



Northern College

CURRICULUM, QUALITY AND STUDENT EXPERIENCE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Curriculum, Quality and Student Experience Committee held on **28 February 2024**.

Present: Colin Forrest (Chair), Tim Thornton, Bob Craig, Emma Beal (Principal) and Sue Horner.

In attendance: The Director of Curriculum and Quality (Lee Kirton), the Assistant Principal – Student Experience (Diane Lawson) and the Clerk to the Governors (Sarah Johnson).

Apologies: None

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Q24/1 Each governor present declared any potential interests/conflicts of loyalty related to items to be considered at the meeting.

With respect to his roles as Deputy Vice Chancellor at the University of Huddersfield and HE advisory member of the West Yorkshire Employment and Skills Committee Prof Tim Thornton declared a potential conflict of loyalty in items relating to the College's higher education provision, particularly item3iii - higher level skills strategy. It was agreed that it was not considered necessary for the member to withdraw.

MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

Q24/2 The minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2023 were approved as an accurate record.

Q24/3 The committee reviewed the action tracker, noting that all were either complete, planned or progressing appropriately.

ENVIRONMENT/SECTOR UPDATE

Q24/4 To ensure that the committee was able to take the implications of developments in the sector and operating context into account when reviewing performance and considering strategy it received a verbal update on developments since the last meeting which could have an impact on quality, curriculum, and student experience, including:

- an update regarding the decision for the College not to progress with a 16-19 high needs offer for September 2024 due to quality risks associated with the short implementation timeframe, and opportunities for the development of an adult high needs offer from September 2025;
- on-going discussions regarding future funding for residential;

- the positive outcome of the College's performance monitoring by South Yorkshire Combined Mayoral Authority (SYMCA) and West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA);
- the use of LSIF to drive forward the College's digital capability;
- positive PR activity, including articles in the Yorkshire Post and The Sheffield Star.

Q24/5 The committee particularly explored:

- the update regarding high needs noting that the staff resource used to date remained useful in relation to the opportunities for an adult offer, and agreed that the committee should continue to maintain oversight of developments in this area;
- the positive and encouraging discussion regarding the College's trade union provision at West Yorkshire Employment and Skills Committee, welcoming that the College was becoming a recognised part of the West Yorkshire delivery ecosystem.

Q24/6 The Board welcomed the positive outlook presented in the report, and in the papers as a whole, agreeing that there was an encouraging picture developing and noting the positive and appropriate actions being taken by the College's staff team.

Resolved: i That the update be noted and factored into the work of the committee.

ii That the committee continue to maintain oversight of the College's potential adult high needs offer.

PERFORMANCE REPORT (Document 3i)

Q24/7 The committee considered performance data which enabled it to review the performance of the College in relation to curriculum, quality and student experience, and to use that evaluation to inform risk appraisal, governance oversight and strategic thinking. The committee agreed that the report presented a balanced picture of cautious optimism and key areas for challenge, and that particularly given the amount of curriculum development and diversification over the recent period it represented a very positive picture.

Q24/8 The committee particularly considered progress against key performance indicators - noting that:

- a timing issue regarding outcomes from new provision was negatively impacting some measures (e.g. achievement) but this was not anticipated to be a long-standing problem;
- sequencing of the curriculum had impacted withdrawal rates and the team were implementing measures to address this for 2024/25;
- a dip in attendance had been seen in January/February 2024 due to winter illnesses and the impact of increased community based provision, an anticipated increase in referrals from the DWP should positively impact on attendance, but the College remained above national benchmarks for attendance;
- residence continued to have a positive impact on all KPIs, including attendance and achievement.

- Q24/9 The committee particularly:
- explored the comparison between direct recruited and referred students in relation to attendance and achievement, noting that greater analysis of the reasons for withdrawal was now being undertaken which would be used to drive further developments;
 - explored the year-to-date pass rate, seeking and receiving assurance that this was a timing issue, that the capacity required to achieve the higher levels of verification required for new provision had been addressed and the back log should be effectively cleared in a timely manner;
 - noted that direct claims status had been achieved for two areas since the last meeting which would positively impact on timeliness;
 - explored the impact of the DfE decision to remove destinations from the ILR fields, voiced its concern regarding this negative step, and how the impact of the decision could be counteracted, and it was noted that the College was working with the combined authorities to create an alternative route to enable the collection of robust data in this area;
 - explored the action taken to support those students who reported unemployment as their destination, and agreed that future reports should break this data down further and include data regarding the types of support provided and the impact.

