

The Corporation of New College Durham

**Minutes of the meeting of the Further Education Quality Curriculum
and Students Committee held on 15 February 2024**

Present:

Joy Brindle (Chair) Alice Tomlinson
Andy Broadbent Moss White
Emily Baxter Mark Gomersall
Suzanne Slater Davey Benson

Apologies:

Christine Warren

In attendance:

Alison Maynard (Deputy Principal)
Andy Stephenson (Vice Principal)
Adele Dowson (Vice Principal)
Colleen Peters (Vice Principal)
Caroline Winter (Head of Governance & Corporation Secretary)

Action

24/01 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. No interests were declared.

The Chair advised that this would have been the last FEQCS Committee meeting for Christine Warren as her term of office was due to expire on 31 March 2024. The Chair asked that the Committee's thanks be placed on record for Christine's great contribution to the work of the Committee in her time as a member. The Chair also updated that the Chair of the HEQCS Committee had hoped to attend the meeting as an observer and it was possible that he would join the next meeting in June instead.

Members confirmed they did not require any further discussion about the starred agenda Paper F and the Chair suggested that any queries on the student satisfaction survey could be considered under Paper C, which considered the strategic KPIs.

24/02 Apologies for absence were received from Christine Warren.

24/03 Minutes of previous meeting (Papers A1 & A2)

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2023 (including confidential minutes) were agreed as accurate and signed by the Chair.

24/04 Matters arising

23/39 – the staff involved in the SAR process had been thanked for their contribution to the process.

Confidential minutes:

23/37a – the covering report to the KPI paper (Paper C) on the current agenda provided a narrative against the funding measure and would develop further in future reports.

24/05 Curriculum Presentation – School Engagement

The Chair welcomed Emma Crosskey (Head of Advice Support Careers (ASC)) to the meeting to present on School Engagement activity.

Emma provided an overview of the learner journey before students come to the College. A team of five ASC staff including a member focused on SEND schools worked closely with school career leads and NCD Heads of School to provide activities supporting student progression into a range of areas. Activity was structured around the Explore, Discover and Experience NCD model to provide a progressive programme of careers activities and events for pupils to encourage them to start thinking about their future ambitions. At the start of the academic year the programme focused on building and maintaining relationships with schools and members noted the contribution the programme made in supporting schools to meet the Gatsby benchmarks. The team worked with schools on assembly content, partner evenings and responded to bespoke requests such as providing sessions with a wellbeing focus or on mental health issues. Members noted the 'explore' element was aimed at younger pupils to start early career learning, providing exposure to different activities, careers and to challenge stereotypes. Students participated in events and tours involving a range of different employers and activities such as work with the highways agency to encourage girls into engineering. A 3-week event focusing on student life took place each summer to enable learners to experience different curriculum areas and creating an interactive experience and providing enrichment activity to experience college life. The 'experience' element aimed to support students to make post-16 choices by choosing a taster session where they would spend a day with their chosen curriculum area. Emma explained that it was difficult for schools to find time to reach out to employers but that the College's links with employers ensured their support for the programme. Welcome Fest was the final part of the journey which started a student's time at the College, by which time they knew the team well.

Emma updated on the impact these activities had on school leaver applications to the College and noted a very positive picture in the current year. Members noted a significant increase in overall applications compared with the same time the previous year, which was due to increased early activity in the first term. Members discussed individual schools that had demonstrated a notable increase but also those where engagement had not made the same impact on applications or where access had been limited. Emma explained the team's activities in relation to conversion rate,

their response to trends and concerns, the impact of geographical distance to the College and also to other providers and noted that even where conversion rates were low from out of area schools, the retention rate of these students remained high. Emma also highlighted the recent work to link with an out of area school where there was limited post-16 provision in the local area and the weekly sessions by the catering team working with Trinity School to support students with SEND in their transition to college by getting to know the staff, campus and facilities. Members noted the importance of this work in informing the College's stakeholder strategy in terms of employers' future needs, the jobs that would be in the marketplace in five years' time and how this would feed into work around pupils' aspirations. In response to a member's question, it was confirmed that there had been increased interest around apprenticeship careers advice and guidance, and getting the right information and messaging into schools had been a focus of Apprenticeships Week. Members noted one area of concern was the lack of knowledge within schools relating to qualification reforms, which the team was working to address by promoting awareness and understanding. Members asked about parents' views on T Levels in particular and noted that parents continued to be nervous about the change, with the College holding bespoke sessions to debunk myths and share accurate information.

