

**Minutes of the  
Quality, Standards and Achievement Committee  
Wednesday 8 March 2023  
Tower Board Room, 6<sup>th</sup> floor Tower Block**

- Present** Richard Dimbleby (Chair)  
Emily Parnwell  
Ian Pryce  
Allan Schofield  
Sheila Selwood  
Luisa Vecchio
- In attendance** Sarah Baxter (Executive Director of Marketing and Student Recruitment)  
Philippa Debort (Marketing Consultant)  
Em Lowe (Deputy CEO Education)  
Alex Mortby (Vice Principal) (via teams)  
Sarah Mortimer (Acting Principal Central Bedfordshire College “CBC”)  
Rachel Nicol (Group Director of Governance) (minutes)

**QSA/1/23 Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from Cathy Barr, Sharon De Leonardis and Joe Gallacher.

**QSA/2/23 Declarations of Interest**

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

**QSA/3/23 Matters arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda**

The Committee recorded congratulations to the College on their recent award for Inclusive Education Leadership.

The Committee was made aware of recent appointments to the Corporation, including Cathy Barr, a former governor of Central Bedfordshire College (“CBC”). Cathy will join the QSA Committee.

The resignation of Dominika Kalinowska as a co opted member of the Committee was noted and thanks recorded for her contribution to the College.

**QSA/4/23 Meeting local needs and curriculum planning**

The Executive Director of Marketing and Student Recruitment and Deputy CEO Education gave a presentation supported by the College's marketing consultant, Philippa Debort.

The expectations of Ofsted in respect of the skills judgement were outlined, including the role of local employers, stakeholders and other education providers. The use of local market intelligence in curriculum planning and link to students being able to add value to localities was discussed.

Working groups have been established to look at current year and future plans to ensure co-design of curriculum. It is anticipated that between 80 to 100 stakeholders could be involved in an Ofsted inspection on skills.

Curriculum areas are preparing position statements and case studies and information is triangulated across the Group looking at key stakeholders.

Progress in developing the Local Skills Improvement Plan ("LSIP") was raised. The College has met with the Northampton Chamber who are leading on the plan and are fully involved in the process. A number of events are being hosted, with chambers leading and liaising with employers. Chambers have until May to write the plan, which it is understood will be based around 10 major priorities. The College will then work in June to align the curriculum to identified skills gaps

Questions centred around:

*-What are the mechanisms to feed back to governors on key findings from the research and development of the LSIP?* Findings of market research was presented to the Committee and both the Board and the Committee had received earlier presentations. Links to employer events will be sent to the Group Director of Governance for circulation to the Board.

*-Given the research shows more than 90% of employers are small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) how does the Group focus on all employers?* Work is being done in conjunction with South East Midlands Enterprise Partnership ("SEMLEP"), regional chambers and local authorities to look at all relevant employers.

*-Are there any events planned for CBC?* There is an event planned on 23 March being heavily promoted by Central Bedfordshire Council.

*-What is the nature of the accountability agreements required for the Education and Skills Funding Agency and how will we comply with the timescales required?* There is a requirement for the College to outline the vision and set out how we are addressing the skills needs identified in the LSIP. An extension has been received

to 31 July as the LSIP itself won't be available until after 31 May. The accountability agreement will look at the national, regional and local picture.

Wider labour market information has been shared with all curriculum areas and South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership ("SEMLEP") has presented data in Northamptonshire.

Other events that have taken place or are planned to take place include career events, "speed dating" events with employers and other forums to ensure employers understand curriculum possibilities and how these might align with their own priorities.

Expectations around governor knowledge were discussed, including the need for clear position statements and an understanding of how assurance is received and the position scrutinised throughout the governance structure. Examples of assurance received to date included updates on curriculum planning, presentations of research around skills gaps and actions taken, the self assessment report process and case studies.

The Marketing Consultant provided an up to date high level overview of market information and skills insight used in curriculum planning including an introduction to Lightcast, a platform used to collect data from local job platforms, producing reports for 13 curriculum areas relevant to SEMLEP. The presentation highlighted demographic profiles and types of businesses in different areas. The CBC position will be mapped in the same way in due course. SEMLEP has highlighted 7 key skills with the Group currently offering provision in 6 out of 7 of the areas (not currently in logistics) Further explanation was given on how the increases in job postings are mapped, and forecasts and projections made.

Data on job postings, top skills, SEMLEP highlights and jobs forecast per key areas were presented including detail in respect of: construction, computing, childcare and education, engineering, health and social care,

Use of the RCU vector database in providing an overview of the College's position in relation to other post 16 providers was outlined. Data highlighted the top 10 providers for each of 16 subject areas with Bedford College in the top 10 in 4 key subject areas in terms of learner numbers (childcare, construction, engineering and Health & Social. Vector is owned by RCU, one of two main providers able to access Individual Learner Record ("ILR") data so the data is considered to be robust.

