Agreed by the Committee, 21/5/26

# HART LEARNING GROUP

## QUALITY AND CURRICULUM COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Quality and Curriculum Committee took place on Thursday 26 March 2026 starting at 18.00 in the SITEC Immersive Room, Stevenage campus, and by videoconference (Microsoft Teams).

### PRESENT

Toni Beck (Chair)
Jacquie Bamber
Kit Davies (Chief Executive)
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) (by videoconference)
Kerry Pritchett (Head of Quality)
Elle Heward-Mills (Student Ambassador
Keith Turner (Deputy Principal, Quality and Inclusion)
Robert Dale (Company Secretary)

### WELCOME

- The Chair welcomed Elle Heward-Mills to the meeting, a student ambassador interested in learning more about the role of the student governor.
- Governors wished Grace Wade a very happy 18th birthday and presented her with a bouquet of flowers.

### ITEM 1A: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- Liz Chatman (Staff Governor).

### 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 29 January 2026 were an accurate record of proceedings.

### ITEM 1D: MATTERS ARISING

- There were no specific actions identified in the minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2026 and no governor raised any matters arising from those minutes.

## ITEM 2: STUDENT GOVERNOR REPORT

- Governors were pleased that the team of student representatives had provided good feedback on current student voice arrangements. More frequent rep meetings had been requested and it was planned to schedule two or three per term in 2026/27. Reps would also support and take part in other college activities such as support club, book club, reading club etc. Students had suggested providing donation boxes around the campuses to encourage the college community to support its charities, and the IT ambassador was considering student suggestions about how to enhance student inductions by providing more training on practical matters such as using Office IT applications such as Teams and showing students how to submit documents.

- The election for the next Student Governor was under way, with preparation providing a useful opportunity to reflect on what had gone well this year and what might be done differently next. There had been a lot of interest in this and the Ambassador roles.

- One World Week had gone really well.

**Question**: *When would feedback on student IT questions be available?* The deadline was this week. The issues ranged from the importance of changing passwords, the ability to use equipment on non-college days, walk-throughs of key college systems and so on. These matters were being factored into the development of the induction programme for next year.

**Question**: *Had the concerns raised by Creative students about wifi access been resolved?* Yes, and quite quickly once they had been raised.

**Question**: *Staff had raised issues around wifi access at Hitchin; what was the position with this?* Some faulty equipment was being upgraded as part of the current capital expenditure programme which would be finished by the end of March.

**Question**: *Who would interview the student governor candidates?* Kit Davies, Claire Anderson-Byrne and Grace Wade. There were five candidates and the student governor would be supported by a team of six ambassadors.

- Governors had met students at Hitchin during the recent Governor in College session. The feedback about the role played by student reps had been very positive, and similar issues as had been raised through the student voice process had come out then as well. This was valuable triangulation.

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

## ITEM 3: SPOTLIGHT – APPLICATION FOR THE COLLEGE OF SANCTUARY STATUS

- Work on a bid to be identified as a College of Sanctuary' had begun about 18 months earlier and a draft submission had received good feedback. The final bid ad now been submitted and te team was working with several other colleges and local education institutions (including a secondary school) to develop thinking and share any concerns. The final assessment would take place on 6 May 2026.

- This application provided a coherent framework for strengthening inclusion, equality and social justice in FE. It aligned directly with NHC's core institutional priorities: improving student recruitment, retention and progression; evidencing strong and inclusive practice for Ofsted; and delivering tangible impact against equality, diversity and inclusion objectives. It also strengthened the college's role as a trusted anchor

institution within the local community, deepening partnerships with refugee and migrant organisations, enhancing reputation, and opening up new avenues for external funding and collaborative projects.

- Within NC, the bid was led by a working group with representation from all parts of the college including Hart Learning & Development. All aspects of the bid – including the MCR mentoring programme aimed at disadvantaged learners – were being promoted to all curriculum staff. Training provided by a third party (REUK) would be rolled out and would cover student reps as well as staff.

- Ongoing work included student voice activity incorporating consideration of enrolment, admissions and enrichment processes; identifying staff that could speak other languages had been a valuable exercise, revealing a wide range. The intention was to improve the enrolment process for ESOL applicants to improve information, advice and guidance, signpost to childcare support and build in an individualized transition programme. This might include help to register with a GP, find local schools etc.

