Agreed by the Committee, 16/7/26

# HART LEARNING GROUP

## QUALITY AND CURRICULUM COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Quality and Curriculum Committee took place on Thursday 21 May 2026 starting at 18.00 by videoconference (Microsoft Teams).

### PRESENT

Toni Beck (Chair)
Jacquie Bamber
Kit Davies (Chief Executive)
Grace Wade (Student Governor) (Item 2 only)
Richard Wilson

### IN ATTENDANCE

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

### ITEM 1A: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- Liz Chatman (Staff Governor) – now on maternity leave.

### 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 26 March 2026 were an accurate record of proceedings.

### ITEM 1D: MATTERS ARISING

- The following actions were identified in the minutes of the meeting held on 26 March 2026:
  - Report to the next meeting on the value-added data analysis. **Action complete**. Item 3 provides an update on 'value added' data.

### ITEM 2: STUDENT GOVERNOR REPORT

- The election for the Student Governor for 2026/27 had got under way, although so far only just over 200 votes had been cast and the closing date had been extended. A workshop would be created next year to help students understand the democratic process and encourage support for student governor elections. This would cover the

importance of advocacy, participation in change and critical thinking. A draft 'contract' had been created for student ambassadors and reps.

- The Committee congratulated the student governor on having been shortlisted for the UNLOC Student Governor of the Year award.

- Student rep visits had gathered feedback from students at each campus; governors noted that work experience skills were being planned into the first 8 weeks of the academic year.

**Question**: *How had student feedback about IT support been addressed by the IT team?* There had been action to improve wifi access on the Hitchin campus, and students had asked for more IT support during student induction and Freshers Far events. Tutors would help identify and address technical knowledge gaps and IT technicians would be in attendance in Student Services at specified times.

**Question**: *How had Mental Health Awareness week gone?* It had been very successful, with mindfulness activities and good discussions with learners.

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

**Grace Wade apologised** but had to leave the meeting for another appointment.

## ITEM 3: SPOTLIGHT – INTRODUCTION OF QUALITY FOCUS AREAS AND THE FIRST REPORT ON VALUE-ADDED

- Kerry Pritchett reported on how the introduction of Quality Focus Area (QFA) approach was expected to further drive quality improvement. The structure of the QFA approach was drawn from the inspection framework set out in the Operating Guide for Inspectors and the Further Education and Skills Inspection Toolkit (Ofsted, 2025). In this, broader inspection focus areas replace the previous 'deep dive' methodology to cover different aspects within provision types. The QFA approach includes case sampling, learning walks, visits to teaching and learning environments, and a review of learner work and skills. In effect, they take the form of internal 'inspections' carried out by members of curriculum teams, and led by an SMT member and a member of the quality team.

- Three QFA processes have been completed so far. The first looked at Value Added and incorporated analysis of ALPS data, concluding that most curriculum areas were "either in the black or the red [both being good]. However, further work is needed to ensure students in different inclusion categories such as gender, prior attainment, and LLDD are supported to achieve in line with their peers. Further work is also needed on the recording and analysis of in-year progress against target grades to better support curriculum managers and teachers to analyse learner progress and implement strategies to support as a result."

- This report had nine key learning points, several of which concerned the greater use of data to inform target setting for learners, understanding gaps in learning and identifying support strategies, and understanding prior attainment.

**Question**: *If the QFA mirrored the Ofsted approach, would that look across curriculum areas?* Yes.

**Question**: Would the judgements reached also mirror Ofsted practice? Reports were intended to provide assurance against Ofsted themes and also to help staff prepare for the

new inspection regime. A high level summary of strengths and areas for improvement (AFis) had already begun to emerge and been shared with curriculum managers.

**Question**: *Would Ofsted identify themes they wished to explore in advance?* Plans for the first two days of any inspection would be derived from evidence such as the college's self-assessment review (SAR) report, and thereafter the inspection would consider what it had found so far.

**Question**: *Where new AFIs had been identified, would action plans be created immediately rather than awaiting the new year?* Such AFIs had emerged as a result of pilot programmes in late spring, which meant that there had been little time to develop action plans yet. However, it would be important to ensure that lessons were widely shared and actions put in place quickly.

**Question**: *What did the reference to feedback to learners mean?* Pearson had a strict regulation about giving feedback to learners in summative assessments. Feedback could not 'lead' a student into achieving a higher grade. This could sometimes create challenges as student made re-submissions. Other awarding bodies were slightly less strict in this area which made the position more complex. The team was thinking about how to manage this and balance staff workload.

