

**MINUTES OF THE LEARNING AND QUALITY COMMITTEE HELD ON  
THURSDAY 18 JUNE 2020**

**PRESENT:**

Mark Allanson	Chair
Lillian Croston	Member
Dr Fazal Dad	Principal and Chief Executive
Catherine Hill OBE	Member
Glenys Pashley-Crawford	Member

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

Nicola Clayton	Director: Business Development and External Engagement
Andrew Gadsdon	Head of Quality and Standards (FE and WBL)
Chris Hepworth	Head of Quality and Standards (HE)
Dr Stephen Malone	Executive Dean - HE
Andrew Pickles	Assistant Principal: Student Support and Engagement
Damian Stewart	Assistant Principal: Teaching and Learning (Technical Centre)
Rachel Tarplee	Assistant Principal: Teaching and Learning (Academic Centre)
Dr Val Todd	Head of Research and Scholarship
Jean Tracy	Clerk to the Corporation

It was noted that the meeting commenced at 17.00pm and was quorate.

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Geoff Disley and Don Lennon.

**2. DECLARATION OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

The Chair advised those in attendance that should members of the Learning and Quality Committee become aware of any potential conflicts of interest, they should be disclosed at the earliest opportunity during the meeting.

**3. MINUTES OF THE LEARNING AND QUALITY COMMITTEE HELD ON THURSDAY 13 FEBRUARY 2020**

The minutes of the Learning and Quality Committee meeting held on Thursday 13 February 2020 were accepted as a true and accurate record and were duly signed by the Chair.

**4. MATTERS ARISING**

The update on actions from previous meetings was noted. Reports would be amended as necessary and other matters from the previous meeting had been actioned or would be carried forward.

The Committee was informed that the Assistant Principal: Teaching and Learning (Academic Centre) was currently on parental leave and congratulations were offered. It was therefore **AGREED** that Items 12 (i) and (ii) – Further Education Student In-Year Performance would be taken next.

## **12. FURTHER EDUCATION (FE) STUDENT IN-YEAR PERFORMANCE 2019/20 – RETENTION, ATTENDANCE AND STUDENT PROGRESS**

### **(i) ACADEMIC**

The Report provided Governors with the top-level dissection of the current performance of students against, where available, like-for-like data from the last academic year. It was noted that due to the college closure on 20th March 2020 due to the pandemic, data was not comparable to this point in the academic year outside of the retention position.

Key issues in the Report covered attendance, attendance in maths and English, core retention, pass rates, progress and high needs students. Information was provided on the different methods of student engagement that had taken place since lockdown. Retention showed a good improvement and this would transfer into a high achievement rate, best-case scenario of being 93.8%. The exception to this would be A-level students where the College was predicting two grade Us. It was noted that 28 learners had been lost over the two-year program although only four had been lost in the current academic year.

The Committee noted that the last progress measure was snapshot 4 (March), snapshot 5 not being undertaken because of lockdown.

In answer to a question from a member of the Committee, the Assistant Principal: Teaching and Learning (Academic Centre) replied that very few students would wish to take resits in October, assuming that all the grades were awarded as submitted. The Committee also received an explanation as to what would happen in terms of grades and the availability of appealing against any change in those grades. The Principal and Chief Executive shared that statistical modelling would take place and made it clear that students would only be able to appeal against an administrative error where the wrong grade had been entered by the College. The Committee also asked about and received information on the high grades in the current year.

The Chair of the Corporation requested that College submit a letter to the Awarding Organisations, as it was allowed to do, to inform them that the College was under new management and that the new standards and robust marking were now in place. It was **AGREED** that this would be progressed.

#### **ACTION: Principal and Chief Executive**

The Committee questioned the College about the C to D band grades which were being awarded and asked what actions were taking place to improve these. The Assistant Principal: Teaching and Learning (Academic Centre) replied that robust enrolment and monitoring over the year had been in place. This had ensured that earlier intervention had been put in place and that this had continued through the year. An external company had been brought in to help with revision and work was continuing to improve staff performance where necessary. A member of the Committee asked about the culture shift in A-level staff and was informed that this was an historic issue where staff had not embraced the new changes, for example in teaching and learning. A small hard-core group remained and the College was continuing to work with them to effect the required improvements.

The Chair thanked the Assistant Principal: Teaching and Learning (Academic Centre) for the work that had been undertaken but commented that the Committee needed to see general improvements in A levels across the board. As previously noted the letter to be awarding organisations would be taken forward. In terms of retention, it was pleasing to see general improvements and the change in staff culture was also welcomed by the Committee.

### **(ii) TECHNICAL**

The Assistant Principal: Teaching and Learning (Technical Centre) presented the Report.

