

The Corporation of New College Durham

**Minutes of the Higher Education Quality Curriculum and Students
Committee meeting held on 26 June 2023**

Present:

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

Apologies:

Megan Poole
Peter Morrison

In attendance:

Alison Maynard – Deputy Principal
Adele Dowson – Vice Principal, Curriculum
Julie Coverley – Head of Higher Education
Suzanne Crane – Higher Education Collaborative Manager
Caroline Winter – Head of Governance & Corporation Secretary

Action

23/15 Chair's introduction and starred items

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

The Committee noted that this was the last meeting for Linda Wight after nine years as a governor and would have been the last meeting for Megan Poole after two years as student governor as both of their terms of office were due to expire on 30 June 2023. The Chair thanked them on behalf of the Committee for their contribution to the Committee, the College and Corporation.

Members confirmed they did not require any further discussion about the starred agenda paper G.

23/16 Apologies for absence were received from Megan Poole and Peter Morrison.

23/17 Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 March 2023 (including confidential minute) were agreed as accurate and signed by the Chair.

23/18 Matters arising

There were no matters arising from the previous meeting.

23/19 Higher Technical Qualifications (Paper B)

Alison Maynard presented Paper B, which updated on developments relating to Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs).

Members noted HTQs were a key element of the government's agenda to increase higher technical skills at Levels 4 and 5. The College continued to be a trailblazer for the qualifications, which were developed with employers to ensure students gained the right training and skills for work. Members noted the College's progress in relation to Cycles 1 and 2 of the HTQ Growth Fund, but that the College had written to the DfE seeking permission to move the DevOps Engineer target of 8 against two different qualifications due to under recruitment, with the potential for £79,155 clawback. It was also noted that changes were being proposed to the planned Nursing Associate and Mental Health and Wellbeing programmes following difficulties in securing placements. It was proposed to draw this provision together into a single Health Care Practice programme, however there was also a risk of £129,155 clawback in this area.

There was also potential for clawback of £59,366 in respect of a Civil Engineering programme, however this was due to external delays beyond the College's control and it was therefore hoped that the clawback would not be actioned. Members noted the total potential clawback outlined was the worst case scenario and that the College's ongoing contact with the DfE as an early adopter of the HTQ initiative would help minimise any potential clawback.

It was noted that the College had received funding through Cycle 3 of the initiative with delivery commencing in September and that notification had been received in relation to Cycle 4 of up to £48.8m funding (£29.8m capital and £19m resource funding) with a bid deadline of mid-July. The Senior Leadership Team had taken the view that submissions to Cycle 4 of the fund should be made by both the College and also as part of the North East Institute of Technology (NEIoT). Alison advised that confirmation had been received that providers bidding as part of an IoT would receive a 20% uplift in funding. Members sought and received assurance that the IoT would submit a strong partnership bid despite the absence of one partner.

Members noted the update including the potential claw back from the courses identified and confirmed their endorsement of the proposed submissions to the Higher Technical Skills Injection Fund 2 (Cycle 4).

23/20 HE Partnerships update (Paper C)

This item is recorded confidentially under Minute 23/20a.

23/21 Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy (Paper D)

Alison Maynard presented Paper D, which updated on progress against the Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy since its introduction in August 2020.

Members noted a similar paper had been considered by both the Further Education Quality Curriculum and Students Committee and the Finance and Resources Committee. The paper updated on a wide range of initiatives including the employment of Level 5 counselling students to provide one to one sessions for learners, drop-in sessions, work to raise awareness of mental health issues, training to upskill staff and raise awareness on neurodiversity, provision of specialist services including Qwell for HE students and the introduction of a new Fitness to Study Policy to support students with mental health issues to continue to study. Alison reminded members that the College had been graded outstanding for its Personal Development framework and that the Safeguarding Team played a significant role in supporting the mental health of students. Mental health was a significant and complex area and staff CPD included sessions on stress awareness for managers, mindful approach to stress management and essential employee relations. The College was also progressing an increased number of fitness to practice issues. The importance of taking a whole-College approach to mental health and wellbeing was recognised and the paper proposed drawing together the strategies for staff and students into a single strategy, but supported by separate action plans for each group. In response to a member's question, Alison advised that CPD in respect of mental health and wellbeing was optional but that additional bespoke activity was also delivered.

Members approved the proposal to develop a combined staff and student mental health and wellbeing strategy.

23/22 Update on Higher Education Key Performance Indicators and Strategic Aims (KPIs) 2022/23 (Paper E)

Alison Maynard presented Paper E, which updated on current performance within HE provision. Members noted that the HE quality team were joining with the FE quality team to provide a single central resource and it was anticipated that this would have a positive impact on the HE data.

Members noted the headline data in the report. Full time student numbers were down at Durham and Alison advised that students were not moving into HE as the cost of living crisis was driving potential HE students into low paid and unsustainable jobs. Part time numbers were slightly above target as a result of in year starts. London full time students were 23 below target. The total number of full time and part time HE students at Durham and London was 1907 which was 147 below target and work was being undertaken to understand the position.

