

**Minutes of the  
Quality, Standards and Achievement Committee  
Thursday 3 November 2022  
Room BB010 Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) building**

**Present:** Richard Dimbleby  
Joe Gallacher (via teams)  
Ian Pryce  
Sharon De Leonardis (via teams)  
Sheila Selwood  
Luisa Vecchio

**In attendance:** Sarah Baxter (Executive Director of Marketing and Student Recruitment)  
Alex Mortby (Vice Principal) (via teams)  
Rachel Nicol (Group Director of Governance) (minutes)

**QSA/32/22 Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from Dominika Kalinowska. The Deputy CEO-Quality was unable to attend.

**QSA/33/22 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest from those present relevant to the matters on the agenda.

**QSA/34/22 Matters arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda**

Joe Gallacher, staff governor, was welcomed to his first meeting of the Committee.

Alex Mortby confirmed he has prepared an update paper on HE partnership strategies and the potential impact on the relationship with the OfS. Further work is being done on the financial model and the Committee will be updated following discussions at Executive.

It was confirmed that a better process is now in place for debt collection relating to University partnerships and thanks were given to the finance team for their diligence in this.

There were no other matters arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

## **QSA/35/22 Pro metrix and external assurance**

The Deputy CEO – Quality was unable to attend the meeting. It was agreed that the presentation on pro metrix will be deferred to a later meeting. The Executive Director of Marketing and Student Recruitment provided a brief overview of the purpose of the system and its advantages in providing live data.

The governors had received a presentation at their development day on preparations around external assurance. The Executive team are working on priorities and areas of focus with discussion on monthly agendas. The potential timing of an inspection and the relationship with the proposed merger was raised and discussed.

### **The update was noted**

## **QSA/36/22 Academic Risks**

The Committee confirmed they had read the report.

The CEO highlighted sector leadership considered to be strong but with greater scrutiny internally on performance measures and attendance and impact on outcomes.

T level take up is considered to be low but higher than in previous years. Questions had been raised in respect of the Health and science T level qualification in some other institutions which was believed to have impacted on reputation.

Strategies are in place to match current T level strands with understood demand. In addition the College are working on a project to further educate parents and schools.

The Committee raised questions as follows:

*If we're running a T level are we abandoning the BTEC?* Government policy and the skills agenda is currently supporting T levels and it was noted that funding follows policy.

*How is attendance being managed?* The strong correlation between attendance and grades in A levels in particular was highlighted. It is being addressed through a number of actions and closer scrutiny through the enhanced performance monitoring meetings at Executive level. The Committee was keen that future reports

should articulate the impact of initiatives tried and robust reporting around attendance patterns in different areas.

*Is behavior and attitude an issue?* Rules are in place with enforcement being further developed to ensure implementation of appropriate steps to address behavior in relation to attendance in particular.

*Has the set up of registers from the IT side impacted the monitoring of registers?* The leadership team are reviewing internal processes to ensure efficient amendment of registers when issues are identified to ensure accuracy and improve monitoring of attendance. The Committee reiterated the need to establish expectations with students quickly.

*The impact of any staff shortages?* Teaching staff recruitment is positive. Teaching assistant pay increases are progressing provided they are within budget.

*What is the progress in terms of recruitment of the Quality team?* The Heads of Quality are now in place and the Director will be in post by the middle of December.

*What was the Diversity Trail blazing award for?* It was believed to include work with student and staff forums. It was confirmed that the College has won the Bedfordshire Equality and Diversity award and been put forward for a National award.

*How achievable is the plan to close the identified gaps in knowledge following the pandemic?* It is believed that this prioritises Maths and English and is manageable within the resources.

*What is being done to mitigate the risk of students having lower achievement as they progress from a lower starting point?* It was explained that entry criteria has not been reduced but it was understood from anecdotal evidence that achievement across similar organisations is understood to be lower. It is anticipated that further benchmarking will become available.

The Committee was pleased to note the progress on social media and on a number of student awards.

A Techspo event at Kettering, organised by the IT team, was noted to have been very successful.

**The academic risk register was noted.**

## QSA/37/22 Local skills needs and labour market information

The Executive Director of Marketing and Student Recruitment presented the report and highlighted the Group's developing approach to the use of labour market information ("LMI"). The Committee was pleased to receive a detailed and clear flow chart on the use of LMI and Skills data in curriculum planning, both inside the annual planning process and for course consideration at other times.

