

QUALITY OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE: 14TH MAY 2024

MINUTES

PRESENT

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

IN ATTENDANCE

Angela Joyce (CEO), David Dangana (Director of Quality and Compliance), Jackie Chapman (Executive Director for Growth and Partnerships), Graham Drummond (Director of Governance), Stewart Cross, Graham Cooper (Clerk),
For item 3 only: JJ Sulaiman (CIC Student representative), Rahma Hussein (CIC Student Engagement Officer), Brooks Seyoum (WKC Student Engagement Officer)

APOLOGIES

Amelia Sussman, Mark Isherwood

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

1. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19TH MARCH 2024

Action

The minutes of the meeting held on 19th March 2024 were agreed as a correct record.

2. MATTERS ARISING

The committee noted the following:

With respect to industry skills sessions, as the Executive Principal who was to take this matter forward has now left the Group, the Director of Governance agreed to follow up on the possibility of splitting these sessions in order to make them more manageable for students.

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There were no other matters arising.

3. STUDENT ENGAGEMENT REPORTS

3.1 CONEL

The committee received the CONEL student engagement report presented by Jamal Mahamud, who advised that overall attendance at student enrichment events and recent events that have been organised to help students prepare for examinations has been higher than previously. This follows on from initiatives to engage class representatives in disseminating information and promoting events. The committee noted the following activity highlights:

- a) Student First Aid workshop: St. John's Ambulance Service have delivered first aid taster sessions to students. These sessions have provided over 900 students with the confidence and the basic skills needed to respond to incidents such as heart attacks or stab wounds in the community.
- b) Media literacy & Extremism workshops: Over 300 students attended a series of interactive face to face workshops. The presentations, funded by the GLA, were delivered by an external agency Shoutout UK and covered subjects including Concepts of Media Literacy, Conspiracy Theories and how to tackle them, and the use of deep fake AI generated audio and visual content. They also provided advice on how to fact check and find reliable sources of information.
- c) Knife Crime: Over 500 students attended Knife Crime presentations led by the Get Real Youth Service, who offer an engaging mix of stark facts, powerful demonstrations, and gripping footage designed to captivate and educate students, ultimately dissuading them from carrying knives. Through these workshops, students gained an insight into the dangers of gang affiliation and the severe repercussions of knife crime.
- d) Prison Life workshop: Delivered by Khadys Dream, this workshop informed students about the realities of Prison life, with a particular emphasis on the long-term impact on the mental health

of prisoners, the risk of falling into serious debt, the dangers of prisoner peer pressure and gang membership.

- e) Other activities included a 6-week programme to teach students the skills to create T-Shirt designs and print, a 12-week programme led by experienced podcasters covering topics such as storytelling, interview techniques, audio production, and building an engaged audience, and a 6-week Social Media Marketing and Management programme aimed at helping students to develop skills to learn how to create engaging media content and to monetise their social media activities.
- f) Workshops covering subjects such as Stop and Search, Mental Health, Financial Literacy and Drugs and Alcohol awareness also contributed towards a holistic enrichment programme aimed at equipping students with essential life skills and knowledge.
- g) In addition to the enrichment activities, events were also organised to help students prepare for examinations. The Enfield and Haringey Talking Therapies Service hosted a series of online workshops focused on 'Dealing with Exam Stress' – designed specifically to equip students with effective coping techniques to manage exam-related stress prior to, during, and after examinations. Exam revision workshops are also being held to help students learn different study techniques, improve their coursework and focus on exam readiness.

3.2 CIC

The committee received the CIC student engagement report presented by JJ Sulaiman, Student Union President, who highlighted the following:

- a) Student Union Elections: Elections for the 2024/25 academic year have been held and the President and Vice President have both been elected from the diverse range of students who nominated themselves for each of these positions. There was a higher level of student engagement with the election process than in previous years, following on from activity to promote these through emails and a poster campaign.
- b) Social action campaign: This campaign, entitled #candireset, focuses on the negative impact of social media on mental health. The campaign was successfully launched on 1st February 2024 and has achieved a high level of student engagement and response.
- c) Culture Week: This was a hugely successful and enjoyable initiative. Held during the last week of April, Culture Days involved both staff and students, who were encouraged to dress in their cultural attire, and featured music, drumming and dance performances, henna, a photobooth, bead- making, guess the flags and mapping cultural heritage activity.

The Student Engagement Officer explained the consultation with and involvement of students in organising events. Feedback is gathered, which has affirmed, in particular, the popularity of cultural events and their effectiveness in helping to promote a sense of community, involvement and inclusiveness.