**Question**: *What conclusions could be drawn from the ALPs data?* Most areas were doing well and were achieving outcomes in line with or higher than similar cohorts nationally.

**Question**: *Would the committee see the next QFA reports?* Yes, as soon as these had been completed.

- Governors welcomed the new approach which was supporting staff to understand HOW students were making progress and to identify which students were NOT making progress so that interventions could be targeted appropriately. Department heads were encouraged to consider how to improve ALPs scores and in some cases appeared likely to have done so this year, in some cases, significantly so. One of our courses was close to a score of 2 – which was genuinely excellent and sector leading.

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

## ITEM 4: NHC PERFORMANCE UPDATE

- Governors were pleased to see the positive picture shown by the report, with all curriculum areas forecasting achievement rates above 90% and a reasonable prospect of achieving the overall target of 93.6% (the forecast was slightly below this at 92.2%). The forecast nevertheless represented an improvement against 2024/25. Attendance remained below the (aspirational) target of 90%, and more effort would need to be focused on this at an earlier stage of the academic year to attempt to create really good study habits in the autumn term. The retention rate, however, was excellent. There was also a very strong enrichment programme.

- The report showed that students with additional needs performed as well as or better than other categories of learner, which provided good evidence of inclusive practice. The proportion of students needing Exam Access Arrangements (EAAs) continued to grow. Maths and English revision sessions over Easter had been well-attended.

- For the rest of the academic year, the focus would be on achieving a larger progression target of 1,160 students; delivering targeted forecast achievement rates of 93%+; preparing for GCSE exams ensuring all access arrangement were in

place; and monitoring value-added metrics to ensure higher levels of learner attainment were achieved.

**Question**: *How was the road safety video reaching such a wide audience?* It was being shared with local schools.

**Question**: *What was the impact of the continuing growth in EAAs?* The process for identifying and managing these had been much better this year, including providing routes for students to self-refer by using a QR code. This meant that issues were identified earlier, making them easier to manage. Data had also been added to ProSolution, which made it mare accessible to staff. The main constraint was a physical one; finding enough rooms within the campuses to accommodate learners needing this kind of adjustment.

**Question**: *Were there any concerns about the college's ability to close gaps where these existed this year? T*eams had been encouraged to set ambitious and aspirational targets, and it was important that governors should keep that in mind. The overarching aim had been to encourage departments to see what more they could do rather than settling for what had been achieved before. Teams were confident of closing most of the gaps but a lot of hard work was needed. It was also fair to note that student mental health and other issues had had an impact this year, also affecting attendance. Even if some of the aspirational targets were not met, overall, it was expected that the outcomes would show an improvement against 2024/25 of two or three percentage points.

**Question**: *Had the summer series of GCSE Maths and English exams begun?* Yes, these were under way.

**Question**: *How had they gone so far?* All had gone very smoothly; the Exams team had done a great job.

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

## ITEM 5: HART L&D PERFORMANCE UPDATE

- Governors discussed another positive report overall with KPI data for apprenticeships likely to be at or above national benchmarks. Most achievement rates on Adult online programmes were better than last year although at the end of March, there were a small number of lower forecasts – which it was hoped could be addressed by the year end. Employability performance was strong and engagement with JobCentre Plus continued to develop; Hart L&D was now the provider of choice in Hemel Hempstead, for example. It was particularly notable that while the national job entry rate from SWAP programmes was 13%, Hart L&D was achieving 64% and aimed to increase that to 79%.

- Professional programme outcomes were at or ahead of target with one exception (L2 AAT) where some students had been withdrawn because of lack of engagement. The Youth Hub work in Stevenage was going well. Good feedback had been received in respect of student experience and an independent audit of Gas provision had been successful.

- Sub-contractor monitoring had continued successfully.

- Governors congratulated the team upon a strong performance and welcomed the robust quality assurance approach taken with sub-contractors.

**Question**: *How could sub-contractors access the team's provision for staff and organisational development?* It was certainly harder to get sub-contractors on site to staff development days – although Emil Dale Academy staff were attending the NHC staff development day in June. The team had also organised 'sharing good practice' events and was scrutinising what the sub-contractors had organised themselves. The intention was to standardise QA processes across all sub-contractors. Governors noted that there would be a presentation at the autumn meeting about the work with the Emil Dale Academy.

