

CURRICULUM AND QUALITY COMMITTEE: 19th MARCH 2024

MINUTES

PRESENT Nicole Morgan (Chair), Angela Herbert, Simon Horne, Mary Stiasny, Antony Moss, Nana Brew (Staff Governor), Rowda Ali (WKC Student Governor), Jamal Mahamud (CONEL Student Governor)

IN ATTENDANCE Angela Joyce (CEO), Kurt Hintz (Executive Principal), David Dangana (Director of Quality and Compliance), Jackie Chapman (Executive Director for Growth and Partnerships), Graham Drummond (Director of Governance), Graham Cooper (Clerk), Daniel Taylor (Good Governance Institute)

APOLOGIES Anthony Smith, Amelia Sussman, Asfa Sohail, Praful Nargund, Mark Isherwood

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST None

Antony Moss was welcomed to his first meeting as a co-opted member of the Committee.

The Chair also welcomed Daniel Taylor who explained that he was attending as an observer from Good Governance Improvement (the consultancy service of the Good Governance Institute), who have been appointed by the Board to undertake an independent review of the Group's governance (as required every three years).

1. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 25TH JANUARY 2024 **Action**
The minutes of the meeting held on 25th January 2024 were agreed as a correct record.

2. MATTERS ARISING
The committee noted the following:

- With respect to item 3.1 – the proportion of students who attended a stop and search workshop (earlier in the academic year) who self-declare as black was not recorded for the event, however 28% of the Group's total student population self-declare their ethnic background as being African (16%), Caribbean (6%) or Other Black (6%). Governors will be invited to future events.
- With respect to item 4.2 and the Multiply programme, a summary of progression data was provided, including a breakdown of the 304 Multiply students who went on to English/maths/ESOL or vocational studies.
- With respect to item 4.3 and a comparison of the conversion rate on bids to the previous year:
 - 47 bids were made in total for the whole of 2022 and 2023.
 - the bid win rate in 2022 was 91% (current rate 90%)
 - £9million total contract value won, which includes the Multiply programme.

3. CURRICULUM AND QUALITY UPDATE
A report was received and the committee noted:

Attendance and Retention

- Overall attendance is 87.1% (0.5% lower than this time last year). For 16-18s, overall attendance is 0.5% lower (+0.5% Candi, -1.8% at CONEL, and -1.5% at WestKing). 19+ attendance is 0.9% lower than at this point last year, a breakdown of which was provided, with variations across curriculum areas. Attendance rates continue to be monitored weekly by the Heads of School and Curriculum Managers, with interventions to drive improvement.
- The Staff Governor provided additional context with regard to attendance, informed by feedback that had been received from students and parents, specifically that in light of the cost-of-living crisis, students are having to prioritise working to support their families, ahead of

focusing on their studies, which is having an adverse impact on attendance.

- The committee also noted that data published by the DfE similarly showed attendance levels down across schools, with mental health and anxiety cited as contributory factors. The Executive Principal provided additional insight gained from his role as part of the AoC's wellbeing group, in relation to the drop in attendance rates across FE arising from home life and cost of living issues, and the lingering impact of the pandemic on mental health also a factor. Relative to many other colleges, the Group's attendance levels, at over 90%, are holding up well as a result of ongoing interventions that are in place. Digital resources are in place and that additional sessions for students, including after school sessions, Easter booster sessions etc. are amongst the interventions in place to help students make up for lost attendance. The Student Governors noted the popularity of these. Additionally, the Student Governors provided feedback in relation to additional sessions on industry skills provided to students, noting that the length of these sessions, at 3 hours, makes attendance for the full sessions challenging. The Executive Principal agreed to look into the possibility of splitting these sessions to make them more manageable.
- Overall retention rates are strong and slightly higher than this time last year across the board.