- Q24/10 The committee:
- considered student voice activity and outcomes and requested that a stronger narrative regarding student voice be built into future reports;
 - urged further action to ensure that observation and follow up for new starters was realistic and effective, and agreed that members of the committee be invited to walk through the observation of teaching and learning process.

- Q24/11 The committee agreed that the data presented demonstrated good progress, with some areas for further development identified.

- Resolved:**
- i That performance in relation to curriculum, quality and student experience remained reasonable, and key areas of challenge were identified, and appropriate actions were in place to address them.**
 - ii That more detail be provided in future reports regarding the support offered to students whose destination was reported as unemployed and the impact of the support provided.**
 - iii That a stronger narrative regarding student voice be built into future performance reports.**
 - iv That members of the committee be invited to walk through the observation of teaching and learning process.**

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN PROGRESS UPDATE (Document 3ii)

- Q24/12 The committee considered a progress report against the College's quality improvement plan (QIP), noting that the plan was linked to section 3.1 of the strategic delivery plan, and particularly exploring areas which were rag rated as red or amber; and:

- noted the work to address the gap in chaplaincy provision;
- noted that a number of the amber actions would be likely to move to green relatively quickly;
- sought and received assurance that no areas which were rated as green or amber were deteriorating or moving towards red;
- sought and received assurance that the College had a well defined and effectively operating learner journey map which defined the timing and responsibility for key activities;
- explored how new teaching staff were supported to embed the Northern College approach into their schemes of work and teaching practice;
- welcomed the introduction of staff awards;
- requested a further strengthened narrative in the next report regarding the key areas considered.

Resolved: i That a further strengthened narrative regarding the key areas considered at this meeting be included in the next QIP update.

HIGHER LEVEL SKILLS STRATEGY (Document 3iii)

- Q24/13 The committee considered a draft Higher-Level Skills Strategy to test and challenge the proposed approach and make recommendations prior to its approval. The committee:
- welcomed the broadening of the strategy from HE to higher level skills, and its alignment with the local skills plan;
 - looked forward to the development of an action plan with timescales for implementation;
 - explored potential opportunities for further development, including the apprenticeship levy;
 - encouraged diversification from the tight health and social care focus where UCAS entries generally were challenging, and urged consideration of other high priority skill areas for South and West Yorkshire where there was application growth;
 - explored the significant recent increase in focus on franchise arrangements in HE, agreeing that this should have a greater emphasis on the risks and mitigations given the College's current unregistered status;
 - explored the opportunities around modular/stackable learning and the College's potential contribution to micro credentials, and levels 5 and 7 coaching and mentoring;
 - requested inclusion of the residential aspect of the provision;
 - agreed that any further reflections/comments should be provided to the Principal by Friday 8 March 2024.

Resolved: i That the Higher-Level Skills Strategy be further developed in line with the committee's comments.

ii That committee members feed any further reflections or comments regarding the Higher-Level Skills Strategy to the Principal by 8 March 2024.

- iii That the updated draft of the Higher-Level Skills Strategy be presented to the Board of Governors for approval at its meeting in April 2024.**

CURRICULUM STRUCTURE AND PLANNING

Q24/14 The committee received a verbal summary of the new provision included in the curriculum plan for 2023/24, and plans for further development and diversification in 2024/25 in relation to:

- digital skills;
- STEM based community learning;
- delivery in partnership with the DWP and JCP work coaches;
- Level 2 horticulture (including green skills and technical aspects).

Resolved: i That the curriculum innovations delivered and planned be welcomed.

