

HART LEARNING GROUP

QUALITY AND INNOVATION COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Quality and Innovation Committee took place on Monday 17 December 2018 in the Council Chamber, the old Town Hall, Letchworth.

PRESENT

Vernon McClure (Chair)
Lynne Ceeney

Kit Davies (Chief Executive)
Liz Mitchell

IN ATTENDANCE

Nadia Hodges (Curriculum Director,
Stevenage)
Gary Phillips (Executive Director of
Quality, Curriculum and Organisational
Development)
Kerry Pritchett (Head of Quality)

Sarah Robins (Curriculum Director,
Hitchin and ECC)
Rebecca Rutherford (Head of English,
Maths & Skills for Life)
Lindsey Sherring (Director, Hart Learning
& Development)
Robert Dale (Company Secretary)

ITEM 1A: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- Liz Calver, Daniel King, and Jack Tomlinson.

ITEM 1B: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- None.

ITEM 1C: MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

- The minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2018 were agreed and signed as an accurate record of proceedings.
- The minutes of the meeting held on 2 October would be recirculated before approval.

ITEM 1D: MATTERS ARISING

- Actions had been completed as below:
 - Advise the Board of the views of the Q&I Committee [about the SAR for 2017/18] at its meeting on 10 December 2018. **Action complete.** The Board discussed and accepted the SAR presented to it.
 - Advise the Board of the views of the Q&I Committee [about the QIP for 2018/19] at its meeting on 10 December 2018. **Action complete.** The Board discussed and accepted the QIP presented to it.

ITEM 2: NHC PERFORMANCE UPDATE

- Performance data was looking positive at present and forecast achievement rates had increased slightly since the paper had been written – and were now at 93%. The process of quality assurance was well in hand, including learning walks, classroom observations, the ‘first impressions’ student survey and student forum feedback. The latter had been good, with students reporting supportive and helpful staff and positive experiences with Maths and English teaching.
- At the ECC, all 22 staff had been paired with mentors. 19 had responded positively and initial meetings had taken place. Two or three staff were more reluctant to engage and might need more work.

Question: What would the mentoring support involve? Each week, the mentors will agree a focus for the whole team – for example, attendance or high achievement – and would ask the teaching staff to concentrate on this. The aim was to encourage teaching staff to take accountability for encouraging student attendance rather than leaving this with the students. There was a good deal to learn about the pastoral aspect of the teaching role for a number of ECC staff, who were skilled tradespeople in their own right, but whose backgrounds did not in all cases cover this.

- During 2017/18, ECC staff had improved compliance with Group processes and practices but needed to develop more understanding of the reasons behind them. Communicating with the team about how student performance was being compared nationally (so that they were reassured that unfair comparisons were not being made) was also important. This practice extended to sub-contract partners as well.
- The Chair commented that he and Liz Mitchell had visited the ECC recently. Students had seemed fully engaged but limited interaction between staff and students had been observed. He could confirm that considerable progress had been made since his first visit (nearly four years ago).

Question: *Was there still a sense at ECC of ‘them and us’?* Yes, though work had been undertaken to mitigate this and there was a regular senior management presence on site.

Question: *To what extent had ECC staff been involved in developing the support programme?* The importance of co-ownership was recognised and the programme had been presented as something that would evolve and grow based on staff feedback. Although most staff were clearly on board, it was vital to work on the few unengaged. This included seeking to address concerns – eg about the availability of technical support or resources - and fix problems to build trust.

- Governors were encouraged to continue to support this area of the Group including by conducting unannounced learning walks.

Question: *Maths and English attendance was lower than expected; what was being done to tackle this?* The timetable structure had been reviewed, and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment challenged. Curriculum teams were creating half-termly plans and these were being reviewed in a positive and supportive way by managers. Planning had already improved as a result of this intervention. Links were also being made with best practice networks, and a new approach to providing feedback to students had been piloted with some success – indicated by initial analysis of First Impressions survey data. Maths and English week would take place in February 2019 to boost the subject profile. Curriculum teams had been asked to come up with practical contributions.

Question: *How effective was attendance monitoring?* Attendance was tracked closely and tutors aware quickly of student absences so that the issue could be tackled through conversations early.