The Chair thanked Emma for a very valuable presentation, which supported members to understand the activity behind the figures and updates in curriculum reports.

24/06 Accountability Agreement update (Paper B)

Alison Maynard presented Paper B, which provided a mid-year update on the NCD Accountability Agreement (AA) approved by Corporation in May 2023.

Members were reminded of the background and development of AAs, which were introduced last year as a mandatory requirement of the DfE to enable colleges to access their funding. Part One of the AA focused on the College's financial statements and Part Two focused on College priorities. Alison updated that feedback was sought on the current year's AA in the recent Annual Strategic Conversation with the DfE but other than high level confirmation that the AA was a good document, no detailed feedback was provided. Members reviewed the progress to date as outlined in the appendix to the report and noted there were no areas of concern. Actions were being progressed and feeding into KPI performance and the impact would be seen towards the end of the year. Members sought clarification on the timescale of the current plan and commented that there was still a significant time period to make further progress. It was also noted that whilst submission of the plan was required to access funding, the content had no impact on the level received. The Principal emphasised that in the context of the College's overall strategy, the AA was the layer linking the Strategic Plan to the individual aims and KPIs and so whilst the AA

met a DfE requirement, the objectives and actions would have been progressed in any event. Members were updated on the wider discussion at the Annual Strategic Conversation as shared separately with members by the Corporation Chair. The DfE and FE Commissioner representatives had spoken very positively about the College, highlighting progress in delivering against all of the government's priorities in its provision.

Alison updated on the approach to developing the AA for 2024/25 which needed to be submitted by 30 June 2024. It was noted that the duty on governing bodies to review how the College was meeting local skills needs was now integrated with the AA. Members noted that colleges within Durham were working together to look at areas for potential collaboration and discussions were taking place between the respective Chairs. Alison emphasised that collaboration was already evidenced in a number of areas including the LSIF, recent SPF funding bids and ongoing Visit County Durham partnership activity to address significant skills gaps in the hospitality sector in the County as well as the wider region. Members welcomed the collaborative work and noted that individual colleges could still take their own approach to provision but that it was useful to have a focus on County Durham as the defined local area.

In response to a member's question Alison confirmed the AA would reflect government requirements in relation to local needs and national priorities. Members reviewed the areas detailed in the report that were proposed for inclusion and commented that these provided a comprehensive coverage of activity in addition to the wide range of other initiatives currently underway.

Members noted progress on the current AA and the proposed objectives for 2024/25.

24/07 Strategic Monitoring – Update on 2023/24 Strategic KPIs (Paper C)

Alison Maynard presented Paper C, which updated on progress against the Strategic KPIs. Members noted the latest updates on the College KPIs for retention rate, achievement rate and attendance. In relation to 16-19 education and training Alison highlighted the position in relation to recruitment, predicted achievement rate, retention, attendance and maths and English. Members noted the predicted achievement rate for Adult Education, the apprenticeship recruitment position and predicted achievement rate and sub-contracting performance.

Members discussed the recent bus strikes and queried the potential impact on attendance and achievement. Alison advised that some students now wanted to study at home and some had left College to take up employment and that there was potential for a 4% impact on achievement. Systems had been established to capture an accurate measure of attendance over the period and

were able to reflect where there was a genuine inability to attend. It had been possible to distinguish attendance levels before and after the strike and whilst this was not the only issue it had been a key contributing factor. Some students had recovered quickly from the disruption, others had not successfully re-engaged and some almost needed to effectively re-start the year. Work was ongoing to support students including phone calls and visits to address attendance and to re-sequence the curriculum in some areas to address lost learning. The student governors confirmed the position among their peers and commented on the length of time students' learning had been affected. Members also commented on the change in mindset post-covid in relation to the importance of school/college among post-16 year olds, which was reflected in a significant persistent absence rate at a national level. It was noted that other colleges were in a similar position and there were also examples of new students enrolling with attendance levels at years 10 and 11 under 20%. This was largely unprecedented in pre-16 education and the College was working to understand the support needed to address the issue. It was noted that the curriculum performance management processes also scrutinised the approaches taken to address attendance issues.

Members discussed the reasons for and impact of delays in end point assessments (EPA) and noted that this could go beyond the achievement itself and affect a student's employment. It was noted that delays in EPAs had impacted the College's achievement rate across all areas last year and that the College was reviewing its arrangements in this respect to mitigate any future impact.

