

The Corporation of New College Durham

Minutes of the meeting of the Education Quality Curriculum and Students Committee held on 14 November 2024

Present:

Ben Fisher
Andy Broadbent
Emily Baxter
Suzanne Slater

Davey Benson
Mark Gomersall
Hailie Warren
Beatrix Murray English

Apologies:

Colleen Peters

In attendance:

Alison Maynard (Deputy Principal)
Andy Stephenson (Vice Principal)
Adele Dowson (Vice Principal)
Peter Morrison (Vice Principal)
Rob Grainey (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 and starred items

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted this was the first meeting of the newly established Education Quality Curriculum and Students Committee following the agreed merger of the Further Education Quality Curriculum and Students and Higher Education Quality Curriculum and Students Committees.

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

Hailie Warren joined the meeting at 4.04pm.

Members confirmed they did not require any further discussion about the starred agenda Papers D and M.

24/02 Apologies for absence were received from Colleen Peters.

24/03 Minutes of previous meetings

The minutes of the meeting of the Further Education Quality Curriculum and Students Committee held on 13 June 2024 were agreed as an accurate record.

The minutes of the meeting of the Higher Education Quality Curriculum and Students Committee held on 20 June 2024 were agreed as an accurate record.

24/04 Matters arising

There were no follow up actions from the previous meeting.

24/05 Strategic Discussion – Curriculum Reform (Paper B)

The Chair welcomed Marie O'Brien, Director of Funding and Curriculum Planning to provide an overview on the latest position in relation to the Level 3 curriculum reforms.

Marie summarised the context to the reforms which were intended to respond to successive reviews which found that the current qualification system was overly complex. The overall outcome was to achieve high quality qualifications and establish a clear process that made it easier for students to make a choice. Members noted the proposed changes and associated timeline with the most significant changes due in July 2025. Marie explained the implications of the government's decision to pause the reforms, highlighting the enrolment and curriculum planning challenges in responding to an expected announcement in December 2024 in a way that minimised disruption to students and staff and protected learners' achievement. Marie advised that the College had identified a solution for each of the potential outcomes of the review i.e. the reforms go ahead, partial change is implemented, or the reforms are stopped, and explained how this could be taken forward through changes to enrolments, the marketing offer and the curriculum plan as appropriate, depending on the announcement.

In response to a member's question Marie confirmed that a mix of approaches were being seen among other colleges and whilst some would be taking a similar approach to NCD, others had made little progress in their response and it was clear that the College was ahead of the curve in its planning. Members were supportive of the College's approach and discussed the concerns and potential ways forward for qualifications such as e-sports, travel and tourism and uniformed services where the reform position was unclear. Alison Maynard updated members that a separate independent Curriculum Assessment Review (CAR) was also now underway and due to report in 2025 and although currently focused on pre-16 education may be extended to post-16. In response to a member's question about the future landscape for maths and English following the CAR Alison advised that there had been no early indications to date.

Members thanked Marie for the clear and helpful presentation of the position and the assurance that the College had plans in place to respond and adapt accordingly.

Marie O'Brien left the meeting at 4.30pm.

24/06 Strategic Monitoring – 2023/24 Year-end Report on Strategic KPIs – Performance and Impact (FE and Apprenticeships) (Paper C)

Adele Dowson presented Paper C, which provided an analysis of performance and emerging themes in the 2023/24 academic year.

Members noted the overview of the achievement rate, the impact of changes to curriculum composition, apprenticeship achievement, key strategic themes over the year, the teaching and learning update and developments in academic integrity.

Members asked about the reason for lower than expected staff engagement in CPD and noted that whilst there was a mix of issues, time was a key factor. The offer had been reviewed to trial different approaches including shorter and snappier CPD sessions, which offered strategies that could be absorbed and implemented quickly. The Quality Team continued to work closely with curriculum teams to try and respond to their needs.

Members commended the progress by staff that did not initially meet expectations on their first learning visit, and the positive approach to improvements to move individuals forward.

Members noted the report.

24/07 Curriculum and Quality Monitoring – information report (FE) (Paper D)

Members received and noted Paper D, which provided an overview of learner surveys, equality for students and student discipline for Term 3 and annual analysis.

24/08 Update on 2024/25 Strategic KPIs (Education & Training, Apprenticeships and Higher Education) (Paper E)

Andy Stephenson presented Paper E, which provided an early update on performance against the quality and curriculum strategic KPIs for the current academic year across FE, apprenticeships and HE.

Members were updated on attendance across all areas of provision, functional skills achievement, student satisfaction, GCSE maths high grade, retention in adult education, apprenticeship recruitment and retention, employer satisfaction, HE recruitment, retention and continuation, and the work to understand the detail of performance across the different elements of HE provision. Andy highlighted areas of performance concern and advised on tailored strategies in place to deliver improvement, with early indicators suggesting positive trends.

Members discussed the concerns over attendance and asked about patterns across the year. It was noted that there were particular challenges at certain times of the year including approaching holidays and exam periods as well as variations by curriculum area. The impact of the previous year's bus strikes was also noted as a non-typical event that had a significant impact.

Members noted the KPI position at the end of October 2024.