The cycle was noted to include an autumn review of data around part time recruitment and a review in May around full time, adult and apprenticeships provision.

A central team reviews local markets for all areas of the College and presents findings to Principals, Vice Principals and Heads. A new piece of software has been procured and combines Office for National Statistics ("ONS") and College enrolment data, then comparing college data to identified skills gaps. Further support is planned for departments to help them to interrogate the data and maximise its use.

The course approval process will now include a requirement for aligning labour market information and the Self Assessment Report ("SAR") and asks areas to reflect on how the information is being used with departments providing case studies as part of the SAR.

Current provision will be adapted to ensure units delivered meet the skills gaps.

The Committee further questioned:

*Will governors have access to a presentation on research?* The Board has historically received presentations on local market information. Further reports will be provided including information on skills gaps and LMI to enable discussion around strategic options as well as review assurance on the delivery of an appropriate curriculum.

*Can the Committee have a report following the data reviews?* It was agreed that regular updates will be factored into the work plan so that the Committee can understand and have oversight of the use of data across the Group.

*Where are we with working with the Northamptonshire Chamber of Commerce who lead on the local skills improvement plan?* At the current time the Chamber is working with employers to identify future skills needs but are not known to be engaging with local colleges. Their first report will be prepared before the end of the academic year and it is understood this will go to the Secretary of State. The College has approached the Chamber to be involved and Northamptonshire is part

of a pilot. It is understood that all areas need a plan by 2025 so it is hoped there will be more opportunities for involvement in the near future.

*Is it anticipated that the curriculum will change significantly following the exercise?*

The College has always used labour market information so significant changes are not anticipated. It has also been recognised that tensions between identified skills needs and student (customer) demand will need to be factored into planning to ensure provision is financially sustainable.

*How does the College plan to meet the skills needs in wider regions and nationally?*

It was confirmed that data is looked at across all levels but demographics and data on how students travel for work are also considered.

*When do we get the opportunity to consider new qualifications such as short courses?*

It is believed that this will come through the skills analysis and will be considered in terms of funding. There is an option to provide paid for courses in the short term with the anticipation that funding will subsequently follow identified demand.

### **The report was noted**

#### **QSA/38/22 HE update**

Alex Mortby (Vice Principal responsible for HE) attended remotely via Teams. A number of items had been included in the HE update and these were summarised:

**OfS update:** The College had participated in consultations regarding the Teaching Excellence Framework (“TEF”) but it was understood that changes had not been made to reflect on sector feedback.

The paper set out the regulatory conditions and current position regarding benchmarks, in particular for continuation, progression and completion and provided assurance on the College’s position with regard to benchmarks. Progression following PGCE is the biggest challenge and is being closely monitored.

Further attention was drawn to interim arrangements for assessment given the decision of the Quality Assurance Agency (“QAA”) stepping back from its Designated Quality Body (“DBS”) status due to a conflict of interest. The future position remains uncertain.

The Committee questioned:

*How improvements in completion and progression for the PGSE can be moved forward? Where external people are on the course the College is looking at whether there are roles or opportunities for work placements internally.*

*Can you explain Essay Mills legislation and the impact? At the moment private companies are approaching students to provide essays. The intention is to legislate against providers rather than students. Software is now available to produce work using Artificial Intelligence which is requiring additional strategies to be able to identify plagiarism.*

*Who would any cases be referred, how is this managed and how are staff supported? There is no duty to refer externally but staff receive training, cases are referred internally and considered individually at a committee.*

*How will management of this area be resourced and review in terms of assessment? Guidance from QAA is for the appointment of an Academic Integrity Officer and allocation of this role is being looked at in liaison with the HR team.*

*Is there any impact of the legislation on FE? The legislation covers FE but it is not considered to be as significant a risk.*

**NSS survey:** The Committee was pleased with the direction of travel and overview of scores and relationship with TEF scores. Focus had been on the improvement of completion rates. The potential for engagement with withdrawn students is being looked at to ensure appropriate management. Work is still being done on increasing the effectiveness of courses and provision of academic support, in particular on developing the university partnership arrangement at Shuttleworth.

Comparisons with other similar providers had been reviewed showing sector correlation.