3.3 WKC

Rowda Ali, WKC Student Governor, presented the WKC Student Executive Report. She provided an overview of WKC's enrichment activities, which included:

- a) World of Work: Organised by the careers department, external organisations conducted careers workshops, stimulating learners to think about future career opportunities and pathways.
- b) Personal Finance/Financial literacy project: aimed at business students, educating learners on personal finance by inviting 'The Money Charity' to run topics such as tax, payslips, and pension.
- c) Planet Earth Games: an initiative to engage learners in the creation of sustainable and functional items centred around upcycling materials.
- d) LGBTQ+ History Month: various workshops, including a curated panel discussion featuring distinguished speakers from diverse industries who shared their personal and professional experiences to provide valuable insights into their journeys, and to foster awareness and challenge prevalent stereotypes and biases associated with the LGBTQI+ community. Students provided particularly positive feedback regarding the accessibility of these workshops to all students.
- e) Refugee Education x ESOL: a series of workshops aimed at asylum seeker and refugee learners, facilitated a Refugee education charity, focussing on pathways and progression in the United Kingdom, including on how to utilise qualifications already achieved in their home countries.

- f) Felix Project event: In association with the Felix Project, a charitable organisation that delivers surplus fresh fruits and vegetables to local food banks and colleges, launching the project in WKC, initially focussed on ESOL learners to provide fresh produce to the college. In turn, learners will operate a food stall to redistribute surplus produce among their peers. The Felix Project will also support learners who wish to obtain Food Safety Level 2 Certificate.
- g) Sexual Assault Awareness event to remind learners of the support available for those who have experienced abuse and harassment. A number of external organisations came on site to provide information and advice to learners.
- h) Anti-bullying and Cyberbullying event: consisting of external organisations holding information stands, providing information and advice on what to do if students experience bullying in college and online.

With respect to deciding on the programme of activity, the process is informed by emerging themes, including topics arising from the previous year's safeguarding and mental health support activity. Feedback on events is gathered from students, including by way of discussions at class representative meetings, with a 'you said, we did' response provided through posters etc.

Overall feedback regarding the number, variety and accessibility of activities is positive. It was also noted, however, that some workshops are targeted specifically at certain groups/cohorts of students. For example, workshops on knife crime have been targeted at student groups (not individuals) with a high incidence of criminal convictions. Workshops on mental health and sexual assault awareness have also had a positive impact by resulting in noticeably more students accessing counselling and support services.

With respect to attendance at enrichment events, the Student Engagement Officer advised that this reflects the broad ethnic mix and demographic breakdown of the college's student body, other than that there is a significant focus on participation by 16-18 learners, with adult learner attendance being generally lower.

The Staff Governor advised that some Educational Health Care Plan (EHCP) students have struggled to engage with enrichment activities and requested that this is looked into.

4. DRAFT ACCOUNTABILITY STATEMENT 2024/25

The committee received and considered the Group's Draft Accountability statement. It was noted:

- The statement is a concise public statement of the Group's key aims, targets and outcomes for the year ahead, and is required to be produced by all FE institutions in line with DfE guidance. The statement must be approved by the Board.
- This is the second year that a statement has been produced, and the draft statement for 2024/25 is similar to the previous year's. However, this year's additionally includes a reference to the statutory Local Needs Duty, introduced in the Skills and Post-16 Education Act 2022, which requires governing bodies to: "*undertake regular reviews of how well the education or training provided by the college meets local needs, in particular needs relating to local employment*". The Accountability Statement is required to report on any actions agreed as a result of such a review, and appropriate text has been added.

The committee discussed the amount of work required to pull the statement together, and the need for care to be taken in its preparation, given that it is a document that is published and publicly available. This was noted as important also in the context that, notwithstanding that there are no current plans for the DfE to assess colleges' Accountability Statements or to use them to influence funding allocations, this policy might change over time or arising from specific events.

The committee agreed to recommend the Draft Accountability Statement to the Board for approval.

5. QUALITY UPDATE

The Quality Update report was received and the following was noted:

Attendance and Retention

- Attendance is slightly below last year and slightly below what the management team would like to see. Overall attendance is 86.9% (0.6% lower than this time last year). The overall attendance for 16-18s is 0.3% lower than last year (+0.4% CIC, -1.4% at CONEL, and -1.2% at WKC). 19+ attendance is 1.0% lower than at this point last year, a breakdown of which was also provided. Attendance rates continue to be monitored weekly by the Heads of School and Curriculum Managers, with interventions to secure improvement and a particular focus on

students turning up to attend examinations. It is expected that the latter and students attending to complete course work/projects will lead to a slight upturn in attendance.

- The Director of Quality and Compliance explained the mechanisms in place to ensure that students who are unable to attend – e.g. for reasons of physical or mental health, are provided with additional support, in collaboration with parents, social workers and external agencies, so as to ensure that those students are able them to continue their studies. The Staff Governor also highlighted the role of a high-risk intervention officer, working with both staff and students, to help support this activity.
- Retention is strong at 96.6% overall, 1.3% higher than last year (95.4% compared to 93.2% for 16-18s and 97.4% compared to 96.7% for 19+).

Student Recruitment

- Marketing to drive student recruitment for 2024/25 continues to be 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 1,958 when compared to the same time last year, and offers up by 851. Applications for 16-18 year-olds, are currently up by 747 compared to last year, and applicants with offers are up by 557. 19+ applicants are currently 1,213 up on last year and applicants with offers are up by 299. The one area where recruitment is struggling continues to be the Group's 6th form A-Level provision.

