

CHAIR APPROVED

The Corporation of New College Durham

**Minutes of the Higher Education Quality Curriculum and Students
Committee meeting held on 13 March 2024**

Present:

Ben Fisher (Chair)
Andy Broadbent
Mark Gomersall
Alice Tomlinson

Apologies:

Ian Green
Andy Stephenson

In attendance:

Alison Maynard – Deputy Principal
Peter Morrison – Vice Principal
Julie Coverley – Director of Higher Education
Suzanne Crane – Assistant Principal
Caroline Winter – Head of Governance & Corporation Secretary

Action

24/01 Chair's introduction

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked attendees for accommodating the later start time of 4.30pm.

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

24/02 Apologies for absence were received from Ian Green and Andy Stephenson.

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

The minutes of the meeting (including confidential minutes) held on 23 November 2023 were agreed as accurate and signed by the Chair.

24/04 Matters arising

23/37 – Strategic Monitoring (prescribed and non-prescribed qualifications) – it was confirmed that each set of qualifications would be reported to both HEQCS and FEQCS committees moving forwards.

23/37 – Review of KPI targets – the targets were reviewed as requested by the Committee and the revised targets were approved by Corporation in December.

Confidential minutes:

23/35a – the Oxford Business College (OBC) business case was considered by Corporation in December with a delegation to the

Principal to finalise and sign the contract, which was completed in February. The proposal for next steps relating to the London School of Commerce (LSC) partnership was on the current agenda.

24/05 Partnership Update - London School of Commerce Contract Renewal (Paper B)

This discussion is recorded confidentially under minute 24/05a.

24/06 HE Future Developments Update – (Paper C)

Julie Coverley presented Paper C, which provided a strategic overview of the current and emerging HE landscape to help inform the College's HE provision over the next 5 years.

Members noted that the North East region had one of the lowest HE participation rates in England and were briefed on key challenges in the HE sector including skills shortages, the cost of living crisis, competition from higher education institutions and staff recruitment. Members reviewed higher education enrolment trends (excluding the College's partnerships), a SWOT analysis of the key factors impacting on the College's HE provision and were updated on current HE policy and reforms, current collaborative arrangements, external factors influencing student enrolment and expectations and the marketing strategy.

Overall the College was in a strong position in the region as a widening participation college providing good quality education. Students' performed well and received support that would not be available in a University setting. Members considered 12 recommendations outlined in the paper for strategic actions to strengthen HE delivery and recruitment at the College and discussed the following points: the impact on the market of the proposed cap on University fees for foundation degrees, the anticipated introduction of UCAS points for level 3 apprenticeships, the rationale, financial viability and student experience when running programmes with small cohorts, the links between the College's advisory boards and the North East Institute of Technology to shape and inform HE provision, the effectiveness of internal communications to promote progression and the focus on converting applications to enrolments, consideration of how the College promoted its USP e.g. smaller class sizes, the opportunity to stay at home to maintain contact with friends and family, support services, contact hours, the effectiveness of school outreach activity, and the planning work taking place in readiness for the introduction of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) which placed the College ahead of many other colleges.

Members commented that the proposed strategic actions were a mix of short, medium and long term actions, some were business as usual and the key areas of focus should be those with immediate and greatest impact. It was acknowledged that whilst

the enrolment process was business as usual, this would be an area of immediate focus, along with working with Heads of Schools to focus on internal progression between levels 4 and 5, as this was the key factor impacting Level 6 and 7 enrolments. Other issues for consideration included the potential around Higher Apprenticeships which were increasing and employer use of the Apprenticeship Levy.

It was noted that the HE incentives package had made no impact on the enrolment figures and members were advised that using this funding in alternative way was being considered to help generate an increase in HE enrolments. Members queried the impact of removing the incentive package on financial support for students in the context of the ongoing cost of living crisis and it was clarified that the bursary fund would still exist to support students with financial difficulties and that higher apprentices would be supported by their employer. It was acknowledged that more promotion of the bursary fund may be needed to ensure students were aware this may be available to them. Members endorsed the proposal to repurpose the incentives package funding to support a different approach to try and increase enrolments. The benefits of having representatives from the College's HE team available to provide support on A Level results day was highlighted and it was agreed to take this forward.

