Agreed by the Committee 29/1/26

HART LEARNING GROUP

QUALITY AND CURRICULUM COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Quality and Curriculum Committee took place on Thursday 27 November 2025 starting at 18.00 by videoconference (Microsoft Teams).

PRESENT

Toni Beck (Chair)
Jacquie Bamber
Liz Chatman (Staff Governor)
Kit Davies (Chief Executive)
Claire McCafferty
Grace Wade (Student Governor)
Richard Wilson

IN ATTENDANCE

Claire Cooper (Head of Student Experience) (for Items 2 and 3)
Deanna-Mae Donnelly (Student Ambassador (for Items 2 and 3)
Nadia Hodges (Director of Curriculum)
Lara Mathie (Director of Curriculum (SEND))
Lorna McCallum (Executive Director-Apprenticeships and Partnerships)
Kerry Pritchett (Head of Quality)
Keith Turner (Deputy Principal, Quality and Inclusion)
Robert Dale (Company Secretary)

WELCOME

- The Chair welcomed Deanna-Mae Donnelly, the student ambassador leading on equalities issues, to the meeting who would make a short presentation about hidden disability at Item 3.

ITEM 1A: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- None.

ITEM 1B: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- Kit Davies declared that he was a member of the Board of WENTA, of the Stevenage Redevelopment Board and of the Hertfordshire Virtual School.

ITEM 1C: MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

- The Committee agreed that the minutes of the meetings held on 2 October 2025 were an accurate record of proceedings.

ITEM 1D: MATTERS ARISING

- Actions had been completed as below:
  - Review the title and description of the Curriculum Rep role. **Action complete.** These reps would now be called 'Course Reps' as this was thought easier for students to understand.

- Decide how and when to provide the Board or Quality & Curriculum Committee members with more information about ALPS. **Action complete**. The Governor in college session on 27 November would incorporate a presentation on this tool. It was important to note that ALPS only covered some (not all) level 3 qualifications so had limitations as a performance measurement dataset.

- Prepare plan for communicating student survey feedback to students and families. **Action complete**. Student survey data and analysis was being communicated to students via their student reps and being used by marketing in its wider messaging.

Question: *How did the latest student voice response rate compare with other colleges?* There were some national datasets that could be reviewed but approaches to obtaining information about student perception and satisfaction varied across colleges and it was hard to get a reliable comparator.

Question: *Was NHC discussing student perceptions with other colleges?* Not currently; it might be possible to gain some insights via the Student Services network.

Action: Make enquiries from the Student Services network about data on student satisfaction at other colleges.

- Review the mitigations for the Safeguarding risk (Risk 68) and consider whether the probability of a serious incident had increased. **Action complete**. The Audit Committee and Board had noted at their meetings in October that the post mitigation risk score had been increased because of the additional volume and complexity of need among students generally and among learners on the SEND register or with other additional needs. Resources had also been increased and staff training and specialist expertise developed to help mitigate the increase in demand and risk, and it might be appropriate to bring the post-mitigation score down subsequently in the light of these developments.

ITEM 3: STUDENT AMBASSADOR REPORT – HIDDEN DISABILITY

- Deanna-Mae Donnelly advised the Committee about 'hidden disability' and plans to raise awareness about this issue around the college. There were a number of students known to have 'hidden disabilities' and it was proposed to undertake an awareness raising campaign to help the wider college community understand this and perhaps to encourage more students to come forward. This would include campus signage, 'guest speakers' in some Personal and Academic Development (PAD) sessions, sign language lessons, perhaps via an enrichment offer as there were staff trained to do this, a 'walk in my shoes' day, and reminders that 'jokes' or 'banter' about disabilities were not acceptable.

- A number of students at Springboard and with Additional Learning Support (ALS) would be prepared to step forward as 'guest speakers' and describe their lived experiences to the student community. The student services team was encouraged to engage with Lara Mathie (as the Director of SEND) on this issue.