**Action**: Add Emil Dale Academy presentation to 2026/27 agenda plan.

**Question**: *What would the Employer Excellence Framework look like?* It was early days. The new Quality Focus Area (QFA) work had been able to identify good working with employers, but teams were less good at documenting their interactions and demonstrating impact. This was what the framework was intended to address. From a quality point of view, it would define our perception of excellence in this activity and provide a structure for teams to work towards.

**Question**: *Given everything else the team was doing, was there enough capacity to support this major piece of work?* The view was that the framework was about recording rather than doing and was supported by some existing reporting. It would require a mindset and process change but not necessarily an undue amount of additional work.

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

## ITEM 6: QUALITY DEVELOPMENT PLAN UPDATE

- Keith Turner reported that feedback report from the college's successful application for College of Sanctuary status had just been received. This stated that NHC was a strong college with a clear commitment to inclusion. The plans set out in the bid were transformative and applied well beyond the ESOL provision. They outlined an ambitious practice supported by productive partnerships. The college showed clear strengths in learner-centred support and outstanding and respectful teaching. A goal should be to strengthen progression from ESOL into main programmes. The college's improvement and inclusion strategies should complement and drive each other. Next year would likely focus on embedding and identifying impact.

**Question**: *Would all the actions scheduled for this year be completed on time?* Progress had been affected by a recent major piece of work prompted by whistleblowing disclosures, but delays beyond the early autumn were not anticipated. The self-assessment review (SAR) report would highlight next year's plans.

**Question**: *What might change in curriculum planning as a result of this?* The curriculum planning day in June would have four areas of focus: (a) giving staff time to collaborate with colleagues across the college in planning; (b) ensuring that cultural capital was included in schemes of learning; (c) achieving three or four units to be co-designed with employers; and (d) teams to identify how action research new practice would be embedded in delivery.

**Question**: *How would the new student profiles support staff?* The key profile pages in ProMonitor had been revamped to ensure key personal data (such as inclusion categories) was visible. Usability had also been improved. In addition, tech leads had designed a bot to aid tutors developing their practice in creating teaching tailored to individual students. This was a teaching aid to support tutor development rather than an application for use with students, however. It was expected that this would improve consistency in target-setting.

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

## ITEM 7: QUALITY AND CURRICULUM RISK REGISTER

- Since the previous review, one risk (Risk 83 related to changes in eligibility arrangements to support from the apprenticeship levy) had been added. These changes had a future impact on the apprenticeship offer, and discussions with the main affected clients (Lloyds Banking Group, Royal Berkshire Hospital Trust and John Lewis Partnership) were ongoing to explore alternative options.

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

## ITEM 8: 2026/27 PROPOSED MEETING CALENDAR AND AGENDA OUTLINE

- Governors reviewed and approved the proposed calendar of meetings and outline agenda schedule for 2026/27. The plan was substantially the same as in 2025/26.

- **The Quality & Curriculum Committee approved** the proposed calendar of meetings for 2026/27.

## ITEM 9: ANY OTHER BUSINESS

*Royal Visit*

- Governors were delighted to hear that Sophie, Duchess of Edinburgh, had visited the STEM Centre as part of a recent visit to Airbus in Stevenage. As well as showcasing the great work done by the STEM Centre with local schools, this was another positive point in connection with NHC's relationship with Stevenage Borough Council.

*BBC documentary, 'Natalie Cassidy: Caring Together'*

- Governors were also delighted to hear about the start of this documentary which would begin airing on 25 May 2026. The programme followed the actor through her Health and Social Care qualification at the college. Special thanks were due to the tutors involved (Cheryl Hall and Anna Copper) and Natalie's fellow students, and to Heather Almond and Jo Balharrie from Marketing who had supported the programme makers from the initial contact.

- As well as following Natalie Cassidy's progress and personal story, the programme had showed how the college and workplaces interacted and made the other students and their family stories part of the programme. Governors were delighted with the positive national publicity this had brought to the college.

## ITEM 10: DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- Thursday 16 July 2026, 18.00, at the Stevenage campus.

## ACTION LOG

| Date | Item | What | Who | When |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 21/05/26 | 5. | Add Emil Dale Academy presentation to 2026/27 agenda plan. | Robert Dale | 31/07/26 |