Members noted the improved predicted achievement in functional skills (FS) and following last year's Ofsted focus, queried whether this varied at different levels. Alison confirmed that whilst entry level and Level 1 maths were improving, performance remained lower than in English, reflecting the national position. Members noted both the recent AoC paper criticising FS qualifications and the low national achievement rate, but that the College 16-18 performance was improving and that adults performed quite strongly in FS. In response to a member's question Alison confirmed that following the delays to the high-grade maths predictions an update would be provided to Corporation. In relation to the positive recruitment position, Members asked about the point at which this would create a challenge. Alison gave examples of programmes where recruitment significantly exceeding curriculum plans had needed to be paused due to teaching capacity and that whilst it was difficult to predict, the learning from the current year was informing planning for next year.

AM

Members received the report and noted the latest performance position.

24/08 Update on FE Quality Development Plan 2023/24 (Paper D)

Alison Maynard presented Paper D, which updated on the FE Quality Development Plan (QDP).

Members were briefed on areas for improvement including: the reviewed curriculum model in functional skills, initiatives to improve high grades in GCSE maths, staffing developments in engineering and electrical installation and the continued focus on attendance. Alison reiterated that further updates on high grades, functional skills and GCSE predictions would be provided at Corporation in March. In areas for development, members were updated on: staffing developments in the Quality team, the recent Teaching and Learning Fair involving and showcasing all curriculum areas, initiatives to support staff recruitment and retention including in areas of skills shortage and future skills needs. Members noted work was also underway to consider different types of delivery in light of the recent Bootcamp contract announcements.

Alison advised that good progress was being made across the plan and members noted the report.

24/09 Curriculum & Quality monitoring – discussion report (Paper E)

Adele Dowson presented Paper E, the Curriculum and Quality Monitoring report.

Members were updated on emerging themes including the curriculum planning process focus on responding to local and regional skills gaps, attendance, student mental health and the support services in place. Members also noted the latest apprenticeship numbers, predicted achievement and the work with employers to respond to their skills needs. The enhanced learning update detailed the current position on quality of teaching, learning and assessment (TLA) and Adele advised of the correlation being seen between attendance and predicted achievement and what was happening in the classroom. There had been a temporary pause in the quality assurance (QA) process due to the bus strikes however this had provided an opportunity to focus on the support for teachers in engaging students in remote and hybrid delivery. Resuming the QA process in term two was therefore a priority and Adele reported there had been a positive shift in the culture around the process with the work of the quality team positively received by staff. Activity was moving into a new phase in which there were strong relationships between the Teaching and Learning Innovation Team and teaching staff, who were keen not just to meet but to exceed expectations. Members noted the developments in international partnerships and were updated on recent and planned visits to Dubai, Copenhagen and Seville.

Members discussed and queried a number of issues arising from the report including: the support and training available for support staff working in a classroom environment and engaging with

students which differed to the TLA support offer, staff engagement with and feedback on the TLA programme and its impact in terms of improvement and teaching quality. Members were updated that feedback from students had indicated some anxiety about TLA assessors observing lessons and this would be followed up. Members were updated on the cultural awareness training to support staff engaging with ethnic minority groups through the Bangladeshi Centre and were interested to note the volume of soft skills provision in the early phase of work with the National Battery Training Academy (NBTA) before progressing to the necessary technical skills provision. In response to a member's question, it was noted that the NBTA was a formal partnership between the College, Newcastle University and Innovate UK. Members asked about engagement with the Multiply programme and noted that the requirements in the two delivery areas were quite different, with the Durham programme progressing well against the contract requirements but a number of challenges existed in securing engagement and progression in Tees Valley.

Members received the report and noted the activity taking place within Curriculum and Quality.

24/10 Curriculum & Quality Monitoring – information report (Paper F)

Members received the Curriculum and Quality Monitoring information report, which updated on Learner Surveys, the Learner Support Fund, Student Discipline (Term 1), FE and Corporate complaints and compliments and competitions.

24/11 FE Student Forum feedback (Paper G)

Alice Tomlinson presented Paper G, the FE Student Forum feedback. Alice reported there had been low attendance at the forum but confirmed the Student Union had also attended the majority of school forum meetings. The key issue raised related to the price and quality of food and range of options and access to catering facilities by Foundation Studies due to timing issues. Alice advised that alternative methods of engaging students were being explored to ensure the views of the wider student population were obtained to inform future activity.

Members received the FE Student Forum minutes and noted the Issues and Actions document.

24/12 Any other business – none.

24/13 Date of next meeting: 13 June 2024

Signed.....Date.....