Question: *What data was there about 'hidden disabilities' in the student population?* There was no separate category of 'hidden disability' and although students were encouraged to identify disabilities during the recruitment and induction process, not all did so, and there was likely to be some under-reporting. Work was undertaken each year to combine all the information held to get the best possible picture of student needs.

- **Governors welcomed** the report and looked forward to hearing about the progress of the campaign through the Student Governor reports in future.

ITEM 2: STUDENT GOVERNOR REPORT

- The student governor reported on the recent events to promote progression to Higher Education. She had spoken to Business, and Travel and Tourism students at the Hitchin campus and described her experiences of visiting universities to consider which to apply to. Students had lots of questions and several had followed up with arranging visits of their own to institutions such as Manchester, Exeter and Nottingham Trent. Students were already getting good support for writing UCAS applications but had really appreciated hearing the personal perspective.

- Student voice responses were good – comments on question 1 (about their experience to date including arrangements for work experience) had been positive, and several had recommended NHC to their friends and family. All responses showed that students knew how and where to find support should they need it, for example in connection with bursaries, careers advice or general mental health and wellbeing issues. Students were positive about the enrichment offer (which included sports, games, mindfulness, and social options), generally preferring lunchtimes. Some suggestions had been made for additional clubs (eg D&D). Consideration was being given to arranging transportation for students at other campuses wishing to use the Hitchin sports facilities. Revision, study and Mentor clubs helped students develop friendship and support networks.

Question: *Was there good representation across all campuses and courses among the course and student rep population?* All groups had a class rep who reported to the Course Reps. Supported Studies and Access students were able to contribute to student voice as well and given support to do so.

- Governors thanked the student governor for considering the survey data in detail; they were pleased to hear about the work to promote progression to HE and were pleased to hear that there had been an increase in UCAS applications this year.

- **The Quality & Curriculum Committee were delighted** to hear about the excellent work being done by the student governor and her team.

- Deanna-Mae Donnely and Claire Cooper left the meeting.

ITEM 4: DRAFT 2024/25 SELF-ASSESSMENT REVIEW REPORT

- This report was prepared annually at the end of each academic year to examine all aspects of the performance of the college during that year. It covered six key judgements and four provision types and the assessment and conclusions were used to inform the development of the quality improvement plan (QIP) for 2025/26. The report now incorporated an executive summary.

- The report provided clear evidence of a very strong year, the result of a deliberate and sustained programme of development to create a cultural shift in the business. Teams were more collaborative, professionally curious and accepting shared accountability for student outcomes. There was a clear vision emphasizing supporting learners to achieve their full potential.

- Staff survey results reflected a clear sense that the college was a place where staff were empowered, and where their views were listened to and valued.

- Achievement rates were up across all areas in many cases significantly with achievements of young people in the top 10% of the FE sector nationally. English and Maths results had also been significantly above the national average and were thought to be in the upper quartile. Apprenticeship achievements had reached 64% and were above the national benchmark. On-line and Employability outcomes were strong. The data from our consideration of added value suggested that, from a low baseline on entry, the college helped a large majority of learners reach or exceed their potential. There was a strong progression rate (64% - up from 48% in 2022/23).

- Leadership and Management was assessed in this SAR report as Outstanding, with student outcomes, the culture of aspiration and inclusivity, high staff morale and satisfaction overall and dynamic, values-driven leadership with continuous improvement and creativity embedded in its approach across the whole management spectrum.

- The proposed assessment of Provision for Young People was also Outstanding. With exceptional achievement rates, a clear and ambitious curriculum intent tailored to student potential and employer needs, a high retention and progression rate, and rigorous assessment and support for students, the college was now performing in the top tier of FE colleges nationally. Provision for HNF students continued to be Outstanding, with the same strengths in outcomes and support.

- The SAR report included some areas for improvement:

  - Achievement rates on a small number of programmes including professional courses, apprenticeships, and ESOL programmes for 16-18 students.

  - A small amount of teaching and learning on several 16-18 level 3 programmes to ensure that all students make the progress of which they are capable.

  - Updating the curriculum content of some apprenticeship programmes to better meet employer needs.