The Committee was informed that learner independence had been developed and had improved. Staff teams were now working well together and the sharing of good practice was at the forefront. The Assistant Principal: Teaching and Learning (Technical Centre) explained the differences in how students were completing their programme of study; some learners had been in College for assessment where necessary and a number of adaptations to the assessment process had been necessary.

The Committee noted the improved retention figure (currently 97.6% as against 89.4% in 2018/19) and that this would translate into an improved pass rate. Information on key retention improvements by area was contained in the Report together with information on the improvement in pass and achievement rates.

In answer to a question from a member of the Committee, it was confirmed that no areas were below the retention target. The Assistant Principal: Teaching and Learning (Technical Centre) explained that a clear sequence of events had been put in place to ensure that all students were retained.

The Principal and Chief Executive commented that there was now robust data management within the vocational area and that work was continuing to ensure further improvements were made, including in the number of high grades being achieved.

The Chair asked if there was a similar letter to that mentioned earlier which could be sent to the Awarding Organisations. The Principal and Chief Executive would take this forward.

**ACTION: Principal and Chief Executive**

The Chair commented on strong performance in this area which were expected to result in improvements in achievement rates and wished to thank the teams involved.

*The Assistant Principal – Teaching and Learning (Academic Centre) left the meeting.*

## **5. LEARNING AND QUALITY COMMITTEE**

- (i) **CALENDAR OF BUSINESS 2020/21**
- (ii) **MEETING DATES 2021/22**
- (iii) **TERMS OF REFERENCE – 2020/21 AND REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE 2019/20**

The Clerk to the Corporation went through the Report, noting that work would continue with the Principal and Chief Executive to streamline the reports presented to the Committee and that changes to the Committee's Calendar of Business would be made as necessary.

The Committee noted the changes to the Committee's Terms of Reference to take account of changes in staffing and the agreement that the Academic Board Terms of Reference would be reviewed biennially. The Committee did not wish to make recommendations on further changes to its Terms of Reference.

The Committee noted that it had satisfied all of the requirements under its Terms of Reference, although noting that attendance to date was slightly under that expected.

Having considered the Report, the Committee:

- **APPROVED** the meetings dates for 2021/22
- **AGREED** to recommend to the Board the amended Terms of Reference and that it did not wish to make further changes
- **AGREED** the commentary covering its progress against its Terms of Reference for 2019/20.

## **6. COVID-19 – COLLEGE UPDATE**

As agreed by the Board at its meeting on 3 June 2020, the Report provided the Committee with an update on the impact of Covid-10 on Quality of Education, Finance and the progress on re-opening the College.

The Report covered the way in which teaching had been delivered online and the agreed method for tutor centre assessed grading in FE. It was noted that these grades would be subject to awarding body quality assurance checks, statistical modelling and analysis against centre performance from previous years. In HE, adaptations to student assessments had resulted in a variety of open book style assessments being adopted. The number of HE students sitting the exams had shown an improvement and the College was supporting those students who had not yet attempted their examination.

The Committee noted the increase in the planned budget deficit as a result of the pandemic and that the College would not run out of cash; cash balances remained healthy.

The Saturn Centre and the MOT Centre had opened. Both openings being overseen by the College's Health and Safety Manager, staff and Trade Union Health and Safety Representative to ensure full risk assessments were undertaken and social distancing and the necessary PPE were in place. Student assessments taking place in College were by invitation only and were progressing well. Although the Unions were advising staff not to return, no staff had taken this route.

The Report also covered the external and internal consultations which were taking place such as the meetings held with the Council and College working groups.

The Principal and Chief Executive stated that the College would look to be involved in the delivery of training packages for those made redundant as a result of Covid-19. The Chair applauded this intention, noting that it would be beneficial to the College's relationship with local employers. He requested that an update be provided at the next meeting.

**ACTION: Principal and Chief Executive**

The College was asked to provide an update on staff morale, etc. The Committee was informed that regular welfare checks were being undertaken and support provided as necessary. Risk Assessments and relevant induction for staff and students were being prepared. Staff wanted to return to work and would be involved in the planning process. The Committee was informed that part of the staff development activity in the week commencing 6 July, would look at how staff could return gradually.

## **7. SAFEGUARDING POLICY ADDENDUM – COVID-19 (JUNE 2020)**

The Safeguarding Policy had been updated in line with DfE guidance, the addendum providing the standards and expectations for safeguarding year 12 students returning to the College for onsite learning during the Covid-19 lockdown. The details had been shared with all staff. It was noted that the Local Authority had commented favourably on the content of the addendum.

