

**The Corporation of New College Durham**

**Minutes of the meeting of the Higher Education Quality Curriculum  
and Students Committee held on 20 June 2024**

**Present:**

Ben Fisher (Chair)  
Andy Broadbent

Alice Tomlinson  
Ian Green

**Apologies:**

Mark Gomersall  
Alison Maynard  
Andy Stephenson

**In attendance:**

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

**Action**

**24/14 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.

Members noted that this was the last meeting for Alice Tomlinson as her term of office was due to expire on 30 June 2024. The Chair thanked Alice for her contribution to the Committee over the last year.

Members confirmed they did not require any further discussion about the starred agenda Paper F.

**24/15 Apologies for absence** were received from Mark Gomersall, Alison Maynard, Andy Stephenson

**24/16 Minutes of previous meeting (Papers A1 & A2)**

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2024 (including confidential minutes) were agreed as accurate and signed by the Chair.

**24/17 Matters arising**

24/06 – all HE programme leaders in addition to the Vice Principal and senior members of the HE curriculum team would be in attendance to offer students support on support at A Levels Results day.

24/07 – it was noted that the KPI tables were a standardised format across all committees and areas of reporting, and included the trend across the year against the target.

Confidential minutes:

24/05a – the partnerships paper was updated to include a summary of key issues considered against each option before circulation to Corporation.

## **24/18 Consultation on proposed regulatory advice and other matters relating to Freedom of Speech (Paper B)**

Peter Morrison presented Paper B, which updated on new legislation due to come into effect for Higher Education providers in relation to Freedom of Speech. Peter advised that the paper had also been considered by the College Equality Diversity and Inclusion Group and the Further Education Quality Curriculum and Students Committee, and explained that the College was aiming to have a Freedom of Speech Policy and Code of Practice in place for the new academic year to ensure compliance with the new requirements.

Members noted that the new duties placed a responsibility on the Corporation to ensure that the College takes reasonably practicable steps to ensure that freedom of speech within the law is secured for members, students, apprentices, employees and visiting speakers. The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) were responsible for ensuring mandatory training for staff and to ensure that all students and visitors were aware of their responsibilities when on site. Peter highlighted the responsibilities the legislation would place on the Students' Union President and confirmed the College's approach would need to ensure they had appropriate support. It was noted that a new complaints scheme managed by the Office for Students (OfS) would be introduced giving students an additional mechanism to complain. Peter confirmed that the College (via the AoC) and the Students' Union had responded to the OfS consultation on proposed guidance to accompany the new duties and members noted the AoC response appended to the report.

Peter advised that the College was already well placed to respond to the new duties in light of opportunities across the curriculum to discuss sensitive and contentious issues and encourage debate, for example in personal development sessions, HE tutorials, apprenticeship reviews and in discharging obligations under the Prevent and safeguarding legislation. Discussions on the provision of suitable training were ongoing and it was planned to raise awareness of individuals' rights and responsibilities through the SLT newsletter and student induction. The required documentation would be developed over the summer to ensure the College was compliant for the next academic year.

In response to a member's question on training, Peter confirmed this would be mandatory, would also apply to governors, and be available as an e-learning module. Members asked about the definition of 'reasonably practicable' steps and Peter advised this was considered in a recent briefing discussion he had attended

and that more guidance on this specific question was expected from the OfS. Members noted the links to a number of the College's existing policies and procedures and Peter confirmed that these would be refreshed to integrate with the new documents through the usual periodic review.

Members confirmed they were supportive of the proposed approach to implementation as outlined in the report.

**24/19 Strategic Monitoring – Update on HE Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) 2023/24 and proposed targets and KPIs for 2024/25 (Paper C)**

Peter Morrison presented Paper C, which updated on progress against the KPIs for 2023/24 and proposed targets for 2024/25.

**2023/24 performance update**

Members reviewed the performance against KPIs for enrolments, retention, continuation, both overall and broken down into Durham and partnership provision. Members asked how the level of withdrawals compared with other colleges, and it was noted that whilst the current levels were higher than national figures, the key area of concern was timeliness of withdrawals as a focus of the Student Loan Company.

**Proposed 2024/25 targets**

Members reviewed the proposed targets for 2024/25 and Peter highlighted areas where there was a proposed change, the new proposed KPI for attendance and the new individual KPIs and targets for the College's HE partners, which were aligned with OfS benchmarks. In response to a member's question on the Durham attendance target, Peter advised that this had been established to align with the FE attendance target. Most programmes had attendance above this level but there were pockets that fell below, which would be addressed through quality reviews. Julie Coverley advised of the potential for some of the OfS KPIs to change as these were reviewed annually and this would be monitored for any updates.

Members queried whether the proposed target for internal progression from Level 3 (SKPIHD6) was achievable in light of the 2023/24 figure and suggested it may be appropriate to revise the 2024/25 target to a lower level. The Principal suggested that the target should relate to the level of the College's FE growth in the current year due to the potential for these students to flow through to HE.