Further discussion centred around:

*-What is the relationship between top skills in demand and areas where people are looking for work?* It was agreed that there is always a balance between the data,

intelligence on current skills gaps and the demand from individuals, hospitality being given as an example with data showing a demand for workers but with a lack of interest in courses. The College accounts for such issues by looking at planning to offer the most appropriate courses but also by focusing on transferable skills.

*-How we know that the SEMLEP data is the right data?* SEMLEP use lightcast but have also spent time talking to employers to triangulate information.

*-Are there any plans to develop provision in logistics?* The College is looking at the possible provision of short qualifications as well as the national training provision. Some courses however have been explored but are not considered cost effective.

*- How is the College promoting the link between skills like maths, soft skills and jobs?* The College embeds Maths and english skills for relevance into study programmes and supports the delivery of transferable skills.

*- How will the College trace the pattern between recruitment, progression and destinations to determine whether the skills agenda is being met?* The College works hard to determine the criteria for positive destinations with a need to triangulate the data with two thirds of students not taking jobs in the subject they train in. There is no data being produced currently on how quickly vacancies are being filled

*-What are employers doing to contribute to the investment in skills?* It is understood that employers are spending 28% less than they have historically on developing their work forces. A general discussion took place on how employers might contribute, the role of the apprenticeship levy, funding of education and how this might be developed.

The Marketing Consultant, Executive Director of Marketing & Student Recruitment and the Deputy CEO Education were thanked for the presentation.

**The update was noted**

#### **QSA/5/23 Academic Risks**

The Deputy CEO Education presented the report and confirmed the position will be reviewed in the context of the merger with CBC.

Security activities, including occasional knife arches and sniffer dogs, were outlined. No significant occurrences were reported and internal processes had been followed.

Anecdotal evidence of the experience and student perceptions were helpfully provided by the student governor and reassurance provided noted.

The College has had lots of positive coverage including the AoC Beacon award, feedback from the T level thematic review and a DfE immersion visit. A meeting is also planned with Ofqual.

The Committee discussed performance measures at point 11, in particular English and maths and the causes of low attendance although positive feedback had been received on delivery. The Committee was updated on the new model planned for the next academic year of 1 hour of delivery attached to the main programme, more small group work and focus on GCSEs for everybody 16-18. The current model at CBC is being retained next year. The Committee sought and were provided with assurance that the modelling has taken account of the needs of both students and employers as well as achievement.

Questions were raised on the current position in respect of external assurance, checking, auditing and quality reviews.

### **The academic risk register was noted**

#### **QSA/6/23 Oversight of Quality of Education**

The Group Director of Quality presented the report including departments rated good or better, strengths and weaknesses and pace of improvements being made.

The Committee discussed the balance of focus between bringing up weaker areas and making good areas outstanding. Every area will have a quality review meeting to look at the holistic picture, including provision for special educational needs, apprenticeships and HE. Assessment schedules and external verification positions are included in the reviews.

Questions and discussion centred around:

*-How realistic is the forecast that 98.1% active students will achieve?* The College is positive but the position is being monitored on a monthly basis.

*-How does the College plan to keep momentum up in good areas?* Regular reviews and practices of sharing best practice and focusing on further improvement.

*-How is the position on the 6th form being managed?* An in depth quality review has taken place and an extensive Quality Improvement Plan ("QIP") and action plan

around student voice and teaching and learning is in place. Weekly meetings are taking place against to monitor progress against the QIP

*-Attendance levels seem low, has any further analysis been carried out?* The College is looking at patterns of attendance and will give consideration to attendance patterns and how these might be improved, particularly through timetabling.

*-What are the numbers looking like at Corby 6th form?* Currently looking at 120 places and have made 118 offers. The Marketing team are promoting the 6<sup>th</sup> form and the building is being prepared for tours to demonstrate facilities available.

The Acting Principal of CBC highlighted key areas, strengths and weaknesses around Quality of Education at CBC and provided an assurance update on ongoing apprenticeships and the working alongside Bedford. Positive work is taking place with employers and relationships being rebuilt.

Further discussion took place on maths and english outcomes and inherent difficulties in evidencing these. Good progress was referenced on GCSE courses with some areas on functional skills still being worked on. Vocational tutors are responsible for achievement. Quality assurance work has been escalated and there was understood to be an increased awareness of the value of english and maths

*-How is support for Educational health Care Plan “EHCP” learners managed in cross college areas?* The College has focused on differentiation and how learning is better matched to EHCP plans with close working between pastoral and behaviour leads and core programme tutors

*-What is the culture at Dunstable on quality improvement and where are staff in terms of engagement and morale?* Staff recognise the journey and are embracing it. Culture has always been to include staff in implementation of changes from the outset and improvement is recognised as a whole college approach.

*-Can CBC now recruit apprentices?* Yes they can as part of the Group and this is being planned in.

### **The report was noted**

#### **QSA/7/23 HE update**

The Director of HE provided a verbal update on various HE matters including:

-Position on merger including OfS compliance, deregistration for CBC, working through actions on merger in respect of submission of data. The College is looking at whether they have to resubmit the BC registration documents and access and participation plan and at how to match provision with CBC.

