

The Corporation of New College Durham

**Minutes of the Further Education Quality Curriculum and Students
Committee meeting held on 16 November 2023**

Present:

Joy Brindle (Chair)
Christine Warren
Emily Baxter
Suzanne Slater
Alice Tomlinson
Mark Gomersall

Apologies:

Andy Broadbent
Davey Benson

In attendance:

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

Action

23/31 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.

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

23/32 Apologies for absence were received from Andy Broadbent and Davey Benson.

23/33 Minutes of previous meeting (Paper A)

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 June 2023 were agreed as accurate and signed by the Chair.

23/34 Matters arising

There were no follow up actions from the previous meeting.

23/35 Curriculum Presentation – Green Skills emerging themes

The Chair welcomed Lee Baum, Green Skills Manager, to the meeting to provide an overview of emerging themes in the Green Skills agenda.

Emily Baxter joined the meeting at 4.08pm.

Members were briefed on key themes including retrofit, modern methods of construction (MMC), air source heat pumps (ASHP) alongside employer engagement and a range of activities to develop and promote the College's green skills offer. Members noted that the College had been successful in securing North East LEP funding which would enable further investment in this work and discussed the need to incorporate this into the curriculum planning process to embed the agenda across the College.

Part of this item is recorded confidentially under confidential minute 23/35a.

Members were impressed at the level of ongoing interaction with stakeholders and sought clarification on the programmes that would be offered and how this might develop in future.

Part of this item is recorded confidentially under confidential minute 23/35a.

Emily Baxter declared an interest in the discussion as an employee of Homes England, which had been referenced in the presentation as an organisation that the College was working with. Members noted the range of schemes delivered through Homes England and that this provided a potential opportunity to further raise the College's profile in this area of work.

The Chair thanked Lee for the presentation and members noted the update.

23/36 Strategic Monitoring – 2022/23 Year-end Report on Strategic KPIs and Aims (Achievement and satisfaction rates) (Paper B)

Alison Maynard presented Paper B, which provided the end of year performance position for education and training and apprenticeships. Members were briefed on the closing achievement rate, English and maths, learner surveys and achievement from a student equality perspective. Members welcomed the new format for presenting the data and it was confirmed this would be the key document to present the latest performance position moving forwards.

Members congratulated the College on an excellent set of results which illustrated the ongoing work across the College and asked that this was passed onto staff. Where performance was below KPI members commented that it was important to recognise this was marginal and that performance was in line with target in many areas. Members also commented very positively on the SAR validation sessions which had enabled an opportunity for governors to understand the extent of the teams' work in terms of collaboration, tailoring, innovation and focus on improvement.

Part of this item is recorded confidentially under confidential minute 23/36a.

Members asked about the potential impact of an increase in external assessment in terms of increasing student anxiety and mental health issues. It was confirmed that this continued to be a factor post-covid and the College was continuing to provide students with high levels of support in preparing for assessment including asking awarding bodies to come on site.

Members reiterated their praise for the strong overall performance but emphasised the Committee's role in holding the College to account for the wider performance position.

Part of this item is recorded confidentially under confidential minute 23/36a.

23/37 Strategic Monitoring – 2022/23 Year-end Report on wider Strategic KPIs and approval of 2023/24 Strategic KPIs and targets (Paper C)

Alison Maynard presented Paper C, which updated on progress across the full suite of strategic KPIs and sought confirmation of the KPIs and targets for 2023/24. Alison reminded members of the process undertaken to review and refine the strategic KPIs, which were provisionally approved by Corporation in July.

Part of this item is recorded confidentially under confidential minute 23/37a

Members noted the performance against KPIs for 2022/23, the early progress against KPIs for 2023/24 and approved the strategic KPIs and targets for 2023/24.

23/38 Curriculum & Quality Monitoring – information report (Paper D)

Members reviewed the Curriculum and Quality Monitoring information report, which updated on student discipline in Term 3 and the annual analysis for 2022/23, and academic malpractice over the last academic year.

23/39 Update on College Self-Assessment Report 2022/23 and FE Quality Development Plan 2023/24 (Verbal update)

Andy Stephenson updated members on progress in developing the College-SAR. Andy thanked all members that participated in the SAR validation sessions, emphasising the value of governor input and challenge in these discussions to both the development of the SAR and the opportunities this provided for the staff involved.

