

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE COLLEGE FURTHER EDUCATION CORPORATION

QUALITY AND INNOVATION COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Quality and Innovation Committee took place on Wednesday 22 March 2017 in Room S155, NHC, Stevenage.

PRESENT

Vernon McClure (Chair)
Kit Davies (Deputy Principal)

Matt Hamnett (CEO and Principal)
Rob Irving

IN ATTENDANCE

Jennie Condé (Head of Quality)
Stella McManus (Director of Curriculum
Operations)

James Sowray (Director of Commercial
Operations, Hart L&D)
Robert Dale (Company Secretary/Clerk)

ITEM 1a: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- Lynne Ceeney, Jo Charles and Sam Coath.

ITEM 1b: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Vernon McClure asked that it be recorded that he had formerly been a director of EdExcel, although he was not connected with the business now.

ITEM 1c: MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes were agreed and signed as an accurate record of proceedings.

ITEM 1d: MATTERS ARISING

Actions had been completed as below:

- Meet the Student Union Executive to discuss how they might contribute to promoting M&E. **Action under way.** Claire Cooper had met the Student Union Executive and had discussed the concerns of students about Maths and English, the changes made to improve standards and outcomes and the ways in which students could support this. Students were now being used as ambassadors to give positive messages about the importance and relevance of Maths and English achievement – and this would continue. The approach would be kept under review.
- Submit the SAR to Ofsted as required. **Action complete.** A copy of Matt Hamnett's letter to Peter Lauener (see Item 3) is attached to these minutes.
- With the Student Union Executive, consider how to improve the induction process in 2017/18. **Action Pending.** Mike Wright would address this with the Student Union Executive in the summer term.

ITEM 2: NHC QUALITY IMPROVEMENT UPDATE

The Chairman noted that he had agreed to a request that the Quality Improvement and Maths & English update papers be combined to reduce duplication or overlap.

The paper covered two main areas: reflections from the Ofsted support and challenge visit and an overview of progress and performance forecast outcomes for 2016/17.

Matt Vaughan (who was the lead inspector in June 2016) sent a positive letter after his visit on 28 February. This was good evidence that the actions taken over the previous eighteen months were the right ones and were having an impact – as he was well placed to assess the progress made since June 2016. A similar sense of progress was gained from the governor conversation visits which took place in the following week. In addition, an Ofsted consultant (who had visited the college in April/May 2016 returned again to assess the position at Stevenage and reported tangible improvements in teaching, learning and assessment. Matt Vaughan would return in October for another support and challenge visit, which would have a particular focus on Maths and English. Student Voice feedback included positive views about Maths and English.

Question: *Would the student induction programme have been addressed by then?*

Yes, the plan was to work on improvements during the coming summer term and plan for confident and consistent delivery in September.

Question: *How much confidence should be placed in the feedback letter?* The visit is not an inspection and the letter is not an Ofsted judgement. The team can take encouragement from what it says, nevertheless. Broadly speaking, the team was moving from putting things right to making them better and was changing fewer things with each improvement cycle. The distance travelled since early 2015 was clear and the team was positive – but not complacent. They needed to continue to demand increased consistency, higher expectations and incremental improvements to enhance student progress and performance.

The forecast self-assessment grades for curriculum areas had been reviewed through quality improvement processes. Overall, there was confidence that the college could self-assess as Good. Measures such as outcomes, attendance, retention and student views were all positive. Within an overall Good assessment, there were some areas that might not yet have reached that standard – Creative Arts, Business/Travel and Construction. There were some common themes – staff turnover, and performance management to change leadership (in two of the three areas). All areas had some strong indicators and further lesson observations and quality assurance were under way. Matt Vaughan had seen eight classes in the Construction and Motor Vehicle area and had said that all of the teaching observed had been good. Governor support for a learning walk in Business/Travel would be a real help.

Action: Confirm date of Business/Travel learning walk.

Question: *How could stronger staff and leaders be recruited in these areas?* The college was a more attractive place to work than had been the case in 2015/16, and the HR team better able to support this process. Consideration might also be given to encouraging retention, for example, of Maths and English teachers or other key team members. In year leavers were really disruptive to learning.

Action: SMT to consider proposals to encourage staff retention (including through performance related pay) and discuss with the Board.

ITEM 3: HART LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

The reported achievement rate for 2015/16 had been reduced as a result of two factors; the first, a general change to calculation methodology applied late in 2016 to all providers. This had the effect of depressing all achievement rates by c5% (from a national average of 72% to 67%). The second arose from an instruction given at the end of an extremely long audit process conducted by PWC (the SFA auditors). This had the effect of reducing the Hart L&D outcome by a further 3.7% to 60%.

Question: *What did staff say to PWC at the time?* Staff challenged PWC, but the instruction was repeated. Given the time pressure, staff opted not to challenge further, and had not perhaps fully appreciated the impact of the instruction.