- Enrichment was a key aspect of the bid and there were plans to extend it, including some evening sessions. Student Voice responses were informing these developments. It was also important not to treat ESOL learners as a separate college community; integration with other curriculum groups was valuable – as for example in the case of the Health and Social Care students working with ESOL students.

- The response from the bid assessors so far had included comments such as "an incredibly impressive application" and "bold, brave and will be extremely impactful". NHC had also been asked by the assessment organization to support two other institutions going through this process.

- Governors noted that the approach was for all learners, not just a specific and quite small cohort; the college already provided inclusive support for learners with additional needs and the approach built on the successful trauma-informed practice that had been in place for several years now.

**Question**: *Would governors also receive training?* Yes, that element would be included.

**Question**: *What form would the training take?* Sessions would be delivered to learners via PAD sessions across a morning or afternoon. All student reps would be required to attend.

**Question**: *How many students would this affect each year?* It was difficult to be specific, not least as the approach was expected to have a positive impact across the whole college community. Separated migrated children were also supported by the Virtual School and might constitute a group of 35 to 40 learners out of the c2,500 new students each year.

**Question**: *Was there any assumption that numbers would rises as a result of a successful application?* Not as such; the bid was intended to recognise what the college did and not to increase recruitment. It was possible that simply being more accessible and working with local schools could raise the college's profile and attract more future students.

**Question**: *How was this funded?* Outcomes were funded via the Adult Skills Fund (ASF) budget. The objective for ESOL was to facilitate progression into work and UK society. One of our recent learners (originally from Ukraine) on a motor vehicle programme had gone on to win a national award.

- Governors noted that work was under way to re-shape the Student Services team to create more focused roles to make the team more responsive to changing needs.

- Governors welcomed the detailed report and saw this as a very exciting initiative for the whole college, which would build on its values as an institution at the heart of the local community, raise aspirations and extend links with local stakeholders

- **The Quality and Curriculum Committee accepted** the report and looked forward to hearing more about the application in future.

- Sarah Robins left the meeting.

## ITEM 4: MID-YEAR STUDENT SURVEY – 2025/26 COURSE IMPRESSIONS

- Governors discussed data from the Course Impressions survey of student views, the second of the three to be undertaken this year. There had been a high response rate, so responses were considered reliable and broadly representative. Key points were:

  - The proportion of positive responses (87.1%) was slightly less than the First Impressions survey (-3.6%) and the 2024/25 Last Impressions survey (-1.9%). This outcome was probably influenced by the transfer of historically low-scoring questions from the other two surveys.

  - The proportion of students happy being a student at NHC had also dropped against the First Impressions survey (by 1.7%). However, only a very small number of students (29) answered 'strongly disagree' and almost all questions (17/19) had a positive response rate above 80%, with 13/19 above 86%.

  - Questions related to teaching and learning scored highly and most showed improvements on the previous academic year. Despite a slight decline (less than 2%) questions on student safety and behaviour had also scored highly.

  - Positive responses to Q11 ("During the autumn term, I had a 1-to-1 tutorial with my teacher to discuss my progress and to set targets") rose by 12.7% with 87.8% of students confirming they had participated in such a tutorial. This was much more representative of anecdotal evidence of what was taking place rather than the lower historic survey results had suggested.

  - Positive responses to a question about the Personal and Academic Development (PAD) programme declined by 10.7% in comparison to 2024/25. The decline was also reflected in feedback gathered through wider student voice and governor activity.

- Governors were pleased to see the generally positive feedback and agreed that it was consistent with the discussions with students during the recent Governor in College event. Discussions about the PAD programme had produced some good ideas, and it had been recognised that there was work to be done to improve this element of the curriculum. Students were keen to understand more about what the programme would cover, and when. Many wished to have more sessions on life skills or driving theory and it would be desirable to consider the needs of second year students separately. Possibly a framework of standard options would be useful that students could self-assess against. There was real scope for innovation.

**Question**: *Was there a minimum number of PAD hours required to be delivered?* Yes.

**Question**: *Was the timetabling of PAD sessions always as good as it could be?* This was also something to consider; more integration with the curriculum might encourage engagement and attendance.

**Question**: *Where were the dips in student satisfaction, engagement or attendance? Were there any clear patterns?* Not really. Business students were less satisfied on average, but it was not clear why. Analysis could not yet be carried out on inclusion cohorts, but this was being developed.

