on a weekly basis.

The Clerk confirmed that the report will go to the Board on 9 December 2020 for approval where the Chair and the Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality will be asked to provide a summary. The Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality indicated that following approval, and prior to 31 December 2020, the report should then be uploaded to the portal to be shared with Ofsted. The Clerk questioned whether there needs to be a clear message to accompany the report that picks up on the ongoing work and the expectations for the next year. The Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality explained that once uploaded to the portal, reports are reviewed by senior HMIs using a risk-based approach. He did not feel that there are any risks identified that would change the cadence on what will happen. When notification of inspection is received, the College will provide a short summary paper which should clearly set out the material uncertainties and progress made since the previous inspection.

The Chair made reference to the appendices within the report, in particular figure 1. This showed the College's position in the FE sector as being currently 11th. The Assistant Principal confirmed that data for 19/20 was being compared against sector data for 18/19. There is no intelligence currently showing how other colleges have performed. In a non-COVID year it would be expected that would still be in the top ten nationally. The Interim Principal / CEO was supportive of this statement.

The Chair thanked everyone for their work on the self-assessment report.

The Committee noted the overall proposed grade of requires improvement and approved a recommendation for consideration at the Board.

CQ/28 Curriculum and Quality Standards KPIs

The report was presented by the Deputy Principal: Curriculum and Quality.

The Chair questioned whether the KPIs shared are a good way to set out progress and attainment asking what current performance is against these indicators. The proportion of core allocation achieved at 68% is worrying. The Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality indicated that income is received over a period of time and anticipates that this will grow gradually. He added that a longitudinal representation could be included. The Interim Principal / CEO felt that there was a need to develop a monthly profile showing where you would expect profile to be at the point in time of reporting.

The Interim Principal / CEO suggested that the target for 2.11, Proportion of Subcontracting AEB & Apprenticeship, should be a maximum of 20%. He also suggested that a further discussion take place outside of the Committee around the proportion of provision aligned to LEP priorities indicating that the College should be providing core provision of basic skills.

The Interim Finance Director set out that the Committee should be looking to determine KPIs should be measured, what the targets need to be and how the information is presented. Governors need to agree which KPIs are included and he suggested that some financial

KPIs could be included once agreed. The Chair recognised this is very much work in progress. A member questioned the KPI around the percentage of provision meeting LEP priorities indicating that provision shouldn't just be focused on LEP priorities as there is also a need to meet local community needs and the needs of employers. She recognised the need to have some financial KPIs but felt that these may be reported to other committees. There are lots of measures of success but the Committee need core KPIs and to ensure focus is kept on these core items. She felt that there was space for some softer measures including the monitor and measuring of how effectively the curriculum plan is implemented. The Chair felt it important to have key focus on the curriculum and quality indicators but indicated that he would also welcome some financial indicators stating that the Committee needs to think about the financial implications of the curriculum plan. The Clerk expressed her appreciation for the work undertaken by the Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality advising that there is a need to look at the remit of the committee and how it measures its areas of focus against the areas for which it is responsible and provides assurance to the Board. In terms of overlap, the Clerk indicated that some KPIs may need to be cross reported and this is where cross communication between committees is required. The Interim Finance Director added that he envisaged that KPIs reported to the Board would be a selection from across the various committees. The Clerk said that the Chair of each committee will be asked to give an overview at each Board meeting and these KPIs will be tabled at the Winter Conference as a starting point. The Clerk clarified that once agreed, KPIs will be presented at each meeting. The Chair confirmed that he was content with work to date and an update will be provided to the Board.

The report was noted.

CQ/29 Any Other Business

The Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality reported that the College had received notification that Ofsted will be reviewing T Level provision in the new year. Two visits have been proposed with the first one in February the second early in the next academic year. Kevin Marston added that it is a monitoring visit and it is planned across 2 academic years as it is a two-year programme. The Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality advised that it is not certain at this point whether a report will be published as a result. Kevin Marston advised that a webinar is taking place on 11 December 2020 to give an overview of expectations so more information will be available once that has happened. The Interim Principal / CEO indicated that he would also pick up on this with the ESFA as part of his regular KIT call.

Action: Update on Ofsted T Level review to be provided as more information is known.

CQ/30 Date of the next meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Wednesday 24 February 2021 at 4.00pm.