Question: *What lessons were learned?* First, about the importance of absolute clarity about the cohort. There were no substantive changes to calculation methodology this year, and the team was confident it had accurately identified the reportable group, including those dropping out after the relevant cut-off date. Second, about the importance of asking for firm evidence to support an instruction from auditors and recognising the impact of a decision that might seem insignificant at the time. The staff in this case had understandably not wanted an already very protracted audit to be dragged out further, but could have been more challenging.

Question: *What would the impact be?* There would be little material impact; the reputational risks for Hart L&D could be (and were being) managed, and perversely, depressing the outcome in 2015/16 would make the anticipated 2016/17 results look better. The most important underlying issue related to the culture and practice of the MI team, which needed to appreciate that data potentially affected income.

Matt Hamnett had written to Peter Lauener pointing out the perverse consequences of an instruction, in effect, to count 45 achievements as failures, although we did not expect that the position would change as a result.

Apprenticeship outcomes in 2016/17 were forecast to be 69% - likely to be in line with or above the national average. Learner survey data was positive and indicated improvements in attitudes towards Maths and English as a result of the courses.

There was one sub-contractor about which there were serious concerns. This was a new partner in 2016/17, with a Good Ofsted rating, excellent references from other colleges and positive meetings between senior teams. Matt and James would meet the CEO soon aiming to apply sufficient pressure to ensure problems were addressed, but not so much as to encourage the private equity backed business to walk away.

Question: *What was OneFile?* The eportfolio and learner management system used across the Group. The plan was to get this to interface directly with the MI system.

Traineeships were progressing well, with a range of additional progress measures supporting the core outcome targets. This was consistent with a new emphasis on student progress as well as achievement (reflected in questions from Matt Vaughan during the recent Ofsted Support and Challenge visit). The learner engagement team nonetheless remained focussed on setting expectations that students would make progress with Maths and English, including retests if required.

Rob Irving commented that the recent learning walk had been very informative. The employer of one apprentice who had moved from a sub-contractor to direct delivery

had noticed a substantial improvement including more contact and engagement from the Hart L&D staff now supporting the apprentice.

Action: Circulate letter to Peter Lauener to Committee members.

ITEM 4: HE UPDATE

HE provision was currently a small but well performing area of provision for NHC. The landscape was changing significantly as a result of new apprenticeship policy and university competition and so our approach should be re-evaluated.

Numbers were currently stable with the majority of students taking the extended science degree. The reputation of the HE offering was strong with the validating university and we had applied to receive the gold standard on the Teaching Excellence Framework – an unusual feature for FE college provision. Student satisfaction was good and teaching and learning good with some elements of excellence.

Question: *Was this area of provision a distraction to the core business?* Not as things stood. Making changes – to cut provision or grow it - would require more management time and introduce risk. It was low risk to maintain the programme for now. There were longer term risks that market changes would undermine college delivery.

Question: *Why were some courses running with very low numbers?* These reflected the gradual phasing out of individual programmes. The three major programmes were Science, Business and Computing.

Question: *Were teachers on HE programmes dedicated to this provision or did they work across the college?* A number of courses used a consortium approach with teaching being provided by partners outside NHC. Some lecturers were dedicated exclusively to HE programmes.

Question: *What financial return did these programmes generate?* Although income streams could be identified, it was harder to get a good picture on costs at present. Understanding this better would be part of the anticipated strategic review.

Question: *Why do students choose to study at NHC?* There are many reasons, including the quality of teaching, good student experiences, and strong links to industry and employability. Other local colleges were keen to offer the popular extended science programme, and – separately – there was a suggestion that the four Hertfordshire colleges plus the University should jointly become an Institute of Technology. This was an interesting suggestion, which merited further consideration; there were other approaches which might meet the needs of North Hertfordshire better.

Question: *Were HE Learning Walks conducted?* Yes, the same quality assurance and performance challenge processes were applied as in the rest of NHC provision. Support from governors for this would be welcomed.

The Committee agreed that a strategic decision about the future of HE provision at NHC should be taken by the Board towards the end of 2017, but that for now, there were more pressing matters to address, and the offer should remain in place.

Action: Develop strategic paper on HE provision for October Board meeting.

ITEM 5: DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- Thursday 18 May 2017, starting at 18.15, in Hitchin (room tbc).

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Signed as an accurate record

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Chair

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Date

ACTION LOG

Item	What	Who/When
2.	Confirm date of Business/Travel learning walk.	Jennie Condé 31/03/17
2.	SMT to consider proposals to encourage staff retention (including through performance related pay) and discuss with the Board.	Kit Davies 12/05/17
3.	Circulate letter to Peter Lauener to Committee members.	Robert Dale 31/03/17
4	Develop strategic paper on HE provision for October Board meeting.	Kit Davies 30/09/17