



CURRICULUM AND QUALITY STANDARDS COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 15 SEPTEMBER 2021

Report: Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 19 May 2021

Author: Clerk

Action: Approve

Status: Open

Present: David Mitchell (Chair)
Carol Davenport
Sarah Stewart

In attendance: Deni Chambers
John Deary
Tracy Foreman
Helen Hepple
Ivan Jepson
Kevin Marston
Keith Oxspring
Andrew Robson
Suzanne Slater
Chris Toon
Emma Moody / Sally Cooper (Clerk)
Suzanne Clark (Minutes)

CQ/42 Welcome / Apologies / Conflicts of Interest

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received from Andy Cole, John Gray and Richard Ward.

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

It was agreed to change the running order of the agenda with the budget setting item being presented first.

CQ/43 Minutes of the last meeting dated 24 February 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 24 February 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

CQ/44 Matters Arising

The Clerk advised that the Board had been updated in relation to the curriculum planning report and it was agreed to present this at a future meeting. A member suggested that this would give a good lead in to approval of the 2021/22 budget at the meeting in July – this would be taken through the Finance & General Purposes Committee. The Chair was in agreement with this and felt that it would give governors a good understanding of how curriculum planning links to the budget.

It was confirmed that an update on the curriculum planning process would be given later in the meeting.

The Assistant Principal – Standards and Performance advised that a draft infographic will be used to present the end of year performance position at the meeting in the autumn term. Feedback will be sought from the Committee and if it was felt to be a successful way to demonstrate performance it will be adopted.

The Chair confirmed that a note was circulated to governors outlining the previous discussion around the College's Ofsted RIMV. The decision to forego the monitoring visit and go to full inspection was agreed by the new Principal / CEO and this has been communicated to Ofsted. No formal feedback has been received to date.

The Clerk indicated that standard reporting templates being adopted for the Board and all committees will be used consistently going forward.

CQ/45 Budget Setting

The report was presented by the Assistant Principal – Curriculum.

A copy of the planning sheet used to support business planning by each curriculum area was shared with the Committee with an overview given of the different sections. The information within the planning sheet is aligned with the College's management accounts.

A member referenced the bottom-up approach used for budget setting and recognised that there is also a top-down element to this asking how easy is it to get the two to meet. The Interim Finance Director advised that ideally the two sets of information would match. The top-down approach gives a guide whilst the bottom-up approach is the idealistic way of budget setting which gives the individual budget holders ownership. Any discrepancies between the two would be reviewed logically to determine the correct way forward. This would then be agreed with the budget holder, considering any other opportunities as appropriate. Dialogue from business planning rounds is a key element of budget setting and the importance of budget holders having ownership was stressed. The Assistant Principal – Curriculum gave an example of how this was being implemented in College explaining that the approach was leading to excellent outcomes and continued delivery of a good product. The Interim Finance Director commented that it has been emphasised to all involved in the process that numbers need to be realistic rather than aspirational. The Assistant Principal – Curriculum added that information from the first round of planning is very close to the 3-year forecast giving an indication that the current approach is working very well.

The Chair recognised that budget setting is a complex sophisticated process indicating that a lot of resource would be allocated to this. He asked whether the process is fit for purpose and could or should it be streamlined. The Assistant Principal – Curriculum advised that the previous process did not give budget holders full ownership. It was acknowledged that the process is complex but it is not felt to be particularly time consuming. There are good levels of scrutiny applied and it also has a benefit of saving time later in the year. The current approach gives good accuracy and ownership and

managers make an early start on planning. The Deputy Principal: Curriculum and Quality advised that there is an excellent understanding of conversion rates and applications in relation to 16-18 full-time provision which makes this almost a scientific calculation. A potential stress point around 16-18 full-time recruitment was highlighted. The College has currently received an increase in applications of around 1/3 based on the same point in the previous year. The team are looking to build some resource in to the budget to accommodate this. As 16-18 funding is lagged, a decision may be needed on whether to invest in growth and this was flagged as a potential challenge.

The Clerk recognised the comments above, that the budget was based on realistic forecasts and indicated that this point should be made to the Board, to give governors an understanding of the basis on which the budget is created. She added that whilst governors had commented that the process is thorough this should to more accurate results. The Board need to understand how the process and budget is kept under review so they, and the appropriate committees, can identify if any areas are underperforming or if changes are arising throughout the year which would mean the forecasted budget was going to vary. This will be an area of particular focus for the new Finance Director when in post.