**Question**: *How would the intended qualitative feedback be reported on and how would student concerns be responded to?* The student services team would work with and through the student rep structure to communicate with learners.

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

## ITEM 5: NHC PERFORMANCE UPDATE

- Governors were pleased to receive this report, which shared a strong and positive picture of performance, with retention and forecast achievement rates both high. BTEC projections suggest increased high grades and good value added. Attendance remained below the target of 90%. Trends were being examined by department and better monitoring at this level would be in place for 2026/27. There had been good support from families for Maths and English revision arrangements.

- Applications for 2026/27 programmes stood at 2,435 – 281 better than at the same point in 2024/25, and the team was confident of reaching the recruitment target for 2026/27.

- SEND and Additional Learning Support (ALS) data remained particularly strong with forecast achievement for those with an EHCP and/or HNF higher than for those without. Staff training to support SEND learners had continued.

- A wide range of enrichment was reported, with local media interest in the tailored learning offer at the ECC. A project with a local school (aimed at raising the aspirations of their learners) was in progress with level 3 NHC students leading. It was hoped to develop this further in future years. Our GCSE Maths team had won first placein the regional final of the MEI Maths Challenge - beating off local competition from Milton Keynes College (MKC) and the Bedford College Group (BCG) and was progressing to the national final. Other curriculum areas were also involved in competitions and outside activities.

- HE performance forecasts were also good.

**Question**: *What was the process for managing complaints?* Complaints were handled by the Quality team and the process provided for an acknowledgement within 5 working days and a response within 20 working days. 99% of complaints were addressed within this timescale. The complainant could ask for a review of an initial decision about a complaint but needed to provide additional evidence to support the need for a review; the college could decline to review a decision if this condition was not met.

**Question**: *Had this made the resolution process faster and more effective?* Yes, the team had developed experience in this approach and was better at determining how reviews should be conducted when the evidence was there.

**Question**: *Given the strong programme of CPD, would any elements of this lead to accredited qualifications?* Yes, all training were reported or recognised qualifications.

**Question**: *What analysis of attendance was available?* Attendance analysis showed that some specific cohorts of learners were, on average, negatively impacting the level of

attendance. These included care-experienced or care leaver students, learners on certain Engineering and Construction Campus (ECC) programmes such as motor vehicle and engineering multi-skills programmes, and ESOL learners. Broadly speaking, these learners often had more barriers to learning than average and this was a factor affecting attendance. All learners with below 90% attendance had targets to improve and monitoring was being enhanced to support earlier intervention. While attendance was not particularly low for the sector, the team would continue to press for improvement and hoped to get closer to the target in future.

**Question**: *At course level, did individual tutors know which learners were not attending?* Yes, and there were structures and processes in place to support attendance including individual student action plans and direct contact with families. The issue was on the agenda of all performance board meetings and teams were being tasked with getting on top of attendance much earlier in the academic year.

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

## ITEM 6: HART L&D PERFORMANCE UPDATE

- Governors welcomed recent developments that enabled the growth of our adult training offer. These include participation in the Stevenage Youth Hub, becoming the provider of choice for Luton JCP, delivering a range of new SWAP programmes, and engaging with the AAT with the aim of becoming a host college for future professional events. Recruitment onto professional programmes (AAT and CIPD) was going well and several new Lloyds Banking Group cohorts were starting.]

- A joint project with the University of Hertfordshire (UoH) (which they will fund) has been agreed for delivery between January and July 2026. This aims to create seamless progression pathways from NHC's Level 1–5 Health & Social Care programmes into UoH courses, including apprenticeships, degrees and modular study, to better align learner journeys with local workforce needs.

- There has been a strong start to the new business development service (SoPro) with some good leads emerging including for wider employer engagement, not just apprenticeships.

- Performance data remained good, with a reduction in the proportion of 'out of funding' (OOF) learners. Achievement forecast data was down slightly from the last report – mainly because some learners did not return from breaks in learning as expected. Some healthcare learners have assessments awaiting marking and an action plan is in place to address this.

- The team considered that it is largely On Track against the latest apprenticeship accountability framework, with one data gap to be filled, and more work needed to reduce the number of OOFs still further. On-line achievements remained above 90% and Employability programmes at more than 97%.

- Learner feedback had been good and sub-contractor quality continued to be monitored carefully.