The Committee was informed that the College had continued to provide support to learners whilst in lockdown and that the website included links which showed that relevant support was still available. The College had continued to work to protect vulnerable learners and was aware of those students who fell into the vulnerable and at risk categories.

The Chair thanked the Vice Principal: Student Support and Engagement and agreed that the addendum was very comprehensive and that both specific and general reminders were contained in the Report.

## **8. DRAFT CURRICULUM STRATEGY**

The Director: Business Development and External Engagement presented the Report.

The Curriculum review had been informed and developed using comprehensive Labour Market Intelligence and key Government reports and strategies, with the curriculum being mapped to the Lancashire Economic Partnership priority sectors for predicted employment growth. It was noted that a review of the Strategy would be undertaken to take account of the impact of Covid-19, this being welcomed by the Committee, and it was suggested that a preface be included in the Strategy document to this effect.

The Committee reviewed the Strategy document and requested the following amendments:

- Preface to be included as noted above
- 'Vocational' to be amended to 'technical and professional', or some combination of
- Under Curriculum Intent, 'young' to be removed from '.. life changing educational opportunities for young people' (page 5)
- Correction to date re deliver of T levels (pages 3 and 6)
- Collegiate qualification to be included in the document to place greater emphasis on the enrichment qualification

**ACTION: Director: Business Development and External Engagement**

It was also **AGREED** that a review of the Strategy would be undertaken next year but that this may need to be done in-year because of the current situation.

**ACTION: Director: Business Development and External Engagement**

The Director: Business Development and External Engagement was thanked.

## **9. PERFORMANCE AGAINST COLLEGE KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FOR 2019/20**

The Principal and Chief Executive presented the Report. Information on the current progress against the 24 key performance indicators (KPIs) monitored by Learning and Quality Committee was considered. It was noted that since lockdown, the College emphasis had been on student engagement.

The Committee noted the explanation and reasons for student progress being under target, it being due to under-reporting by staff rather than students not making progress, and the actions being taken by the College.

A member of the Committee referred to the KPI relating to the FE Commissioner's targets. The Committee was informed that the FE Commissioner had written to all colleges to ask that he be informed should they get into severe difficulty. It was confirmed that there was not a requirement to contact the FE Commissioner where this was not the case, even if not meeting the FEC targets. It was noted that the banks were adopting a similar stance in relation to covenants in that they would not consider a college to be in breach of a loan covenant where it could be demonstrated that this was as a direct result of Covid-19 issues. The Board would need to record that the College had fallen below the benchmark because of Covid-19, should this be the case.

## **10. COLLEGE FURTHER EDUCATION SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT 2019/20 – UPDATE ON TIMINGS (e.g. VALIDATION EVENT)**

The Report provided the Committee with the timetable for production of the 2019/20 Self-Assessment Report (SAR) and included the involvement of a practising Ofsted Inspector and Further Education consultation and also Board members. It was noted that the process further streamlined that from the previous year to ensure that the Quality Improvement Plan was in place at the start of the academic year, rather than in October, when the year was already well underway. The Committee welcomed this change.

In answer to a question from the Chair, it was confirmed that the College would report on how it had operated during Covid-19 and that this would include student feedback, the checks and balances in operation during lockdown and best practice shared since lockdown. Staff and student surveys had been undertaken during lockdown to provide feedback and learning points and students would also be contacted by phone to get their views on the digital learning being provided. The College was also looking to introduce a digital learning walk strategy.

The Chair welcomed the steps being taken and in particular, the value to the quality of course delivery in sharing the best practice identified.

The Committee was informed that Ofsted would be continuing its work from September but that the format had yet to be agreed. The AoC had commented that no inspections would take place until January 2021 and it was noted that the deadline for the College Ofsted inspection was May 2021.

## **11. FE COLLEGE QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN – 2019/20 PROGRESS UPDATE**

The Report provided an update on the actions detailed within the College's FE Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) and it was noted that the lockdown had affected the ability of the responsible managers to continue the actions and bring them to a successful conclusion. Where there had been improvements in line with the target, the actions would be followed up in the new academic year through the Performance Quality Review (PQR) and the Quality Summits. Where progress had been impossible to discern, the targets would roll over into the QIP for 2020/21. The Report included information on the categorisation of the targets – closed, to be monitored through the PQRs/Quality Summits in 2020/21 and roll over into the new QIP.

A member of the Committee questioned and received information on why the QIP was not rag-rated. It was **AGREED** that the College should consider whether this should be rag-rated going forward.

**ACTION: Head of Quality (FE and WBL)**

The Committee also noted the updated on the Ofsted areas for improvement which had been included in the Report.