The report was noted.

Deni Chambers left the meeting at 4.30pm.

CQ/46 Performance Report

The report was presented by the Assistant Principal – Standards and Performance and the Assistant Principal – Apprenticeships.

The Chair commended the team for having maintained quality and standards despite the many challenges faced across the year.

The Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality indicated that national statistics on centre assessed grades were showing a slight increase. The Committee was assured that the grades being awarded by the College are felt to be realistic. A member questioned the ability for combining results with other colleges to allow for benchmarking. The Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality indicated that as a result of the pandemic, no granular data will be released. The College does normally receive comprehensive information in relation to performance allowing for comparison against others and appropriate ranking. The College approach will be to continue to challenge against pre-COVID metrics. The Assistant Principal – Standards and Performance added that AoC data is also used for benchmarking and whilst some data is available this is not at the level of previous years.

The Assistant Principal – Standards and Performance confirmed that there was an error on the term two attendance figure in Table 1, page 2 of the report, for Maths and English. He indicated that this would likely be 77% rather than 97%. This would be corrected.

The Chair recognised the challenging environment for apprenticeship delivery.

In relation to timely achievement, a member asked what proportion of apprentices is it envisaged will still be with the College next year. The Assistant Principal – Apprenticeships indicated that of the 152 learners who need to achieve before 31 July 2021, the majority are close to the end of their programme. It is expected that any who do not achieve by 31 July will roll forward into the new academic year. This has been considered in business planning to ensure that there is adequate resource in place to deliver. The member asked whether additional allowances will be needed and whether there was potential to have an impact on recruitment in the new academic year. The Assistant Principal – Apprenticeships advised that the team will look to use casual

resource to support continuing learners to achieve and will still be looking to take on the planned number of new starts. The Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality added that resource planning looks at this on an individual basis. Where learners are expected to progress into the next academic year they are counted in the metrics. There may be a need to look to reduce trainer / assessors due to the impact on the market in this area. It was highlighted that predicted activity in the College's original recovery plan for apprenticeships was approximately £4.5m and this has now been reduced to £3.6m.

The Chair asked whether there was any cause for optimism or whether the College is in a static position in relation to apprenticeship delivery. The Assistant Principal – Apprenticeships advised that there are some green shoots in this area. The College is engaging with some new employers in industries where there had been a decline. This is encouraging in automotive and leadership and management. Some larger employers are also starting to regain confidence in apprenticeships. The Director of Business Development raised awareness of a new 'Kickstart' initiative launched recently which has allowed employers to take young people on a fully funded basis for 6 months. This could be having an impact and has potential to delay the recruitment of apprentices until later in the year.

The Deputy Principal: Curriculum and Quality highlighted that the KPI report had been included within the performance report and members noted this.

The report was noted.

CQ/47 Post Inspection Action Plan / Quality Improvement Action Plan

The report was presented by the Assistant Principal – Standards and Performance.

The Chair commented on a very comprehensive set of actions around apprenticeships.

The Chair recognised that work experience would be very challenging due to ongoing restrictions, but given its red rating, asked if there was any additional information to share with the committee. The Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality explained that this item was also discussed as part of a recent ESFA Case Conference. It is a challenge as the government have indicated that virtual placements are not acceptable but there is uncertainty that some previous providers will return to having physical placements. The College is currently undertaking lots of work in this area to secure a number of placements. The Assistant Principal – Employment Edge confirmed that COVID restrictions have made accessing placements a challenge but gave assurance that links with employers have been maintained. Although placement activity has not been as planned, learners have had access to increased work inspiration activities that can be undertaken remotely. Work placement will be an area of the recovery plan and it is planned to meet with each Head of Department to create a plan specific to each sector, with a view to being in a much-improved position in the new academic year.

A member commented that she was encouraged to see the steps taken around apprenticeship provision and enhanced reporting. Following the previous monitoring visit, Ofsted had indicated that there was no evidence yet to demonstrate that the new processes were having an impact. The member asked whether processes have now been embedded long enough to demonstrate improvement. The Assistant Principal – Apprenticeships indicated that this would likely still be the case. Improvements in relation to leadership and management and the level of oversight are clearly evident. Progress reviews with learners are every 12 weeks and as the system was only introduced in December there has not been sufficient time for this to be evidenced. There should be a much better understanding in June / July. It was confirmed that the new Apprenticeship Portal gives much-improved visibility.