Learner Feedback - Spring 2024 Learner Survey

- The Spring 2024 Learner Survey was completed just before the Easter break. The overall response rate was 54%. Overall satisfaction rates for most themes are about 90% (+/- 2%) in line with the responses in previous surveys.
- The response and learner satisfaction rates vary at college and curriculum / course / subject level. A more detailed analysis of the feedback is undertaken at those levels and interventions are put in place based on the findings. A 'You Said, We Did' campaign is run to enable learners to know the improvements that are put in place following their feedback.

NSS Survey

- The NSS HE learner survey has ended and the results are awaited. Although the Group has c. 500 HE students, only a very small number (16) are eligible to complete the survey and the response rate from this small group was 82%. The committee surmised that whilst ordinarily NSS results would count towards the Group's Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) outcome, it is likely that in view of the small number of eligible participants, the panel will not rely on the NSS scores, and it is therefore useful to have available the internal learner survey HE data.

Key Quality Priorities for Term 3

These were noted as:

- Student Exit Survey
- Curriculum Review Meetings
- Corporate Services SAR
- Learner Progression Meetings
- Summer Exams
- Certificate Claims
- Staff PD Days

5. APPRENTICESHIPS QUALITY UPDATE

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

- Current data shows an expected increase of over 10% on last year's overall apprenticeship achievement rate, from 52.3% to 64.8%.
- Although retention is only slightly higher than last year, the reason for the higher predicted achievement is that a key issue last year was the number of apprentices who did not complete in time and therefore moved into the following academic year. For the current year, at the end of March as per the data in the report, there were 331 apprentices still to complete (out of 692

who are expected to complete this academic year), of which a further 40 have completed since. Of the remainder, half have already completed their studies and have triggered the gateway. The success rate of students who reach this stage is very high, leading to confidence in the final success rate, which at anything over 60% will represent a significant improvement on last year. Notwithstanding the overall better position, there remain a couple of areas where there are legacy learners who continue to lag behind and this is being addressed.

- In terms of comparison to the national average for achievement, it was explained that the Group was below the national average of 57% last year, although it is expected that in light of the improvement, the Group will exceed the national average this year, albeit that the latter is not yet known.
- The recruitment of new apprentices remains a difficulty that is generally not seeing improvement, despite the optimism at the beginning of the year. The Group continues to retain its market share of apprentices in FE in London, but the FE sector as a whole is not doing well in this area. A major recruitment campaign is therefore being embarked upon to increase apprenticeship starts next year. The Executive Director for Growth and Partnerships explained some of the factors contributing to recruitment issues, which includes national providers gaining the advantage in cases where larger employers are seeking national coverage, and also that some of the larger employers that the Group has worked with in the past, such as the NHS, not currently going out to tender. The situation varies by sector. The team is to hold a workshop shortly to consider these issues and future recruitment. A copy of the report from the workshop will be presented to the next committee meeting.
- A Rapid Improvement Plan focused on compliance and triggering completion of learning has delivered results in terms of a significant improvement in compliance and tracking. The plan is ongoing, particularly focused on two areas where there have been staff changes.
- With regard to subcontracted apprenticeship provision, it was explained that there have been no new starts for two and a half years and the only remaining legacy subcontracted provision relates to a small number of apprentices with one employer who are being provided with the appropriate support to enable them to complete.
The Executive Director for Growth and Partnerships explained that there is no difference in the retention rate of black students compared to white students, this being 72.9 in both cases, although c. 60% of students who are due to complete this year are white.

JC

7. DRAFT FREEDOM OF SPEECH POLICY

The committee received a draft Freedom of Speech Policy for consideration and it was noted:

- The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 received royal assent in May 2023. This new legislation strengthens the legal requirements on universities and colleges in relation to free speech and academic freedom, and it expands the OfS's regulatory role. The provisions with respect to this law will come into force in two phases, with the first coming into effect for the start of the 24/25 academic year, by which time the Group must have a satisfactory policy in place.
- Whilst the Group already has a Freedom of Speech Policy, this has been rewritten and the contents of the new draft policy have been checked by the Group's lawyers.

The committee reviewed the draft policy and the Director of Governance agreed to follow-up on a recommendation to make the policy clearer in terms of the management of any complaints that are received and the suggestion that these should all be handled by the same central resource to ensure a common approach whether they come from students, staff or anyone else. The Director of Governance also advised that this will fall under his remit, with the incidence of any complaints expected to be small/infrequent.

GD

The committee agreed to recommend the policy to the Board for approval, subject to any further points to be advised to the Director of Governance by mid-June.

The committee also noted that the Board's scheme of delegation will be amended so that the monitoring of this policy will fall within the remit of this committee and that the policy is subject to an annual review of its contents and associated use.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Angela Herbert asked about the report on Diversity and Inclusion that had been requested previously and the Director of Governance confirmed that this is on the agenda for the next GD committee meeting.

FUTURE MEETINGS

Thursday 20th June 2024 5:00pm