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Student Recruitment

- Marketing in order to drive student recruitment for 2024/25 has been a priority area of focus, with increased activity across all areas including digital marketing, mail drops, open days and increased engagement with schools through the Group's school liaison officers.
- Applications are up by 1,256 when compared to the same time last year, and offers up by 472 (14%). Applications for 16-18 year-olds, are down by 1% on prior year, although the Executive Principal noted that the more important indicator of enrolments is the number of offers, which are up by 288 (10%). Following the usual pattern for the Group, around a third of enrolments for next year will be from internal progression, a third from walk-ins during the enrolment period in the summer (especially Level 1 or Level 2), and a third through the recruitment process that is currently being monitored and which applies most significantly to Level 3. A particular concern is A Level applications, which are lower than the same time last year, due to the competition from school sixth forms and many students deciding to remain at school, being an environment that they are familiar with. Schools are also offering BTEC qualifications, particularly Business Studies and Health and Care, as part of their strategy to retain students. The introduction of Alternative Academic Qualifications (AAQs) from 2025 will enable students to undertake a mix of studies. This will impact the sixth form curriculum and will provide an opportunity for a change in emphasis aimed at attracting more students from schools.
- Overall recruitment is pleasing and demonstrates that the previous decline in 16-18 year old recruitment has been successfully turned around. The Kings Cross Centre in particular has returned to a growth trajectory. As regards T Levels, an additional 6 pathways are to run next year (following a start with only 2 pathways in the current year), but recruitment to these is proving challenging.

Learner Straw Poll February 2024

- A learner straw poll was run between the 5th and 9th of February 2024. The straw poll was aimed at obtaining feedback about 5 specific areas of focus determined from previous feedback: General facilities, Catering, Teaching and Learning – Maths and English, Wellbeing and Tutorial and Support. 1,074 students across the Group completed the survey.
- The feedback from the straw poll provided further insight into why the satisfaction statement 'Wider facilities are clean, tidy and accessible' was below the 90% target, and this will inform further actions for improvement.
- The inclusion of learner well-being in the straw poll, was to support the further development of this important aspect, in line with the Group's aim to become a sector leader in the provision of support for students' mental health and wellbeing. Tiredness amongst students was highlighted in the responses and is an issue being looked into further, along with ways to further raise awareness of and encourage access to counselling services, along with increased participation in enrichment activities. The proportion of students not being aware how to access these areas indicates a need for improved communication with students, and increased use of text messaging as a primary mechanism is being pursued. Anthony Moss explained how challenges relating to understanding student support needs have been addressed in his institution through the implementation of a new tool and he offered to share this experience, which the Director of

Quality and Compliance agreed to follow up.

- Other aspects covered by the survey included looking further into the dissatisfaction previously expressed with respect to wi-fi reliability. Action has now been taken to address this issue, particularly at the Tottenham Green Centre, which had the highest level of dissatisfaction. Toilet cleanliness was also an area of focus, as well as catering facilities. The latter includes the provision of free breakfasts to students, and steps have been taken to raise awareness and to overcome cultural issues/reticence amongst students to take up the offer. This includes a 'breakfast club' approach, providing a space for students to study and to prepare themselves to take on the days' studies.

Apprenticeship Report

The report was presented by the Executive Director for Growth and Partnerships:

- Retention remains strong at 76.3%, slightly higher than last year. With regard to numbers likely to complete by the end of the academic year, the position is better than last year, with a third of continuers already triggered (i.e. having completed their studies and now at the End Point Assessment stage). From previous experience, c. 90% of the latter do complete and it is therefore expected that the percentage who complete will be higher than the national average. There remain, however, c. 220 apprentices in learning who have yet to move to the End Point Assessment stage and the focus ahead of the Easter break is to support as many of these to reach this as possible, particularly in view of the capacity difficulties that the awarding bodies have to undertake assessments towards the end of the academic year.
- To ensure that as many students as possible are supported to reach completion, a Rapid Action Improvement Plan on compliance and tracking of apprentices across several areas has been implemented this year. The majority of areas have made good progress, with the only area of limited progress being Construction, predominantly due to staffing issues rather than quality of delivery. Fortnightly meetings are taking place to address this, which will be helped by additional staffing that has been put in place for term 3.
- Apprenticeship recruitment is an area that is not performing well, despite taking on a new Head of Sales at the beginning of the academic year. This a national trend, not just a college specific issue, but resource is being redeployed to try to boost recruitment during term 3 for the September intake. This is already showing early signs of success, e.g. in Engineering following a recent employer engagement day event, and achieving similar success in other areas is now the key focus.

