Agreed by the Committee, 26/3/2026

# HART LEARNING GROUP

## QUALITY AND CURRICULUM COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Quality and Curriculum Committee took place on Thursday 29 January 2026 starting at 18.00 by videoconference (Microsoft Teams).

### PRESENT

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

### IN ATTENDANCE

Claire Anderson-Byrne (Deputy Head of Student Experience) (for Items 2 and 3)
Lara Mathie (Director of Curriculum (SEND))
Lorna McCallum (Executive Director-Apprenticeships and Partnerships)
Kerry Pritchett (Head of Quality)
Oscar Sweetman (Student Ambassador (for Items 2 and 3)
Keith Turner (Deputy Principal, Quality and Inclusion)
Robert Dale (Company Secretary)

### WELCOME

- The Chair welcomed Oscar Sweetman to the meeting, a student ambassador supporting the work of the Student Governor in respect of volunteering.

### ITEM 1A: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- Jacquie Bamber
- Nadia Hodges was unwell and her presentation would be delivered by Keith Turner and Lara Mathie.

### 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 27 November 2025 were an accurate record of proceedings.

### ITEM 1D: MATTERS ARISING

- Actions had been completed as below:
  - Make enquiries from the Student Services network about data on student satisfaction at other colleges. **Action under way**. No national data was available on student satisfaction but this would continue to be investigated.

- Amend the Draft SAR to take account of the Committee's advice and present to the Board. **Action complete**. The Draft SAR had been presented to the December meeting of the Board with the adjustments suggested by the Committee incorporated.

## ITEM 2: STUDENT GOVERNOR REPORT

- Governors reviewed the report, welcoming the recent Higher Education student finance presentation which had been really valuable in giving learners a sense of what student life would be like. There were lots of other finance sessions in the Personal and Academic Development (PAD) curriculum. Governors were pleased that having the student governor's role had been an important factor in the receipt of an unconditional university offer.

- Informal conversations with student reps were ongoing and dates had been set for sessions at the end of each half term to help support a direct channel of communications. Student voice activity had identified some 'asks' which have been followed up.

**Question**: *What were the student voice requests?* More PAD sessions on financial matters, more diversity in café menus and more notice about what was going to be offered so students can plan choices around food in advance and improving poor wi-fi in the Pod. More support for students considering university options. There had also been mixed opinions about the careers programmes and work experience was hard to find for some programmes. Some of the responses might have been because of a lack of appreciation that 'projects' could count as work experience.

**Question**: *Did PAD tutors normally do the presentations on university finance?* It was the University of Bedford that had provided the recent session; other local universities would also be willing to provide similar presentations if asked.

**Question**: *Had the concerns of Creative students about the quality of wifi been addressed?* Yes, these had been resolved.

- Governors expressed their appreciation to the student governor for the hard work she had put in and looked forward to hear more about the forthcoming drop-in sessions.

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

## ITEM 3: STUDENT AMBASSADOR REPORT – HIDDEN DISABILITY

- Volunteering was considered to be a useful way of developing student confidence and transferable skills. Through working with partners such as Herts Volunteering Service and local charities, the college was building opportunities to eventually encourage all students to engage in some form of volunteering and to support those that did.

- Whilst there was a general understanding of the positive impact volunteering could have, infrastructure to support a college-wide, high-impact volunteering programme was needed, as well as a more detailed understanding of the barriers students faced when considering this.

- Oscar Sweetman, the student ambassador leading on volunteering had launched an investigation into both the level of existing volunteering and the challenges and

obstacles individuals faced. It was also considering whether anything could be done to change the views of students uninterested in volunteering.

- Governors recognized that this was a useful strand of work, aligned with a national scheme (Good for Me, Good for FE) and that there was already a lot going on – in 2024/25 an NHC student had won a national award – but more progress could be made.

**Question**: *What were the more challenging areas?* In some cases – the Public Services curriculum area, for example – it was easier to identify and take up opportunities. Other curriculum teams could find this harder, but more could be done to promote volunteering consistently.

**Question**: *Did the staffing and infrastructure exist to support this aspiration?* The team was examining how if could do more with its existing structure, and might need to reflect on role descriptions. A whole college approach was needed, with support delivered primarily via Student Services, so Sarah Robins was leading on this at present.

- Governors suggested using case studies from current students to promote the benefits of volunteering to students every year.

- **Governors thanked Oscar Sweetman** for his presentation and looked forward to hearing more about the activity.