ACCOUNTABILITY STATEMENT

Q24/15 The committee considered and welcomed/supported the proposed approach to the College's accountability statement for 2024/25, noting the revised guidance and amalgamation with the previously separate duty to review, the joint development of a collaboration statement by the South Yorkshire colleges, and the College's proposed themes relating to the reach and impact of community learning, sustainability and green skills, maths, English and digital entitlement and connecting higher skills.

Resolved: i That the committee support the proposed approach and themes for the College's accountability statement for 2024/25.

MARKETING AND PR UPDATE (Document 4iii)

Q24/16 The committee considered a marketing update, including:

- activity since the last report and its impact;
- on-going developments - including website and conversion tracking;
- digital advertising and impact;
- events;
- advertising plan; and
- key priorities.

Q24/17 The committee welcomed the more targeted work, the focus on impact and the more dynamic and responsive approach, and agreed that the key test would be its impact on student enrolments.

Resolved: i That the committee note and welcome the encouraging marketing activity.

RISK OVERSEEN BY THE COMMITTEE (Document 4iv)

Q24/18 The committee considered the risks allocated to it for oversight which could have an impact on curriculum, quality and student experience, noting that whilst there were only two risks identified for oversight by the committee, both of them were currently rated as red.

- Q24/19 The committee agreed that;
- data indicated that very cautious optimism could be taken with regards to student enrolment to date for 2023/24, but extremely careful monitoring should be maintained;
 - the workforce remained a key challenge for the College, and the sector as a whole, particularly in relation to teaching staff, but there were no specific issues at the moment with turnover of sickness absence.

- Q24/20 The committee considered whether any new risks had been identified during the meeting particularly the changes to destination data capture, but agreed that this was not a strategic risk at this stage as sufficient work was in place to mitigate the impact, but the executive team would continue to carefully monitor the position.

Resolved: i That the risk register appropriately reflected the key strategic risks related to curriculum, quality and student experience and the controls and mitigation were appropriate.

SAFEGUARDING AND PREVENT UPDATE (Document 5i)

- Q24/21 The committee considered the Safeguarding and Prevent update, noting:
- the work undertaken with regards to preparing for Martin's Law;
 - the Prevent training for all staff planned for the upcoming CPD day.
 - the continuing strength of the College's partnership work with regards to Safeguarding and Prevent;
 - the positive impact of the College's hosting of Christmas Day for care leavers in partnership with a local charity.

- Q24/22 The committee:
- agreed that further work was required by the College to ensure it demonstrated in its reporting that it was meeting requirements relating to the revised Prevent duty, and particularly protecting against a permissive environment;
 - agreed that reporting on Prevent, including the promotion on British values needed to be much more overt than in the current report framework;
 - noted the work being undertaken in relation to the revised Prevent duty, and requested that a review be included in future reports, including assurance that the Prevent lead is appropriately trained;
 - agreed to write to Thomas Franks to thank them for their support for the Christmas Day activity, including the donation and preparation of the catering.

Resolved: i That future reports much more clearly demonstrate how the College is meeting Prevent requirements, including the revised Prevent duty, protecting against a permissive environment, promoting British values, and requirements for training and development.

ii That the chair of the committee write to Thomas Franks to thank them for their support for the Christmas Day event, including the donation and preparation of the catering.

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION UPDATE (Document 5ii)

Q24/23 The committee considered the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion update, and welcomed the College being shortlisted for a World Skills EDI award.

Resolved: i That the College's approach to equality, diversity and inclusion remained appropriate and robust.

POLICIES FOR APPROVAL

Q24/24 The committee considered a revised complaints and compliments policy and agreed several revisions:

- that HE links be referred to up front rather than embedded within the policy;
- that reference to the ESFA and Ofsted complaints policies be included;
- that a student front end be developed which was more user friendly and accessible.

Resolved: i That with the inclusion of the above amendments the policy be recommended to the Board of Governors for approval.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Q24/25 It was noted that Maria Bowie had resigned from her role as independent member of the committee with effect from 28 February 2024, and that the membership of the committee would be reviewed in line with the Board's decision regarding the governance framework for 2024/25 at its meeting in March 2024.

DATES OF THE NEXT MEETINGS

Q24/26	Monday	10	June	2024	1.30pm
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