24/09 English and Maths Review (Paper F)

Rob Graine presented Paper F, which provided a detailed analysis of English and maths provision at the College.

For both areas Rob presented trend data on achievement and attendance, the enrolment position for functional skills and GCSE, the current teaching position, key areas of concern and the strategic interventions in place to address the issues identified in the previous year.

Members thanked Rob for the detailed report, which provided clarity on areas of concern and explained the strategies to address key areas. Members felt the College was doing all it could to drive improvement with the right interventions in place. In response to a question about the achievement of SEND learners in comparison to their peers Rob confirmed that this was on par in English but that SEND learners outperformed their peers in relation to maths, with the recent maths SAR demonstrating their achievement was above the national rate. SEND learners received focused support at an early stage which was maintained over time so that teachers knew and understood their support needs. Members asked about the performance of adult learners and noted that there was a need to consider mode of delivery, review the approach to information advice and guidance and also the intent of the adult offer. Members discussed the move to a block model for apprenticeship delivery and noted that whilst this had improved attendance further work was needed to understand why this had not translated into higher levels of achievement.

Members noted the report.

24/10 Update on College Self-Assessment Report 2023/24 and FE Quality Development Plan 2024/25 (FE and Apprenticeships) (Paper G)

Alison Maynard presented Paper G, which updated on progress in developing the College Self-Assessment Report (SAR) and Quality Development Plan (QDP).

Alison expressed her thanks to everyone that had contributed to the SAR validation sessions and that governor attendance and input was particularly appreciated, with staff valuing the opportunity to speak to governors and senior managers. The process had been very challenging and a great example of the curriculum teams' work. Alison summarised the early messages emerging from the sessions that would be reflected in the College-wide SAR with strengths in leadership and management, quality of education, employer engagement to shape and drive the curriculum and areas for improvement which would be proposed as QDP priorities. A significant amount of outstanding provision had been evidenced and work was underway to prepare the draft SAR for the forthcoming Corporation workshop.

Members commented on the value they gained from being part of the SAR validations and engaging with curriculum areas, which gave both strong assurance and a real insight into the work of curriculum areas and their commitment to continuous improvement.

Members noted the position at the end of October 2024 for the College SAR and QDP.

24/11 Review of HE Annual Report 2023/24 and revised QDP (incorporating 2023/24 end of year review of strategic KPIs and aims) (Paper H)

Peter Morrison presented Paper H, the Higher Education Annual Report and revised Quality Development Plan.

Peter explained the process to prepare the report and the various sources of information on which it was based. Members noted that the report was intended to give Corporation assurance that HE provision was in accordance with the relevant quality standards and Office for Students expectations. Members reviewed the performance headlines and developments over the year as outlined in the report and noted the proposed QDP priorities for 2024/25.

Members endorsed the HE Annual Report for presentation to Corporation and recommended the QDP priorities for Corporation approval.

24/12 Curriculum & Quality Monitoring report (HE) (Paper I)

Julie Coverley presented Paper I, the HE curriculum and quality monitoring report. Members were briefed on the National Student Survey results, internal and external quality assurance, external accreditation, HE teaching learning and assessment feedback, research and scholarly activity, emerging themes and sector updates relating to the new OfS sexual harassment condition, OfS quality assessments, the Lifelong Learning Entitlement, the North East Institute of Technology's (NEIoT) Skills Injection fund application and the implications of the government announcement on fees and maintenance loans.

In response to a member's question around opportunities to work with Durham University to support research and scholarly activity, Julie confirmed that this already took place through the NEIoT but more development was needed to publish research and outcomes from innovative projects.

Members noted the report.

24/13 Partnership Update (Paper J)

This item is recorded confidentially under minute 24/13a.

24/14 Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy Update (Paper K)

Peter Morrison presented Paper K, which updated on progress and impact of the College's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

Peter explained the current context in terms of young people's mental health and briefed members on the College's approach to mental health and wellbeing, adoption of the Association of Colleges' Mental Health Charter, key achievements and challenges since the strategy was launched, student feedback on mental health and wellbeing and the action plan for 2024/25.

Members noted the report.

24/15 FE/HE Student Forum feedback (Paper L)

Hailie Warren presented Paper L, which summarised feedback from the latest FE and HE student forum meetings. Hailie advised that HE students had indicated their satisfaction with the level of teaching, resources and facilities and highlighted a number of areas that had been raised in the forum discussions and how these were being addressed, including wifi/connectivity issues, instances of broken electronics, support for student needs, timetable issues, digital resources and availability of trips and visits.

Members thanked Hailie for her detailed report and noted the progress being made in addressing the issues raised. Members asked about specific areas of concern and commented on the importance of the issues being reported so that staff were able to respond. The Principal also thanked Hailie for her report and emphasised the need to continue to provide this feedback to ensure issues could be addressed.

24/16 Student Union report (Paper M)

Members received and noted Paper M, the Student Union report, which updated on the recent student forum meetings, enrichment activity, further training undertaken by the Student Union president, World Mental Health Day activities, student voice activity at the Construction Centre of Excellence and upcoming events.

24/17 Any other business - none

24/18 Date of next meeting: 20 March 2025