## ITEM 4: FIRST IMPRESSIONS 2024/25 SURVEY ANALYSIS

- In response to feedback about the length and timeliness of the student satisfaction surveys, an extra survey has been added this year; the 'Course Impressions survey' to be conducted shortly. This enabled the length of the other surveys to be reduced while providing more focus on particular aspects of the student experience.

- The First Impressions survey had been conducted in the autumn term and attracted a response rate of 94.8%, slightly below last year's 96%. Overall satisfaction remained very high (90.7%) and slightly higher than last year. Several individual questions had seen a slight fall in positive responses; ten questions declined by less than 2% and a further two by less than 3%. But there were no clear patterns or trends to explain the general decrease. All curriculum areas had overall satisfaction rates above 85% - ranging from 85.7% to 98.9%.

- Some staffing gaps in a small number of areas (now filled) might have influenced the lower scores. Teams had been tasked with following up queries and issues in their area, and developing actions to respond.

- The team now planned to review the reporting structures of all student satisfaction surveys to enable analysis of student satisfaction by inclusion characteristics. This would be important in the context of the new Ofsted inspection framework.

**Question**: *Had the data been analysed by different cohorts?* The team had looked at the questions that had seen reductions in scores, but had not seen patterns at the curriculum area level; more analyses would be developed to see whether different categories of learner responded differently. Governors supported that approach.

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

## ITEM 5: HART L&D PERFORMANCE UPDATE

- Governors noted that our approach to business development had changed and that we now used a third-party partner to provide this service, the in-house option not having proved successful.

- Performance indicators were all very positive, and all better than 2024/25. The majority of learners were on track or ahead of their programmes. Year-to-date (YTD) on-line delivery looked exceptionally strong (at 93.7%, up seven percentage points from last year). This position was likely to fall back slightly during the remainder of the year with the year-end forecast slightly below 90%. End-point Assessment (EPA) outcomes so far had been strong and learner feedback was positive. Results on management programmes were particularly good. Lloyds Banking Group had provided excellent feedback on the programme designed with them, John Lewis Partnership had also seen clear business impact from their programmes.

- A new measure of 'out of funding' learners had now been introduced, so that anyone who missed the end date would be considered to be non-timely. This would increase the reported numbers somewhat and the committee would see this new data at its next meeting.

- There was a potential risk arising from a suggestion that government might restrict the delivery of certain types of apprenticeship at levels 4 and 5. This could have a material impact on our work with, for example, Lloyd Banking Group.

**Question**: *Why had SoPro been selected as the service provider?* Due diligence had been undertaken including making contact with other users and a six months pilot had been agreed. The position would be reviewed after this and a more permanent solution explored. About 15 leads per month were anticipated.

**Question**: *What Additional Learning Support (ALS) improvements were needed?* A new assessment tool was giving real insights into the needs of individual learners, but some of the tutors had not yet fully caught up with the need to tailor teaching and learning to a greater degree.

**Question**: *Were the gaps in staffing affecting the learner experience?* There had been some less satisfactory agency cover but the current temporary staff was better. For Engineering, the issue was about designing the curriculum for September 2026. There were two candidates for the role, who looked good on paper.

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

## ITEM 6: NHC PERFORMANCE UPDATE

- Governors welcomed the report which showed strong performance forecasts, with results from the November GCSE resit cohorts for Maths and English having been above the national average. Functional Skills outcomes had also been also good. Performance Boards were operating well. Each department had a target to support progression. SEND and EHCP learners had good forecast and retention data. Attendance was currently below the 90% target at 88.8% but retention was high at 98.7%.

- There had been significant growth in demand for Exam Access Arrangements this year, but these were being captured earlier and there was an active attempt to capture of support needs through transition and induction processes.

**Question**: *What did the 'Normal Way of Working' mean?* It was a rigorous assessment process to identify what reasonable adjustments might need to be made to accommodate an individual learner's needs.

**Question**: *Would the larger number of EAAs have an impact on facilities or staff resources?* Yes, there were a large number of implications with physical facilities being the biggest risk/constraint. This was being managed by providing additional training to ensure more invigilators were available.

**Question**: *Were EAAs required for all programmes or could assessment arrangements be varied?* Where appropriate and possible, adaptations were made. The pinch points were Functional Skills and GCSE examinations, where options were more limited.

**Question**: *Why had Catering got a lower target achievement rate than the previous year?* Catering results were exceptionally high last year and this year's cohort of learners had a lower past performance rate.

**Question**: *What were the current concerns over GCSE English?* Slightly lower results had been achieved at Hitchin and this was probably because the team had been slightly too flexible over who was allowed to resit earlier.