**Members noted the latest College performance for 2023/24 and approved all of the proposed targets, subject to an amended target for SKPIHD6 in 2024/25 of 135. Members also agreed to recommend the updated KPIs for 2024/25 to Corporation for approval.**

## **24/20 Partnership Update (Paper D)**

Suzanne Crane presented Paper D, which provided the latest update on the College's HE partnerships.

Members were updated that the College had formally confirmed to the London School of Commerce (LSC) that the contract would not be renewed and that arrangements were in hand to consider support for students in a retake position or returning from suspension of studies, in accordance with the Student Protection Plan. Members noted the latest data on LSC completion and continuation rates, which had shown some improvement. Suzanne advised that there had been a recent spike in withdrawals and that the HE team had been contacting the individuals concerned to understand the reasons and identify any common issues. Whilst these calls were ongoing, the early indications were that this had been for largely personal reasons with no issues of concern.

Suzanne updated on the recent Oxford Business College (OBC) launch event at their Brentford campus and updated on the latest enrolment position at OBC and CECOS.

Members were briefed on the report of the Public Audit Committee (PAC) into franchise provision. It was noted that OBC was progressing its application for registration with the OfS and that this was also being explored by CECOS. The Principal updated that the College was looking at alignment of all of its partnership contracts to ensure consistency and transparency in response to the PAC report. The College's website had also been updated to provide some basic information on its partnerships and would look to build on this further in future, to give students an understanding of how their tuition fee was used.

Members noted the report.

## **24/21 Quality Development Plan (HEQDP) Update (Paper E)**

Peter Morrison presented Paper E, which updated on progress against the Areas for Improvement in the QDP for 2023/24.

Members were updated on Durham based enrolments, noting that an action plan was in place focusing on increasing the conversion rate from applications. Peter explained that there was still a decline in full-time HE numbers nationally, and this was anticipated in September. In the meantime, the team were working with OBC and CECOS to consider any learning that could be taken from their recruitment approach. Members emphasised the need to continue to focus on this area.

Members noted the continuation rates as considered in the KPI report earlier on the agenda, an update on the national student survey, and the work to streamline the enrolment process and

ensure students were registered from day one of their programme. In response to a member's question, Peter confirmed that the previous process had been part of the LSC operating arrangements, and it had been possible to remove elements of that process and register students more quickly. Members were updated on staff training and development and the continued support for staff as part of the Academy Fellowship process. Peter advised that the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) were keen to recognise these staff at the forthcoming graduation event and that changes were being explored to the timing and format of the next HE conference to enable more people to attend.

Members noted the report.

#### **24/22 Curriculum and Quality monitoring report (Paper F)**

Members received the Curriculum and Quality monitoring report, which updated on quality assurance student surveys, internal and external quality assessment, emerging themes and sector updates, feedback from HE teaching observations, international activity and research and scholarly activity.

#### **24/23 Access and Participation Plan update (Paper G)**

Julie Coverley presented Paper G, which updated on progress in developing the new Access and Participation Plan (APP).

Julie explained that all HE providers were required to renew their APP after four years and the College had re-established its APP working group with College-wide representation and involvement of the Students' Union President. Members were updated on the limitations of the OfS dashboard data and noted that following a review of the student life cycle, three risks to equal opportunity had been identified.

Members discussed inclusion of the identified risks in the plan and noted that most College-based HE plans would include three or four risks but universities would probably include eight or nine. Julie advised that whilst there were no gaps in the access cycle there was scope for improvement in Access to HE. Members discussed the impact of the College's HE partnerships on the risk areas and the differences in their demographics to NCD.

Members noted the current risks identified for the proposed APP.

#### **24/24 HE Student Forum Feedback – overview of issues and progress update (Paper H)**

Alice Tomlinson presented Paper H, which summarised feedback from the HE Student Forum. Members noted that attendance had been low due to a clash with other events at the time of the meeting and it was planned to move the date and time to try and

increase attendance and ensure the forum obtained a wider range of views and perspectives.

Alice updated on the change to the NCD Academic Regulations and advised that students had welcomed the decision to invite students achieving an exit award to graduation.

Peter Morrison drew members' attention to the success of 50% of Podiatry Level 6 students having secured jobs in the sector and advised that this would be a focus of future marketing activity.

Members noted the report.

**24/25 Academic Board minutes (Paper I)**

Members received Paper I and noted the content of the Academic Board minutes.

**24/26 Proposed Schedule of Business for 2024/25 (Paper J)**

Members reviewed and endorsed the proposed Schedule of Business for 2024/25.

**24/27 Any other business - none**

**24/28 Date of next meeting: TBC**

**24/29 Review of Committee Effectiveness**

Members were asked to complete a questionnaire in advance of the meeting. Members reviewed the summary of responses which highlighted:

- the committee had the right mix of skills but membership numbers were low, which impacted on the ability to provide wide ranging challenge
- Papers provided the right level of detail for governors, and agendas and the schedule of business adequately covered the Committee's terms of reference
- The Committee had focused its time appropriately over the year and members felt that its consideration of the risks associated with the London School of Commerce contract and the wider HE partnership strategy had been the most strategically important work during the year.

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