

**The Corporation of New College Durham**

**Minutes of the Higher Education Quality Curriculum and Students  
Committee meeting held on 2 March 2023**

**Present:**

Ben Fisher (Chair)  
Andy Broadbent  
Linda Wight  
Mark Gomersall  
Megan Poole  
Ian Green

**Apologies:**

None

**In attendance:**

Alison Maynard – Deputy Principal  
Peter Morrison – Vice Principal – *via MS Teams*  
Julie Coverley – Head of Higher Education - *via MS Teams*  
Suzanne Crane – Higher Education Collaborative Manager  
Caroline Winter – Head of Governance & Corporation Secretary

**Action**

**23/01 Chair's introduction**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting including those joining remotely and reminded members to declare their interests in any item of business to be discussed at the meeting. No interests were declared.

**23/02 Apologies for absence** – none were received.

**23/03 Minutes of previous meeting (Paper A)**

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2022 were agreed as accurate and signed by the Chair.

**23/04 Matters arising**

There were no follow up actions from the previous meeting.

*Technical issues prevented clear communications with the remote participants who were due to present the majority of the meeting papers and the meeting was paused while attempts were made to resolve the problem.*

Mark Gomersall left the meeting at 4.15pm.

The Chair proposed re-ordering the agenda to enable in-person attendees to present their elements of reports pending resolution of the IT issues.

### **23/05 Partnership proposal (Paper F)**

This minute has been confidentially recorded under Minute 23/05(a).

### **23/06 Update on Higher Education Key Performance Indicators and Strategic Aims (KPIs) 2022/23) (Paper B)**

Members reviewed Paper B, which updated on progress against KPIs in 2022/23. It was noted that performance against only the first 5 KPIs could be reviewed at this stage in the year.

Recruitment of part time and full time students in Durham was below target, however recruitment of London students was above target with a further intake planned for April. The Principal advised that the recruitment targets were set as part of a 5-year strategy and that variances across the two years reflected a challenging period in the HE market nationally. Members noted the higher London recruitment targets when indications were that the market was saturated however these had reverted to an equal split with 300 students in the April and November cohorts.

Overall retention of students was above target at 93%. The Durham position showed a very positive picture and the London position although not as strong was close to target. The position continued to be monitored and focused on targeting students at risk of withdrawal.

Members noted the report.

### **23/07 Students Union Report (Paper G)**

Megan Poole presented Paper G, which updated on Students' Union activities and the HE Student forum meeting.

Members noted students' positive feedback on the quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment, highlighting in particular the feedback from the Level 4 Social Work representatives. Other issues raised in the forum included the use of back of classroom technology for students that were absent for long periods or with caring responsibilities, the lack of use of the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) by Counselling students, positive feedback on the appointment of an Academic Support Tutor, the suggestion to focus the proposed HE summer school on preparing students for the step up to higher education, appreciation of the hardship fund whilst considering how to ensure students' ongoing awareness of this support after induction and use of small tutorial rooms. Megan advised that the National Student Survey was currently being promoted and updated members on forthcoming events including National Careers Week and activities to celebrate International Women's Day and to promote health and wellbeing. Megan highlighted a proposal to amend the Students' Union constitution to move from an election to an appointment process for the role of

Students' Union President. This had been considered within the forum and was supported by students.

In response to a member's question on why students were not using the VLE, it was noted that the issue was predominantly in relation mature students and levels of digital skills. Members discussed possible ways to ensure students were aware of the hardship fund and Megan advised that whilst this was part of student induction, it was possible that this information wasn't picked up if not relevant to an individual at that point in time and ongoing promotion of the fund would therefore need to be considered.

Members thanked Megan for the report.

### **23/08 Update on HE Quality Development Plan (HEQDP) (Paper C)**

Suzanne Crane presented Paper C, which provided an update on the HE Quality Development Plan. Members noted the move from a Quality Enhancement Plan to a Quality Development Plan to align with the approach to the College's FE provision.

Members noted the purpose of the plan in providing assurances on monitoring of HE awards across NCD provision and the range of information contributing to the updates in the report. Suzanne outlined progress against the 5 key themes of the plan: (1) Work with all stakeholders to implement a range of strategies and activities to promote, develop and grow our HE offer, (2) Improve retention rates at level 4 and improve achievement rates at levels 5 and 6 to meet the College KPIs by effective monitoring of student engagement, data monitoring and implementing strategies, (3) Ensure all students in Durham and London are registered and withdrawn timely in line with guidance from the Student Loan Company, (4) Continue to deliver a staff training and development programme which ensures that the knowledge and practice of HE staff remains up to date in both subject and appropriate pedagogies and (5) Continue to develop and embed targeted activities/projects which creates a shared understanding across the institution of the requirements of the College's Access and Participation Plan (access, success, progression, research and evaluation). Members noted that there was also a separate action plan focused on the Student Loans Company which was largely directed at London School of Commerce (LSC) provision. Whilst progress was being made, this continued to be reviewed monthly.