  - Strengthening the quality, accessibility and use of data across the college so that leaders gain timely, accurate business insights.

- Governors welcomed a first-class report that brought detailed analysis together with clear actions for improvement. There was solid evidence supporting the conclusions reached and a sound foundation to continue to improve. Governors asked:

Question: *Some parts of report did not cite Areas for Improvement (AfIs); was that correct?* The SAR was the foundation of the QIP, which is where actions to address AfIs were identified for each provision type and considered what Ofsted might be examining under the new Inspection framework. AfIs were covered in the Executive Summary as well and concentrated on the most significant elements.

Question: *Should the Quality of Education be considered Outstanding as well?* The reason for not doing so was that there were still some pockets (with very small numbers of students) where quality still needed to improve; as the Ofsted framework referred to consistence across ALL areas of delivery, it was felt appropriate to retain the current Good assessment.

Question: *Should the heading in page 13 of 64 stating that provision for young people was Good be amended?* Yes, this would be corrected before presentation to the Board.

Question: *To what extent could future provision be impaired by the introduction of V-levels?* It was too soon to make a firm assessment of the impact of this policy change and there could also be opportunities. Having smaller qualification 'units' like V-levels could actually improve the fit with employer needs by allowing learners to combine different elements. The curriculum review led by Becky Francis had suggested retaining the current size of curriculum and it was not entirely clear where this policy would land; that recommendation certainly conflicted with the White Paper. The position would be monitored very closely.

- Governors thanked staff for producing a substantial, well-structured and considered document. The college was recognizable from its content, which told the story of 2024/25 fairly and objectively. Congratulations were due to Keith Turner and his colleagues for their hard work and delivery of strong outcomes in the year.

- **The Quality and Curriculum Committee agreed to recommend** the 2024/25 SAR report to the Board.

Action: Amend the Draft SAR to take account of the Committee's advice and present to the Board.

ITEM 5: NHC PERFORMANCE UPDATE

- The report reflected a strong start to 2025/26 following excellent outcomes in the summer as described in the SAR report. Attendance had hit the target of 90% and a strong focus remained on this, although it was expected that the percentage would fall somewhat during the rest of the year. There were c400 support plans in place to encourage attendance. Maths and English teams had made a good start and had shared their progress data with curriculum teams; they would share how they were working to help address the identified gaps in learning through the vocational curriculum.

- Currently, there were 160 Higher Needs Funded (HNF) learners and 235 students with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). Retention was good for this cohort and on a par with the position in 2024/25. Extra staff had been recruited to support the additional need among learners (and to replace some existing staff who had received promotions). There had been good take-up of the professional development offer which would continue to be rolled out during the spring term.

- The college was experiencing the smallest number of vacancies for some time.

Question: *What feedback had been received from the whole-college SEND event?* Kerry Pritchett had led this event and a survey had been issued with final analysis due shortly. The overall satisfaction score had been 3.5 out of 4 and the feedback was being used to consider next steps.

- **The Quality & Curriculum Committee accepted** the report.

ITEM 6: HART L&D PERFORMANCE UPDATE

- There had been a busy and strong start to the year including the development of programmes (such as the recently launched Level 5 People Professional programme) with and for clients such as Lloyds Banking Group. This was proving a very successful relationship with excellent student outcomes. All KPIs were currently on track or better at this point in the year. The Employability offer was performing strongly with excellent Sector-based Work Academy Programme (SWAP) results. Online delivery was ahead of the position at the same time last year and was looking to diversify its offer.

Question: *The Out of Funding (OOF) figure was higher than target; what was the reason?* The target of 15% was reached last year – and this was the national benchmark. This year, the aim was to drive that down to 12% by the year end and this was still forecast to be achieved. The number would vary report by report but should come down.

Question: *What risks arose from the absence of the Head of Business Development?* The role had not worked out as expected and the preference now was to work with a lead generation business as a lower risk approach.