## **13. URGENT CARE COURSES**

### **(i) FE AND WBL**

The Committee considered the Report which provided an update on the FE courses that were currently being scrutinised as part of the College Urgent Care process for 2019/20. It was noted that there were no WBL courses currently in the process.

The Committee was informed that many of the courses had maintained significantly improved retention, minor improvements in attendance and overall improvements in student engagement. The progress to secure further improvements had been hindered by the lockdown. Information on predicted outcomes was not available due to the timing of the submission of grades to awarding bodies.

The Committee was reminded that all courses currently in Urgent Care would be rolled over into next year, irrespective of this year's overall outcomes to ensure that any improvements were maintained.

The Chair of the Corporation Board asked for and received information on staff involvement in the process and was pleased to note that staff had a clear understanding of the expectations.

The Chair commented on the good improvements being reported and on the importance of identifying and dealing with courses in need of urgent care at the earliest opportunity.

(ii) **HE**

The Executive Dean presented the report on the HE Failing Courses, this being the equivalent of the FE Urgent Care Courses. The list of courses included in the Report had principally been based on continuation and achievement metrics.

The Report included the detail of the Quality Enhancement Process (QEP) and template and confirmed that the Annual Programme Reviews (APRs) would continue as normal for all HE programmes.

A member of the Committee had sent in questions prior to the meeting (these, and the College responses, had been included in the papers for the meeting) and asked when feedback on the new peer observation process would be available in order that a judgement could be made on its effectiveness. The Executive Dean replied that some information was available but that Covid-19 had impacted on the process and thus it was not possible to give a full picture.

Another member of the Committee questioned the title – Quality Enhancement Process, commenting that the College needed to show outright improvement as there were too many courses which were not getting to the standard expected. She felt that the title needed to reflect that this was a quality improvement process which was mandatory and which could be monitored on a monthly basis to evidence improvements. The Chair of the Corporation Board also questioned whether the pace of improvements was fast enough.

The Executive Dean did not disagree with the views being expressed but stated that the targets had been met and that the decline in recruitment and quality had been over a long period and could not be changed overnight.

Information on what the Quality Summit and Quality Enhancement Process involved is to be provided to Glenys Pashley-Crawford.

**ACTION: Executive Dean**

The Chair noted the pressure from Governors to effect improvements and agreed that 'improvements' was the right word to be using.

The Chair commented that he did not get a sense of what were the benchmarks for progression – from assessment and for year-to-year. He asked if such information was captured. He also commented that it was difficult to assess whether the step-up for our students was too great and what the College was doing to address this. The Executive Dean replied that changes to the assessment process had been made and that these were expected to have a positive benefit. He was confident that the changes were leading directly to improvement.

The Principal and Chief Executive noted that retention was fundamental and must be addressed. He appreciated that the Executive Dean and HE colleagues were working to bring about improvements but the pace needed to increase.

The Chair thanked the Executive Dean for his Report, noting that this was work in progress and that the HE area was a big part of the College and so a focus for Governors.

#### **14. HIGHER EDUCATION (HE) STUDENT PERFORMANCE 2019/20**

(i) **RETENTION, COMPLETION, ACHIEVEMENT AND ATTENDANCE**

The Executive Dean – HE presented the Report which covered information on in-year performance in HE.

The Committee noted the information provided on the results of the internal survey (Module Evaluation Questionnaire (MEQ)) – 18 out of 22 questions received improved scores.

In-year retention had been added to the Report which also included information on the OfS continuation rates. The latter figure for first degree FT and PT undergraduates for 2018/19 showed an improvement on the figure previously reported to the OfS (71.1% v. 59.9%). The Committee noted the information provided on the present in-year continuation rate and that expected for year-end. Whilst these figures showed an improvement, both were below the TEF Year 4 regional benchmark. The Executive Dean agreed that the number of learners who leave was still too high.

A number of questions had been submitted prior to the meeting and these, together with the College's responses had been circulated with the papers. The questions covered:

- internal league tables (what do they achieve and are they succeeding);
- the number of resit exams (how many, why, what support was given);
- the high number of withdrawals and failing courses (why, are students being recruited at the right level, specific details on reasons for withdrawals); and
- complaints and appeals (what was the HE focus and how were issues resolved).

It was **AGREED** that the College would review whether the Action Plan for Office for Students should be rag-rated.

**ACTION: Executive Dean**

The Chair thanked the Executive Dean.

**(ii) OFS - IMPROVEMENT PLAN – PROGRESS UPDATE – JANUARY 2020**

The Head of Quality and Standards (HE) presented the Report which provided an update on the College's performance on its Office for Students (OfS) Improvement Plan to address HE student outcomes. The Plan required the College to deliver a material improvement in student outcomes in relation to five areas.