- Governors were very pleased to see the strong results and performance and the wide range of enrichment activities offered.

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

## ITEM 7: QUALITY DEVELOPMENT PLAN UPDATE

- The Quality Development Plan (QDP) shifts focus from previous Quality Improvement Plans towards the deliberate development of quality: embedding excellence, strengthening impact, and positioning the college confidently for the future. This shift reflected the college's maturity and the need to adapt to external change, including the revised Ofsted inspection framework, which placed increased emphasis on impact over time, inclusion and equity, curriculum ambition, and leadership effectiveness.

- The focus on Inclusion was not just an 'add on'; quality would be measured and defined through that lens. Ofsted would look at organization not just curriculum level, so would consider the design of programmes, teaching and learning and support available through student services. It was considered that NHC was already well-placed to demonstrate good practice; there was a professional culture centred around research-led development, with strongly engaged staff supported by a continuous quality cycle. This involved staff and student participation in shaping practice.

- Governors agreed that the QDP had a positive and ambitious air; there was a lot to do and it would take more than one year to fulfil.

**Question**: *How would progress and the timeline be measured and monitored?* Regular meetings between curriculum leads and directors and being clear about how each team contributed to and support the work of others.

**Question**: *How certain was delivery?* The team was confident that the QDP could be delivered as proposed.

**Question**: *What measures of impact were available?* There were some areas where data was readily available and where monitoring frameworks already existed. In others, these

needed to be developed – for example, undertaking more analysis through the lens of inclusion. It was important to focus on the insights, and not just data.

**Question**: *How was the application to become a College of Sanctuary progressing?* There had been good feedback on the initial submission and NHC was one of three applications that was progressing to the next stage. It was important to recognise that this was intended to support the development of teaching and learning about tolerance, good citizenship, community and inclusivity. Holding the status aligned with the college's aim to be at the heart of the North Hertfordshire community.

**Question**: *What would participation in the MCR Pathways programme involve?* This was a programme that supported disadvantaged young people by providing access to volunteer mentors. Several Stevenage schools already took part in the programme, and this would enable the college to continue the support those young people had previously enjoyed. It would also be expanded to bring in learners at the college who had not had this support before.

**Question**: *Was inclusion data collected from students on enrolment and was the data collection broad enough?* What is collected at induction is not always complete, or accurate. There many be several reasons for this including the young person's own preferences. However, staff continued to work on cleansing and reviewing data (including such things as existing Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)), supplementing this with the tutors' knowledge of the students themselves.

**Question**: *Was postcode analysis of learner data available?* Not currently, but this would be part of the next stage of development.

- Governors welcomed the report and noted that it would be a standing item at future meetings.

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

## ITEM 8: QUALITY AND CURRICULUM RISK REGISTER

- A number of changes had been made to the Quality & Curriculum risks following discussions at the Audit Committee and Board at the end of the autumn term. Several of the quality-related concerns have been closed and some have had their post mitigation risk scores reduced given the data showing improved learner outcomes and the higher self-assessment scores agreed in the SAR.

- Aside from the continuing focus on risks associated with AI, two Emerging Risks were of particular relevance to the Committee – the first concerning the new Ofsted framework - and the second (probably more significant but slightly longer term) concerning curriculum reform. The Board would receive a full briefing on the new Ofsted framework during the next Strategic Thinking session before the Board's business meeting on 9 February 2026.

**Question**: *As the Office for Students (OfS) continued to take interest in franchised HE provision, to what extent did this remain a significant risk?* The current post-mitigation score could be reduced from May this year as the cohort of learners was reduced in size (by expected completions). As previously reported, the college had commissioned an audit, briefed to look out for any evidence to support the 'unsupported allegations' that the OfS had raised with the college. This work had not found such evidence. The college had already decided to wind down its partnership with CECOS and this would be complete by May 2027.

Staff continued to monitor and quality assure the provision in detail and believed that it could demonstrate that it had responded to the allegations robustly.

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

## ITEM 9: ANY OTHER BUSINESS

*Governor in College session, 22 January 2026*

- The recent session had provided insights into how 'added value' was provided to NHC students and evidenced using tools such as ALPS. There had been an opportunity during the morning to meet a range of staff and learners. The session had been valuable for governors to assure themselves that the college was demonstrably adding value. Governors were encouraged to attend as many of these events as they could, to see the college in action.

## ITEM 11: DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- Thursday 26 March 2026, starting at 18.00, at the Stevenage campus.

## ACTION LOG

| Date | Item | What | Who | When |
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