Members noted progress in moving the HE Quality function into the College quality team and Alison Maynard advised that this would improve the available data to enable effective monitoring.

Members asked about the 40% target for internal progression and its achievability in the context of previous performance. This had been actively promoted through work with Level 2 and Level 3 students and an increase could now be seen. Members discussed

the approach to the Fellowship Programme noting this had gained momentum over the last year.

Members noted the report.

### **23/09 Curriculum and Quality monitoring report (Paper D)**

Members reviewed Paper D, the Curriculum and Quality monitoring report.

Suzanne Crane updated on current partnership activity. Members noted 609 students were enrolled at the London School of Commerce (LSC) in November 2022, 468 of whom were on the Business and Management programme. Current student numbers were 1374 against a target of 1400. Members noted the fall in retention rates which were due to a number of factors including: students withdrawing early in the academic year due to non-attendance or non-payment of fees, students failing to return to campus from online delivery post covid-19 due to caring responsibilities or work commitments, failure at academic boards and students opting not to return to repeat failed modules. This in turn had directly impacted completion rates and achievement rates and monitoring had identified at risk cohorts. A steering group had been established to review and address the position. Members were updated on the Student Loan Company action plan noting that steps had been taken to process student records in a more timely manner and introduce strategic suspensions for those students posing a risk to the SLA through non-attendance or non-payment of fees. Whilst student registration rates had improved on the previous year they were still below the SLA targets. Attendance had improved at 96% against a target of 98%. Improvement was still required in relation to the timely reporting and processing of withdrawals and the College had taken ownership of the withdrawal procedure in February 2023 until the LSC implemented a satisfactory new automated process. A critical evaluation of the partnership had been conducted to inform discussions on development of the partnership prior to discussions on any re-negotiation of the partnership.

Members were advised that the College had been approached with proposals from a number of other potential partners. Options would be explored with governors at the forthcoming strategy day to inform the College's strategic direction on future collaboration. Members commented that the College was much better placed to consider the future approach following the learning gained through the partnership with the LSC. Members commented that the route to identifying potential partners appeared to be bottom up rather than a proactive approach and the Principal confirmed that it would be difficult to do this in the absence of a procurement exercise. Members asked about the rationale for organisations' interest in partnering with the College and noted the low number of colleges with Foundation Degree Awarding Powers (FDAP), which were an attractive option as a 2-year programme for their student

demographic, often in areas of deprivation. Members noted the limitation of the current FDAP which required students to be NCD students and that there was potential for this condition to be removed if indefinite powers were awarded, allowing the College to act as a validator focused on quality assurance rather than as provider.

Alison Maynard updated members on internal and external quality assurance, noting minor modifications to programme titles, a number of staff changes and the current external examiner position. Members welcomed the positive update on the FDAP application and noted that the College had submitted its Teaching Excellence Framework submission.

Members noted the HE apprenticeships update and the potential for a decline in recruitment following the development of new HTQs which would be in direct competition. Members reviewed the updates on scholarly activity, marketing, and complaints and compliments. In relation to the HE Access Fund, members reviewed the payments made to date and the Principal drew attention to the additional £52,867 hardship fund received from the OfS, which would support both Durham and London students.

Members noted the report.

### **23/10 Access and Participation Plan monitoring (Paper E)**

Julie Coverley presented Paper E, which updated on progress in relation to the current Access and Participation Plan (APP) and future developments.

Julie updated on the consultation exercise and advised that guidance and timelines were still awaited from the Office for Students. Members were updated on the eight proposals for the development of new APPs from 2023/24, which covered: a focus on risks to equality of opportunity, a four-year plan duration, the format and content of an APP, a requirement for numerical targets (which were already used by the College), a significant increase in the volume and quality of evaluation across particular activities with related publication requirements, details of investment in intervention strategies, priorities for raising attainment in schools and use of the published APP data dashboard as part of the APP assessment process.

Julie advised that the College was already analysing the data dashboard and although this was subject to further review when the data was updated this presented a positive picture. In terms of next steps it was noted that the APP would be submitted by summer 2023 and the consultation outcomes and further guidance would be published in the spring.

Members noted the update.

**23/11 Academic Board minutes (Paper H)**

Members received paper H and noted the content of the Academic Board minutes.

**23/12 School Newsletters (Paper I)**

Members noted the content of the School newsletters which had also been placed on the governors' online portal.

**23/13 Any other business**

The Chair thanked all attendees and particularly those online for their patience and contributions in light of the difficulties caused by the technical issues.

**23/14 Date of next meeting: 15 June 2023**

**Signed**.....**Date**.....