The Committee again noted that detailed scrutiny of the data underpinning the Report had taken place and the College was now able to report that it had met or exceeded targets for three out of four areas on which data was available. As a result, milestone targets had been adjusted upwards for continuation rates for full-time and part-time first-degree students, and for undergraduate students. The Committee was informed that the College was on target to hit all the OfS milestones.

The Committee welcomed the upward adjustment of targets but commented that its expectation was for the College to plan to exceed the targets, rather than merely achieve the targets, and thus effect improvement of the offer to students.

**(iii) OFS – ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION PLAN**

- FINAL REVIEW OF 2018/19
- 2019/20 UPDATE

The Executive Dean presented the Report which provided an update on performance against the Access and Participation Plan (APP) 2020-21 to 2024-25. The Access Agreement Monitoring document 2018/19 had been uploaded to the OfS by the deadline of Friday 28 February 2020. The latest dashboard data from the OfS showing the College's performance against the key measures set out in the Plan was included in the papers.

The Dean also highlighted the information provided on Section 3.2 – Aims and Objectives - of the APP and the support being set in place to effect improvements. In answer to a question from the Chair, he highlighted the areas of concern surrounding areas of deprivation and the action being taken, this included the involvement of the Student Engagement Team.



## **15. SURVEYS**

### **(i) FE CHOICES**

The Committee was informed that the FE survey for the current year had been cancelled because of the Coronavirus pandemic and there was thus nothing to report.

### **(ii) EMPLOYER**

Information on the ESFA Employer Survey for 2018/19 was considered by the Committee. The percentage of employers who said they were likely to recommend the College had increased but information was not available to be able to identify those employers who had made a less positive response.

It was noted that the Employer Survey for 2019/20 had been cancelled because of Covid-19.

The Chair welcomed the improvement as reported, but commented that the ambition should be to improve further.

### **(iii) NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY (NSS) AND INTERNAL SURVEY (MEQ) 2020 MEG RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

The Committee was informed that information on the NSS results would not be available until 15 July 2020 and would therefore be presented at a future meeting.

**ACTION: Executive Dean**

Information on the Module Evaluation Questionnaire (MEQ), which mirrored the NSS, was considered by the Committee. The Committee requested that:

- the College look at the communication to students on the work of the Student's Union (re 'the Students' Union effectively represents students' academic interests') and that;
- a report be provided at a future meeting on the work being done to ensure that staff are marking work and giving good feedback, the response in this area being low.

**ACTION: Executive Dean**

## **16. RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP UPDATE ON KEY PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES**

The Committee received a Report which provided an update on key projects and initiatives from the Research and Scholarship Committee. These included externally and internally funded research projects, activities conducted in conjunction with external partners and staff development. The Head of Research and Scholarship commented on the impact on staff of this work in terms of morale and the staff development opportunities it affords.

The Head of Research and Scholarship was thanked for her Report and wished well for the future, it being noted that she would be leaving the College at the end of the academic year.

## **17. CHAIR APPROVED MINUTES OF ACADEMIC BOARD MEETING – 2 JUNE 2020**

The Chair approved minutes of Academic Board meeting held on 2 June 2020 were noted for information.

## **18. STUDENTS' UNION ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20 INCLUDING DRAFT ANNUAL ACCOUNTS**

An update on the activity of the Students' Union during the 2019/20 academic year was received for information. The Report provided an overview and information on the Students' Union and Student Experience Team activities, challenges, ambitions and priorities going forward. The draft Interim Accounts for 2019/20 (as at May 2020) were also included.

**19. HIGHER EDUCATION VALIDATION SCHEDULE AND PLANNING FOR 2020/21**

The HE Schedule for validations and revalidations across the College’s HE portfolio and academic partners for 2020/21, and an outline of likely activity in 2020/21, was received for information.

**20. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There were no items of Any Other Business.

**21. REVIEW OF MEETING**

The Chair noted the questions from a member of the Committee and the responses from the College which had been circulated to all Committee members and which had been referred to during the meeting. The Committee member confirmed that she was generally pleased with the responses she had received and which had highlighted certain things of which she was not aware. It was **AGREED** that further information would be provided at the next meeting on:

- The amount of distance learning taking place; and
- Progression from Level 3 to Level 4 and above and the action plan to improve.

**ACTION: Executive Dean**

The Chair thanked members for their attendance and contribution to the meeting.

**22. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Learning and Quality Committee will take place on Thursday 1 October 2020 at 5.00pm in the Boardroom.

*19:40pm: The meeting closed.*

Signed: .....

Date: .....