The process had been an extensive exercise and the final curriculum meetings had taken place that day. The next stage was to collate the grades and take a step back to assess the College-wide position.

Part of this item is recorded confidentially under confidential minute 23/39a.

The forthcoming SAR session would provide an opportunity to discuss with governors and challenge the thinking behind the proposed grades.

In response to a member's question Andy confirmed that staff feedback was sought on the process and members praised the approach to refresh and refocus this year. The Corporation Chair requested that all staff involved in the sessions were written to, to thank them for their contribution to the process and the overall impact in identifying what needed to improve to move the College forward. Alison also highlighted the positive approach to the sessions from staff, who had set themselves high expectations, knew their data and had taken on board and appreciated critical feedback.

**AM /
CW**

Members commented that the process was a key method of governors receiving assurance on the quality of the curriculum and welcomed the involvement of so many governors in the process this year. Members had been pleased to see the enthusiasm that came across from the majority of staff and their passion for success and improvement.

Members thanked Andy for the update.

23/40 Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy (Paper E)

Peter Morrison presented Paper E, the proposed Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The document had been revised following the Committee's endorsement at the previous meeting to encompass both staff and students, where previously there were two separate strategies. The proposed strategy was also being considered by the Finance and Resources Committee and the Higher Education, Quality Curriculum and Students Committees before recommending to Corporation. Members noted the significant cross-over and impact between the staff and student strategies and that the new 5-year strategy would be delivered through a concise action plan that was reviewed annually.

Members commented that the Committee's previous discussions demonstrated the importance of a proactive approach to student and staff mental health and wellbeing. The Committee's student governors were asked to give their thoughts on the revised strategy and their view was that it was clear, understandable and felt achievable. They were aware of students that had used the one-to-one therapists, which had been really useful for them. They welcomed the emphasis on the College as a healthy and safe place to study and were pleased to see the links in the strategy to external services.

Part of this item is recorded confidentially under confidential minute 23/40a.

Members were advised that the strategy would be developed into a user-friendly format and commented that this was an important opportunity for the student governors to input into that process and ensure that this resulted in an accessible document. Members also observed that the joint document would help place the College into student perspectives as an employer, and help them to understand the responsibilities of employers and the expectations they should have as employees as they moved into the world of work.

Members agreed to recommend that Corporation ratify the Mental Health and Wellbeing strategy.

23/41 FE Student Forum feedback (Paper F)

Alice Tomlinson presented Paper F, which summarised the feedback from the first FE Student Forum this year and updated on issues raised.

Alice advised that the key concern facing students was the current bus strike rather than College issues. Both student governors emphasised the impact this was having on students in terms of stress and potential impact on their grades. In response to a question on action the College was taking in response to the issue, Adele Dowson advised that the situation presented a significant challenge but plans for transporting students and providing alternative delivery were in place. Focus was on students in the areas of greatest risk including those on practical courses where physical attendance and assessment at a workshop or salon for example was required. For some students it was a similar experience to Covid and the mental health impacts from the experience were still being seen. From a safeguarding perspective, identifying those most at risk had been key to enable targeted checks/drop-ins as appropriate. Members commented that the College's excellent wraparound support but noted that the current situation differed from Covid which affected all students, where the bus strikes only affected those unable to travel to College. Members also expressed concern for staff in terms of increased workload and welcomed the support for them in managing delivery both in College and online and ensuring students remained engaged. Members asked what action could be taken given the College's funding of student bus passes for a service they were not receiving, and noted that this was being explored. Efforts to generate media interest and support were also being progressed. Members asked about potential mitigation arrangements following lost learning and noted that whilst this was being highlighted by NCD and other local colleges, engagement was challenging because the strike was not a national issue. Members also observed that the impact would be felt most by the

most disadvantaged students who did not have access to alternative transport.

The Chair thanked Alice for the report and for including the bus strikes in the paper which had enabled a good discussion.

23/42 Any other business

Members congratulated staff following the College's shortlisting for a Beacon Award on employer engagement.

23/43 Date of next meeting: 15 February 2024

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