-Changes in the HE sector and new regulatory powers around sexual harassment.

-Lack of progress in securing a new designated data body but with JISC appointed as the designated quality assurance body.

The Teaching Excellence Framework was submitted in January, a wide profile for the Group was noted with some markers being above bench mark. A panel response is expected in May but it is recognised that there is a risk of a requirement for the document to be resubmitted following merger.

Challenges in partnering Higher Education Institutions (“HEIs”) and the College’s exploration of developments in the HE strategy were outlined and a **full paper will be presented at the June meeting**. Various partnership and contract conversations are ongoing, both current and potential and the College is looking at higher technical qualifications. The Committee discussed the political climate and need to be realistic on both numbers and planned provision.

**The update was noted.**

#### **QSA/8/23 Stakeholder feedback**

The Executive Director of Marketing and Student Recruitment presented a comprehensive report on stakeholder feedback across the Group.

The report focused on reporting survey results where focus groups have been completed to allow for triangulation of information and clarity on actions being taken. An external company is used to allow data to be benchmarked against 76 other colleges. The College’s own benchmark is set at 85% for all questions except likelihood to recommend which is at 90%. Areas of strength, areas for improvement and actions being taken were included.

Questions centred around:

*-Is there need for a greater understanding as to why students feel less or more safe? Focus groups will look at the issue of safety. The Group Director of Quality provided information on the Sixth form visit and views expressed by students. A*



significant local incident, unrelated to the College was understood to have impacted perceptions of safety.

*-Sixth form results are significantly lower than in other areas, what is being done?* Potential causes are being explored in the context of a range of activities including enrolment and induction, teaching and communication with students. Communication is reported to have improved with further work taking place on cover, group sizes and responsibilities.

*-What is the position for student on advice and guidance and what is being done to ensure students have the right information to consider what is right for them?* Work has focussed on planning and communication as well as a range of relevant events to support students.

*-How is leadership supporting growth and promotion of appropriate culture?* Steps have been taken to recognise and balance the culture between “school” and “college” and it is recognised support is required to ensure that the branding separation aligns with rather than undermines the overall Group strategy and College oversight of quality. Induction of new staff will support development of the culture.

The Complaints report was presented including themes and actions to address them. No significant concerns were noted. ***The Complaints and Stakeholder feedback policy is currently being amended and will be introduced at the June meeting.***

**The report was noted.**

#### **QSA/9/23 External partners quality assurance**

The Group Director of Quality provided a report setting out the quality assurance model applicable to the College’s subcontracting and partnership arrangements. This included key roles and responsibilities as well as the processes from target setting, quality monitoring, review and evaluation.

The position on current providers was summarised, including work being done and performance levels and an overview given on how consistency across the Group is managed.

**The Committee noted the model and the assurance provided.**

#### **QSA/10/23 Professional development**



The Group Director of Quality presented the report including:

-Recent reorganisation of the professional development team with one quality manager now leading on professional development.

-Amendments to the application process, requirement for analysis in the context of EDI and need to assess reasons for male / female uptake.

-Innovation in terms of methods of development, using podcasts and other avenues to share best practice, potential for a management system for more automated reporting and relaunch of Risk It.

Committee questions included:

*-Are there any specific development areas to address following the merger with CBC?* One area being looked at is development around feedback and marking.

*-How is the College monitoring progression of staff?* Support for teachers to teach to higher levels to fit with strategy is being provided.

*-How is alignment of professional development managed across the Group?* Reflective pods and other mechanisms for sharing of best practice across the Group are being looked at.

**The report was noted.**

### **QSA/11/23 Quality dashboard and academic performance**

The Group Director of Quality presented the dashboard and the current position on academic performance including attendance, retention and achievement across different activities.

The overview confirmed that although attendance has improved and register issues have been resolved the College is still not where they'd expect to be and initiatives to drive up attendance are in place. English and maths attendance continues to pull down the College position. A number of EDI gaps were highlighted in the attendance report and continue to be monitored.

The Committee raised the apparent lack of correlation between achievement and attendance. It was recognised that in some subjects there is a clear correlation on grades achieved and value added but not in all.

Areas shaded grey in the report are where there has been no change.

Achievement for the 6th form was explained in terms of a legacy issue in respect of the move from 4 to 3 A levels and Apprenticeship achievement was noted to be positive. Sixth form attendance is also being reviewed in the context of expectations and culture.

There had been an unexpected drop in engineering apprenticeships where employment had ceased or they left apprenticeships for alternative employment.

**The dashboard and current position was noted.**

#### **QSA/12/23 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting on 3 November 2022 were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting. (The minutes of the joint QSA and Board meeting on 24 November were approved by the Corporation at their meeting on 7 December 2023).

#### **QSA/13/23 Next meeting**

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 13 June 2023 at 4pm