The Director of Business Development reported that he had recently had a discussion with CBIs national skills policy advisor who is lobbying on work placement opportunities which will hopefully have a positive impact. He also reported that an internal audit of apprenticeships has recently commenced and the PwC team have commented very positively on the work being led by the Assistant Principal – Apprenticeships to develop the apprenticeship system. It is recognised that the system is providing a good level of oversight. The Committee should have confidence in this external validation.

The report was noted.

CQ/48 Higher Education

Sally Cooper joined the meeting and Emma Moody left the meeting at 5.15pm.

The report was presented by the Assistant Principal – Standards and Performance.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Assistant Principal – Standards and Performance advised that learner feedback is collected continuously. There is a survey of learners currently live. It was reported that some learners have been significantly affected by the pandemic and the Committee was advised that there is a mitigation process in place for this. Online learning has been a positive experience for the majority of learners.

The report was noted.

CQ/49 Teacher Assessed Grades

The report was presented by the Assistant Principal – Standards and Performance

The Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality reported that he was currently working with ESFA colleagues on the timescales for the student appeals process. The date for GCSE results is 12 August 2021 which is earlier than normal. This falls in the College holiday period and discussions around any appeals are taking place as it is important that learners are not disadvantaged due to staff being on leave. There is a need to fully understand the timescales. Staff are due to return to College on 25 August 2021 and will be able to respond swiftly to any appeals at this point. There is a very comprehensive robust evidence base available for each learner to support any appeal. There were very few appeals received in the previous year.

The Chair asked whether learners were clear on how they are being assessed and what they can do if they do not agree with the grades awarded. He was aware of the letter issued to learners and asked whether there was anything additional planned. The Assistant Principal – Standards and Performance advised that there were separate letters issued to learners as the process differs depending on the programme type. This is being followed up by staff sharing with learners the evidence sources that will be used to determine grades and this is being done on a course by course basis. From that point, staff are not able to discuss grades with learners or parents until the results come out and the College will only be able to provide general information. The team are awaiting detail on how appeals will be managed but it is expected that the College will be managing this on an informal basis in the first instance, with learners then able to escalate to the awarding body if appropriate.

The report was noted.

CQ/050 Adult Education Budget (AEB) Update

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

It was confirmed that the data within the report is slightly different to the April management accounts as the report was produced prior to this information being available. The forecasted shortfall has improved to an approximate deficit of £500k.

A member recognised that the report was giving a positive view of the current position and asked whether there was potential that the position could further improve by the end of the year. The Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality confirmed that the information provided is a realistic assessment. The Interim Finance Director has included best-case and worst-case scenarios within the management accounts. The data provided is a very realistic indication which could still improve before the end of the year. There are meetings with partners on a weekly basis to look at their run rates. Partners are meeting with employers regularly and the position provided is very much real-time and fluid. The Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality indicated that he was confident that the predicted figure of £0.5m clawback will be achieved and this would have a more positive effect on the College's position moving forward than originally feared.

Feedback received in relation to planned rail provision has indicated a lot of non-attendance with the most recent programme which has had a negative impact. These programmes are generally well attended and there are five more programmes due to run. This will be an area of focus. The Director of Business Development highlighted the geographical challenges associated with AEB and indicated that regular reports will be provided to the Board, following the weekly updates from partners.

The report was noted.

CQ/051 Annual Cycle of Business

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

The Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality highlighted that the safeguarding item included on the cycle for October would be the safeguarding annual report. Safeguarding updates are provided regularly throughout the year to the Chair as designated safeguarding governor and any safeguarding matters or concerns would be brought to the committee's attention at any meeting. A member added that safeguarding training has been arranged for governors to take place in June 2021.

The annual cycle of business for the Curriculum and Quality Standards Committee was received and approved.

CQ/052 Any Other Business

The Chair took the opportunity to recognise the contribution of John Hogg who had recently stepped down as a governor and member of the committee. The Committee had very much benefitted from his wealth of experience and members wished John well for the future. In addition, the Chair acknowledged the planned retirement of John Gray who has a long record of service on the Committee. The Chair stated that John was owed a debt of gratitude for his work on safeguarding which has been a very strong element of the College's management.

CQ/053 Date of the next meeting

The date of the next meeting will be confirmed on the meeting schedule for 2021/22.

The meeting closed at 5.45pm.