Internal survey questions are being aligned to support reporting against the TEF, to better reflect the student experience and to ensure proportionate representation of provision.

The Vice Principal responsible provided a detailed outline of planned survey timings and ongoing monitoring.

The Committee commended the strength of the paper and was pleased that there is a focus on the issues at Shuttleworth. Assurance was given that staff changes have already had an impact with further improvement expected.

**Annual report on reportable events:**The Committee formally noted the reportable event relating to the intention to merge and assurance was given that communication with the OfS had been efficient

**Fraud and compliance:** An update was provided on changes in the regulatory framework, guidance and risk areas and work being done. Assurance was provided on the monitoring of attendance and strength of processes in place to detect fraud in this area.

***It was agreed that the report will be forwarded to the Audit Committee and the risks will be included on the Group Risk Register as appropriate.***

**Consumer protection:** Developments were highlighted and an audit carried out against the OfS framework. Further work is being done on the presentation of information on the website to ensure the costs courses are clear. The Committee was pleased that the area had been audited.

**The HE update was noted. The Vice Principal was thanked and left the meeting.**

#### **QSA/39/22      Quality dashboard and academic performance**

The CEO presented the paper in the absence of the Deputy CEO-Quality and highlighted positive progress and work being done.

The focus is on the day to day experience, the consistent approach and adherence to expectations.

*Is there anyone with overall responsible for attendance and how is this monitored?*

There is no individual with overall responsibility for attendance but with Principals being accountable under the new structure and being in a position to review live data and monitor the position holistically. and course managers having day to day responsibility.

*Is there not one online system?* There is a system in place but is complicated by the construction of the timetable system. Anecdotal evidence suggests some individuals have as a short term solution developed excel sheets.

The Committee was keen that there is a clear line of accountability to ensure improvement and supported the accountability of Principals in this area.

*How is the motivation of students on English and maths?* There was noted to be greater engagement for access to HE students as it enables them to progress to HE. Engagement in other areas is more varied but is being managed closely.

*FE achievement, what are we expecting in relation to benchmarking?* The data has been impacted by years where students started with 4 A levels and then dropped to 3. There is limited data available for benchmarking but conversations with other FE providers suggest similar expectations.

*Is a jump from 79% to 90% achievable?* It is thought the top 10 percent of Colleges will be at around that level.

The Committee noted the positive progress on apprenticeships and a **further report on progress will be brought to a future meeting**

**The report was noted**

#### **QSA/40/22 Stakeholder feedback**

The Executive Director of Marketing and Student Recruitment outlined the systematic approach to receiving feedback from all stakeholder groups.

A schedule of planned feedback was included in the report.

The Executive Director of Marketing and Student Recruitment has identified that benchmarking provided by the company currently engaged to carry out the surveys is not like for like.

Independent focus groups are planned to address the “why” in relation to particular groups and feedback given.

It is intended that feedback will be provided by College and at department level.

*How actively is Have Your Say used by students?* This is coming into the central team in December and is currently used for formal complaints. Work is being done to identify issues at the level below formal complaints and address any emerging trends. Work is being done to promote mechanisms for feedback to students and staff. Centralisation will provide a more holistic approach

*How can timeliness of reports to the Committee be addressed to ensure presentations include feedback from the follow up focus groups?* The schedule of feedback, survey findings and planned focus groups will be reviewed with the Group



Director of Governance and the Corporation work plan will provide for reports at appropriate times.

*Are surveys being run for different colleges and how will they compare?* They are planned to address specific issues but with potential to analyse variances across different colleges within the Group. Equality and diversity questions have been compiled in conjunction with the EDI manager.

*Will the anonymity of data be impacted by the inclusion of questions seeking EDI data?* The College works hard to balance the need for confidence in anonymity with the desire for data. Work is being done to provide information to individuals on the reasons for requiring data to encourage this but provision is not mandatory.

*How are surveys impacted by when they are taken?* They are impacted and consideration is being given to poll surveys at more regular intervals to counter the impact and provide a more balanced picture.

### **The report was noted**

*The Executive Director of Marketing and Student Recruitment were thanked and left the meeting*

### **QSA/41/22      Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting on 7 June 2022 were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.

### **QSA/42/22      Next meeting**

The next meeting will be a joint meeting of QSA and the Board to take place on Thursday 24 November at 3.30pm.