PM

Members noted the report.

24/07 Strategic Monitoring – Update on HE Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) 2023/24 (Paper D)

Peter Morrison presented Paper D, which updated on progress against the KPIs for 2023/24 in relation to both Durham and HE Partnership Students to the end of January 2024.

Peter advised that future updates would separate the data for individual partnerships to ensure a clear performance picture for each element of provision. Members requested that future reports included a variance column. Members reviewed the performance against KPIs for enrolments, retention, continuation, both overall and broken down into Durham and partnership provision. There had been a slight decline in retention largely resulting from high withdrawal rates at the LSC however student numbers remained at contracted levels. Peter updated that CECOS was performing well in respect of timely withdrawals. Peter advised that whilst noting a slight decline since the December updates, the report demonstrated a good overall performance position and that the new monitoring processes were working well.

PM

Members noted the report.

24/08 Quality Development Plan (HEQDP) Update (Paper E)

Peter Morrison presented Paper E, which provided an update on the HE Quality Development Plan (QDP).

Members reviewed progress on Durham full time and part time enrolments, continuation rates which despite a slight improvement were below the OfS benchmark, the National Student Survey which was expected to reach the 50% response rate for publication, an increased focus on timely withdrawals and an increase in HE Academy Fellowship, which would strengthen the College's position in any future application for full degree awarding powers.

Members asked if there was a pattern in relation to timeliness of withdrawals and it was confirmed that in addition to the ongoing concerns with the LSC, the issue had been raised with one School in particular. Members also asked if there was a minimum threshold of Fellowship expected in the context of full degree awarding powers and Peter advised that rather than numbers, the focus was on demonstrating an institution's commitment to ongoing research and development of knowledge and practice.

Members commented that the report presented a very positive picture against the QDP and noted the report.

24/09 Curriculum and Quality monitoring report (Paper F)

Julie Coverley presented Paper F, the Curriculum and Quality monitoring report which provided assurance on the College's HE provision for the current academic year.

Members were updated on quality assurance, noting there were no issues of concern emerging from student surveys. The induction process had been reviewed to stagger the process in response to student feedback from the internal survey. Follow up was taking place in some curriculum areas to support completion of the National Student Survey (NSS) and Julie explained that a second internal survey had been issued which mirrored the NSS, to ensure that the full student voice within HE was captured as some programmes did not qualify for inclusion within the NSS.

Teaching and Learning remained high on the agenda with the focus from the Quality Team supported by Heads of School and the current position was very positive in HE. Julie highlighted the work to respond to the National Review of HE Suicides and advised that a College lead contact had been identified to link into the national review. Members were updated on progress against the Disabled Students Commitment where a recent exercise had demonstrated strong compliance based on the College's current policies and procedures. Julie advised that guidance on the Access and Participation Plan had been received and a working group established to start to collate the information required to develop the new plan for submission in July.

Members noted the report.

24/10 HE Student Forum Feedback – overview of issues and progress update (Paper G)

Alice Tomlinson presented Paper G, the HE Student Forum Feedback. The December meeting had been well-attended with students raising concerns about the lack of printers and blinds in THE Hub, which had now been addressed. The February meeting had not been as well-attended and efforts were in hand to explore ways to improve student engagement. The main issue raised at the meeting had been in relation to catering. There were no concerns raised at either meeting in relation to Teaching and Learning where feedback had been very positive. Members were also updated on the work with students to explain the importance of completing the National Student Survey.

Peter Morrison commented that it was pleasing that the issues raised were relatively low level and where it was possible to accommodate student requests this was always appreciated. Members noted that the next phase of modernisation was in relation to the Library over the summer and then the University Centre. Members agreed it was positive that the issues raised in the forum meetings were minor in nature and noted the report.

24/11 Academic Board minutes (Paper H)

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

24/12 Any other business – none

24/13 Date of next meeting: 20 June 2024

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