- Governors recognised that teaching and learning of Maths and English had improved but that there was more to be done. Parental engagement was encouraged eg through parents evening, but this did not always reach the parents of low attenders. However parents not attending would get separate invitations to meetings and parentmail was also being used to stimulate conversations about education at home. There was no evidence that any specific intervention ensured effective parental engagement as recent Nuffield Foundation research confirmed. Nudge theory suggested using positive text messages and this would be trialled.
- Detailed analysis from the First Impressions survey would be shared with governors at the next meeting.

Action: Include a report on First Impressions survey data as an item on the next agenda.

- **Governors accepted** the report.

ITEM 3: HART L&D PERFORMANCE UPDATE

- The team was concentrating on improving apprenticeship achievement rates, both overall and timely and had taken the opportunity to review every part of its processes from sales to delivery, as only by getting the right student on the right programme at the right time could achievement be maximised.
- There were programme by programme differences in outcomes – for example, retail tended to show better and more timely achievement rates than healthcare not just for the Group but nationally. This probably reflected the different working environments. However, managers were also being trained on better managing tutors; how to hold them more effectively to account.
- Governors asked that where it was available national benchmark data by apprenticeship sector should be reported to them with other apprenticeship analysis. They also noted the risk that government would further restrict funding support for higher level qualifications.

Action: Update the format of reporting to include national comparative data by apprenticeship category.

- **Governors accepted** the report.

ITEM 4: DEEP DIVE – ADULT PROGRAMMES

- The presentation briefed governors about the current adult programme. This was a complex portfolio of programmes, including a range of delivery from basic employability skills, through 'leisure' courses both leading and not leading to a qualification, to professional and higher level programmes. Some 5,500 adult completers were recorded in 2017/18 – the number included people taking more than one programme so did not represent 5,500 individuals.
- Performance data was available for most of the portfolio, and most show strongly against national comparators (where available). One area of 'leisure' programmes (funded ITQs) had performed poorly in 2017/18 but the reasons for this were understood and had been addressed.

Question: *As a college, could we only run programmes leading to qualifications?* No, but public funds were only provided to support programmes leading to qualifications.

- The Self-assessment review (SAR) highlighted strengths and areas for improvement and there was an associated Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).

Question: *What was driving the increased demand for counselling programmes?* This possibly reflected the increased volume of students disclosing mental health issues and higher demand from businesses for staff with qualifications in this field.

Question: *What was the local marketplace like?* The market was monitored and our prices were considered to be competitive. Other colleges and private providers plus third sector providers such as the Letchworth Settlement were the main competitors and attracted students from a wide catchment.

Question: *Who was responsible for overseeing the Adult Programme offer?* At present, there was no single manager accountable. The relevant curriculum teams were responsible for their programmes. This 'devolved' set up had been put in place because the previous approach (placing leadership within Hart L&D) had not worked well. But the position was to be kept under review. There was a weekly project team meeting to support co-ordination.

- Governors asked that a report on adult programmes be made a regular feature of Q&I agendas (at least annually). They also proposed that a report be made to the Board in February 2019, perhaps as part of the Curriculum and Quality update.
- Governors asked for more analysis of the data (eg by programme area and course).

Action: Include Adult Programmes on annual schedule of Q&I business.

Action: Include regular reporting to the Board in Curriculum and Quality update.

- **Governors welcomed** the report.

ITEM 5: ACHIEVEMENT GAPS - REVIEW

- The report provided an update on the analysis of achievement gaps shared with the Committee for 2016/17. There had been a clearer focus on this kind of analysis as it was important to try to mitigate the effects of disadvantage – whether social or educational. One aspect was ensuring tutors and managers knew where effort had to be applied.
- There was evidence of a significant growth in students disclosing mental health issues. This was apparent throughout the education system and had an impact on resources, although the achievement gaps were largely mitigated. Deeper analysis showed that where gaps existed, these were related either to Maths and English (M&E) performance, or to the ECC. This suggested that work ongoing at the ECC and in respect of M&E would potentially reduce differences in outcomes. It might suggest that tutors needed to get to know students better so that they could adapt their teaching strategies where necessary.

Question: *How did other colleges tackle achievement gaps?* Ofsted had indicated that our approach to this was strong, but any available best practice learning from other institutions would be welcome.