Curriculum Business Planning 2024/25

- The curriculum business planning for 2024/25 is progressing to target, due for completion at the end of March. This will then result in a course file being uploaded onto systems by the end of April, in order to enable courses to be advertised and to enable progression interviews. Timetables will then be created during May prior to the enrolment process, financial data will be passed to the Finance Team to input the budget building process, and plans will be made for allocation of resources.
- There are changes that will be necessary, including for example to meet the recent UK Government announcement relating to the minimum number of hours of English and maths provision on study courses for students aged 16-18 years. The latter will require the Group to have an additional 15 maths teachers, which presents a significant challenge in light of the general shortage of maths teachers, an issue that is faced by colleges nationally. 2024/25 will be a transition year with no financial penalties, but for 2025/26 there will be an impact on funding if the new conditions are not fully met.
- Other changes include the discontinuation of a post-Covid small group tuition fund. With regard to T Levels, the Group has received funding for investment in resources and staff training but recruitment onto these new pathways is proving difficult, as already highlighted.

Key Quality Priorities for Term 2

These were noted as:

- Final Curriculum Business Planning meetings for 2024/25
- The annual NSS survey currently taking place
- Spring learners survey
- Staff Professional Development Day, with inclusivity being a key theme.

4. **QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

An update report on the Group Quality Improvement Plan 2023/24 was received and the following was noted:

The current year QIP is made up of

- The progress made since last inspection: This is based on the key findings of the last Ofsted inspection (Dec 2022). Most of the Ofsted areas for improvement had already been identified through the self-assessment process.
- The key areas of improvement based on themes of the Education Inspection Framework (EIF): These are Quality of Education, Behaviours and Attitudes, Personal Development and Leadership & Management.
- Key Areas of Development and Collaboration: These cover all the areas of development and collaboration based on emerging opportunities and priorities identified during the year. They are not areas for improvement but need some focus and attention due to their strategic importance.
- Key Strategic Health Indicators: These cover all the key strategic health indicators as identified and agreed by the Group Leadership Team (GLT).

Progress in relation to many areas of the QIP is strong. The Executive Principal brought the committee's attention to the areas where this is not the case:

- Attendance is slightly down, as already referred to early in the meeting. This is particularly the case in relation to English and maths, the nature of the challenge of motivating students having been the subject of previous discussions.
- Value Added scores for A Levels has been a problem for some time and continues to be a strong area of focus, with mechanisms having been deployed in classrooms, but which are likely to require further time to have impact as part of a long-term strategy. Areas of particular weakness include Science and maths. The committee discussed the need for care in making comparisons with other sixth forms, noting that some school sixth forms are highly selective. Grading severity in STEM subjects generally was also noted as a factor.
- GCSE maths, whilst above national rates (which themselves are low), is also an area of focus for improvement. It is recognised that a 'deep-dive' review of the maths curriculum and delivery mechanisms is required. The new Government guidelines requiring a minimum of four hours per week tuition provide an additional impetus for the review.

In response to a query on the matter of financial support for students, the CEO and Executive Principal advised that whilst this is a topic constantly raised in forums that they attend, they are unaware of any plans or significant lobbying to introduce new mechanisms (such as the previous Education Maintenance Allowance), beyond the existing mostly means-tested financial support mechanisms (including bursaries) that are in place.

Additional data on student demographics was requested and the Executive Principal agreed to follow this up with Angela Herbert. KH

The Executive Principal also brought the committee's attention to the KPI data which is included with the reports to each meeting and which provides detailed comparisons with previous year and national benchmark data.

5. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

None.

FUTURE MEETINGS

Tuesday 14th May 2024 5:00pm

Thursday 20th June 2024 5:00pm