Question: *What was the Mindful platform?* This was a good virtual learning environment (VLE) used with the AAT professional programmes. It supported self-directed learning and assisted the tutors in identifying gaps in students learning. It took time for both students and teachers to learn to use the tool properly but it was now being used effectively.

Question: *Did the Group own the intellectual property (IP) in the programme developed for Lloyds Banking Group?* Yes, the IP remained with NHC, and the package could be repurposed for other clients.

- **The Quality & Curriculum Committee accepted** the report.

ITEM 7: 2025/26 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

- This paper had been shared with the Committee to raise awareness of the nature and extent of training and professional development being provided for teams and the link to the Group's wider strategic priorities. This included a new Leadership Lab programme starting at the end of this term, intended to help develop leadership talent.

Question*: How would potential leaders be spotted?* The process was linked to the competency framework. In addition to the new programme, there was a lot of individual coaching and structured development work with middle managers. The professional development plan was not just about succession planning though, but about preparing for a future that would be different from the present; while the Group was doing well now, it needed to stay ahead of the game. The next couple of years would be pivotal for the FE sector as a result of the business environment and policy changes that would come into effect over that period.

Question: *Would there be governor training on the new Ofsted inspection framework?* Yes, this would be covered in the Governor in College session rescheduled for 22 January 2026.

- **The Quality & Curriculum Committee accepted** the report.

ITEM 8: QUALITY AND CURRICULUM RISK REGISTER

- Since the previous meeting, several Quality & Curriculum risks had been closed and two opened. Other changes included an increase in the post-mitigation score for the Safeguarding risk as proposed at the previous meeting of the Committee. However, there were significant mitigations in place, including extra staff, resources, training and development which might permit the higher score to be reduced after further review.

- The SMT had further reviewed the risk register at its meeting on 25 November and proposed to add three emerging risks (in discussion with the Audit Committee on (a) curriculum reform; (b) local government reform; and (c) the implementation of the new Ofsted framework. Governors asked:

Question: *What challenges might the current proposals for curriculum reform bring?* Some of the risk related to the volume of change expected, in tandem with the existing changes brought about by the new Ofsted framework.

Question: *How did Risks 70 (Digital Strategy) and 82 (AI tools) interact?* The latter concerned the deployment of AI without sufficient understanding or control across the business as a whole, probably initially with Corporate Service functions. The former was mainly about the use of digital tools within the curriculum eg to support accessibility, inclusion and wellbeing. AI tools could also assist with managing teacher workload and innovation. The current awareness campaign used the strapline – "Think with me, not for me" emphasising that AI was a tool not a substitute.

Question: *At what point would continuing growth in the number of students with more and more complex needs become impractical to manage?* The Board had had a brief discussion in this subject; in summary, space constraints would dictate how many students could be accommodated sooner than staff constraints. It was not currently possible to be specific about when that limit would be reached, and careful timetabling would help manage the challenge for some time yet.

Question: *Could this risk emerge sooner than expected or coincide with the other substantial changes identified in the risk register?* Yes, that was a risk, but there were additional mitigations that could be applied should this be necessary. For example, as the move from Units 1 to 5 at Fulton Close to the Town Centre campus took place, there would be less capacity for students (mitigated partly by moving some electrical teaching to the main campus) and some entry requirements would be raised to have an impact on numbers. The other growing challenge was exam access arrangements with most students now needing some form of adjustment. The demographic forecast suggested an upward trend for c three more years, then flat and then down.

- **The Quality & Curriculum Committee accepted** the report.

ITEM 9: ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- None.

ITEM 11: DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- Thursday 29 January 2026, starting at 18.00, by videoconference.

THANK YOU

- As the end of 2025 approached, the Chair thanked all governors for their support during the year, and expressed the Committee's thanks to staff for their dedication and commitment. She wished all present a peaceful break when it arrived.

ACTION LOG

Date	Item	What	Who	When
27/11/265	1d.	Make enquiries from the Student Services network about data on student satisfaction at other colleges.	Claire Cooper	31/12/25
27/11/25	4.	Amend the Draft SAR to take account of the Committee's advice and present to the Board.	Keith Turner	03/11/25