- Changes to the government's eligibility criteria for the use of apprenticeship levy funding would affect our offer and the team was working to develop alternative options.

**Question**: *Was there a potential negative financial impact from the policy changes?* Yes, this was certainly possible, and the team was talking to the affected employers to explore

what they might want to develop as an alternative. There could also be opportunities to extend the current offer with a greater focus on entry level programmes and in other employment sectors. Modelling the impact of different outcomes was being undertaken in conjunction with business planning for 2026/27 and beyond. Assessment reforms were also being implemented – with very little notice given.

- Governors were pleased to see the development of new SWAP programmes – which were genuinely trailblazing. The team was able to respond flexibly to enquiries from outside Hertfordshire and was successfully building relationships with other JobCentre Plus offices, seeking to understand their specific needs and provide an offer derived from our growing range of provision options.

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

## ITEM 7: QUALITY DEVELOPMENT PLAN UPDATE

- The Quality Development Plan (QDP) was making good progress with developing data analysis to permit further insights into cohort performance, enable more targeted interventions and support learners on a more individual basis. Staff training was also going well, including training for sub-contractors and partners. Staff had been asked to mentor a couple of other colleges in support of their College of Sanctuary bids which helped build confidence. The Quality team was working with curriculum teams to identify strengths and gaps in their programmes via QFA data to help drive improvements.

- College-wide action research was now embedded and driving innovation. These sessions had been incorporated into next year's calendar to help ensure the culture continued to grow.

- A 'value-added' review was being carried out and would be reported to the next meeting. This was being undertaken through desktop review, meetings with learners and analysis of ALPs data. An initial assessment suggested that the college had some significant strengths in helping disadvantaged learners achieve.

**Question**: *Would employers provide input to the QFA?* This would be addressed at the curriculum planning days in June.

**Question**: *How was Student Services being refreshed?* When would this take place and what would the impact on staff be? The process would start after the Easter break with the aim of being ready for the new academic year. The objective was to re-align functions with the new focus, refining roles to focus on particular student cohorts. Governors agreed that it was essential that Student Services should link both to inclusion and study programme activity. Better co-ordination between teams would support better achievement.

**Question**: *What burden did the Universal Design' concept place on teachers?* Concern about this had come up in the recent conversations with Governors. Teachers currently had to plan substantial and detailed scaffolding into their delivery to help keep learners engaged. On that basis, it was not expected that the new concept would lead to extra workload. The main impact would probably be on how assessment was carried out.

**Question**: *Was there a good enough spread of employer and stakeholder contacts across curriculum areas?* This was linked to the stakeholder mapping activity currently under way and which would be reported to the Board later in the year. It was important to be able to see easily where we had developed good relationships with employers and whether we could do more to widen and deepen employer engagement. Conversations about this were

going well and had revealed that employers did not always themselves know all of the ways in which they interacted with and supported the college.

- Governors were pleased to hear about the quality of the discussions with the teams about a better stakeholder engagement approach and agreed that this would also help employers understand the full range of interactions. The college's offer was broader than the purely transactional.

**Action**: Report to the next meeting on the value-added data analysis.

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

## ITEM 8: QUALITY AND CURRICULUM RISK REGISTER

- Governors noted limited change since the previous report. Five risks were considered to relate to quality and curriculum matters, including Safeguarding, apprenticeship outcomes, T-level recruitment, the digital strategy and the use of AI.

- Most have low post-mitigation scores, but as a result of Governor feedback about the increased number of learners with additional needs and the increased complexity of those needs, the long-standing Safeguarding risk (Risk 66) had its post-mitigation risk score increased. This is the one quality and curriculum risk assessed as having a 'High' post mitigation risk score (9 or more) – although staff and other resources had been increased to help manage the risk further and the risk score would be re-considered at the next review.

- An emerging risk about the changed eligibility requirements for the use of the apprenticeship levy was likely to require a change of direction over the next year or eighteen months. This was likely to be added to the risk register itself at the next SMT review once details of the government's plans had been announced.

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

## ITEM 9: ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- None.

## ITEM 10: DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- Thursday 21 May 2026, starting at 18.00, by videoconference.

## ACTION LOG

| Date | Item | What | Who | When |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 26/03/26 | 7. | Report to the next meeting on the value-added data analysis. | Kerry Pritchett | 13/05/26 |