In year retention was 2% above the target of 91%. Whilst Durham retention had improved there was a retention issue with Level 4 LSC students. A review of the LSC approach to information advice and guidance and interview processes was underway to determine whether this was impacting on performance.

Overall continuation rates for Durham students met the OfS 75% benchmark however LSC retention was 65% which was significantly below both the College KPI (82%) and OfS benchmark. Further information was being sought from the LSC to understand the figures and a steering group had been set up to monitor improvement of the position.

Progression of Level 3 students internally to HE was 125 against a target of 135.

Andy Broadbent updated members that the KPIs in all of the College strategies were being reviewed to determine which operational measures should be removed from monitoring by the relevant committee and which should continue to be monitored in future to ensure a focus on strategic issues. A dashboard would be agreed and presented to each meeting although members noted that some KPIs were only reported at the end of year. The information would be presented in a consistent and recognised format with a traffic light system to enable a focus on key performance issues, with a narrative provided in reports to provide further detail on any areas of concern. Members welcomed the proposed approach.

Members discussed the potential to improve the areas of underperformance and Alison advised that in relation to recruitment, whilst the impact on numbers was a national issue as individuals took low paid unsustainable employment, the College's focus would be on ensuring the right student was on the right course which was in the College's control, for example by seeking character rather than work references to help ensure students were studying in the right area. There was also a potential for the Lifelong Learning entitlement to have a positive impact when this was introduced. It would also be possible to improve progression from Level 4 to 5 with the right interventions in place. An academic tutor had been appointed within HE and was already making a positive impact.

Members noted the progress against KPIs for 2022/23.

23/23 Update on HE Quality Development Plan (HEQDP) (Paper F)

Alison Maynard presented Paper F. Members were updated on the work to increase HE recruitment with a focus on internal work with students to assist understanding of progression options. Applications for Podiatry Programmes were starting to improve but Social Work was not improving as quickly. Additional marketing resource would be applied to this area to actively promote both programmes.

15 students had been identified as being at risk, some of which were due to academic ability but some involved fitness to practice issues and were moving through the relevant process with the

position being monitored. The Academic Support Tutor was in place and making good progress in implementing a range of strategies to support HE students. Summer schools would support bridging the gap between Level 3 and Level 4.

Members noted the additional Student Loan Company Action Plan as referenced in the earlier update on the LSC.

In relation to staff training and development work continued to promote the HE Academy Fellowship Scheme. Bespoke training had been undertaken with LSC staff covering areas including suspension of studies, academic appeals as well as discussions to share good practice between NCD and its partners. The steering group established to improve continuation and completion rates on LSC programmes would continue to maintain a focus on the actions to deliver improvement. Members noted the discussions on reducing the November and April cohorts at the LSC pending the necessary improvements in performance.

Members noted the report.

23/24 Curriculum and Quality monitoring report (Paper G)

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

The paper updated on internal and external quality assurance, Degree Awarding Powers, emerging themes and sector updates, scholarly activity and marketing.

Members noted the report.

23/25 Students Union Report (Paper H)

Alison Maynard presented Paper H, which updated on Students' Union activities. Members noted updates on students' positive feedback on teaching and learning, assessments, facilities resources and catering, teaching rooms in the University Centre, library stock, access to hardship funds and the HE incentive package. Members were also updated on the review of the HE Tutorial Policy, the HE Summer School and the election of the new Students' Union President. It was noted that the HE forum meetings were well attended with positive and active dialogue. Students regularly fed back positively on their experience of teaching and although issues around the physical environment were the most common areas raised, they appreciated the investment in the HE buildings.

Members noted the update.

23/26 Academic Board minutes (Paper F)

Members received Paper F and noted the content of the Academic Board minutes from the meeting held on 25 April 2023.

23/27 Proposed Schedule of Business for 2023/24 (Paper J)

Members reviewed the proposed Schedule of Business for 2023/24. The Chair advised that the schedule had been produced following a full review of business and aimed to ensure that meeting time was focused on the key issues requiring the Committee's attention. Duplication would be removed between reports where possible and there were certain issues including partnerships and KPIs that would be covered in each meeting given their importance.

Members endorsed the proposed Schedule of Business for 2023/24.

23/28 Any other business

None.

23/29 Date of next meeting: TBC

Alison Maynard, Adele Dowson, Julie Coverley and Suzanne Crane left the meeting.

23/30 Review of Committee Effectiveness

Members were asked to complete a questionnaire in advance of the meeting. In addition to reviewing the summary of responses members commented that they felt able to seek clarification on issues raised in reports or in the Committee's discussions if needed. The Principal confirmed that governors raising queries on issues that they did not understand was helpful to the Senior Leadership Team in identifying where further details or explanations of key issues was required.

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