

## Minutes of the Learning & Quality Committee Meeting held at 2pm on 07 June 2022

Present: Prue Amner (chair), Tim Jackson, Samantha Miller (staff governor) & Mike Stoneman

Apologies: Mark Cooper, Ashley Cullen & Kit Peet (student governor)

In Attendance: Tess Cole VP Foundation & Adult Learning  
Frances Mullen VP Student Services  
Matt Phelps Deputy Principal/Deputy CEO  
Emily Pountney VP Academic & Linked Vocational Learning  
Katy Quinn Principal & CEO  
Paola Schweitzer Director of Governance  
Sarah Warren VP Vocational Learning  
Maria Vetrone COO (Minute 043)

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## Minutes

### 1 – Standing Items

**027 Attendance and Participation**

Prue welcomed Katy to her first Committee meeting as Principal/CEO and welcomed the Vice-Principals. Mark Cooper, Ashley Cullen and Kit Peet sent their apologies.

**028 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**029 Minutes**

Except for Frances Mullen's incorrect title, the Minutes of the Learning & Quality Committee Meeting held on 22 February 2022 were **Agreed** as a true record.

**030 Matters Arising**

Governors noted all matters arising had either been completed, were on today's agenda or were due for completion in the autumn term.

Since the last meeting, several policies had been agreed by Corporation by written resolution. Ordinarily they would be reviewed by the Committee prior to Corporation approval but this had not been possible. The policies were *Assessment and Marking, Careers, Information and Advice Guidance, Internal Quality Assurance, Admissions, Learner Support, Positive Behaviour, Teaching, Learning and Assessment and Comments, Compliments and Complaints*. They would be operational from 01 August 2022.

**031 Ofsted Monitoring Visit**

Matt confirmed that Ofsted had not yet carried out a monitoring visit and it was possible it would not take place until the autumn term. A full inspection was still likely in autumn 2023 or spring 2024. The College was fully prepared and governors would receive the latest College position statement as and when necessary.

## **032 Balanced Scorecard/Performance Data including Destinations Report**

Matt presented the balanced scorecard (paper 147/22/L&Q) setting out progress against the College's 2021/22 performance targets as approved by Corporation.

Matt drew governors' attention to the scorecard's key points:

- 16-18 and Adult classroom-based learning funding targets were expected to be met.
- There was likely to be a small underspend on Apprenticeships, reflecting a small undershoot against the new starts target and the apprentices out of funding recovery plan. The situation would continue to be closely managed.
- Full cost and other income lines were expected to undershoot by a small amount due to the cancellation of some short courses.
- Staff costs as a percentage of income needed to be monitored carefully as pay and non-pay costs were rising significantly.
- Attendance had shown some recent improvement although it was too late in the year to significantly improve the overall attendance percentage (there would be an impact in 2022/23).
- 16-18 and Adult achievement rates were forecast to be around national average for all levels at the end of the year, with Level 3 continuing to present the most significant challenge.
- The achievement rate for Apprenticeships was forecast to be 61%. This was a decrease of 3.7% from last year but significantly higher than the 2020/21 national average (52%).
- Adult retention rates remained above target at every level.
- The 16-18 retention rate for Level 1 and below exceeded the target but performance at Level 2 and 3 was below the target.
- Headcount figures had been adjusted for the early part of the year following identification of a reporting error.
- Staff turnover was currently above the benchmark. Whilst this was not uncommon in organisations that had experienced significant organisational change, the new hire turnover figure was concerning. The People Team were working to understand the reasons to inform actions to reduce turnover.
- Staff absence was tracking broadly in line with the expected annual average. However, these figures did not include any staff sickness absence related to Covid-19 and it was possible there might be an upward trend in the average number of sickness days per person.

Mike asked for further information on apprenticeships achievement. Matt stated there were two areas of concern: construction and hairdressing. Poor achievement in construction was due to Covid and the transition from frameworks to standards meaning apprentices were not well prepared for assessment. Poor achievement in hairdressing related to the subcontractor, HaHa, and concerned approximately 80 apprentices, all of whom would be taught out by the end of 2021/22. Tim noted much work remained but congratulated colleagues on significant progress to date. In response to a question concerning the high staff turnover of new starters, Matt

stated that it appeared to be due to a poor induction process and/or insufficient support in the early months. A People Strategy was being drafted to address this. The high turnover concerned both teaching and support staff but was higher for the latter.

Governors **Noted** progress against the targets in the balanced scorecard.

### **033 Learner Voice Update & Student Union**

Frances presented paper 148/22/L&Q summarising learner voice feedback.

In summary:

- Students felt well supported with their studies
- A high proportion of students who took part in the Math & English survey felt that the teaching was good, particularly with GCSE programmes
- Further investigation was required whether students either know about Maths/English revision sessions or they don't want to attend them
- Students' awareness of the safeguarding team and where to find them, was low. This was being addressed as a matter of urgency
- Issues identified at course rep meetings were responded to quickly and updates provided back to students at future meetings
- A more detailed analysis of Learner Views activities during 2021/22 and distance travelled would be provided at the Committee's next meeting.

Frances noted that cross-College data concerning safeguarding, health and wellbeing information had been captured and there was evidence of impact. There was a brief discussion about behaviour, with Frances noting that post-Covid learners were reporting a higher number of safeguarding issues (this was reflected across the sector) meaning the Code of Behaviour was increasingly important in setting the right tone from day one at the College. Prue noted that there had been limited governor/learner voice interaction during the pandemic and encouraged governors to develop this interaction, particularly through the link governor programme.

Mike thanked Frances for the helpful report and asked how learner voice activity would differ in 2022/23. Emily stated that the College would continue to use a variety of different ways to collect learner feedback and would develop a single cross-College approach. The College was using standard questionnaires to enable comparison against sector benchmarks. In response to a question, Frances confirmed that learner feedback was fed into the SAR and QIP areas as appropriate.

Finally Frances stated that the Student Union, which had existed in both legacy colleges, was being re-established across the whole College. In July Paola would ask Corporation to reconsider the previous agreement that one student governor be elected from each of the former colleges, so that there could be cross-College elections for the Student Union President and second student governor in 2022/23.

Governors **Noted** the Learning Voice & Student Union Update.

**Minute 034 was confidential**

### **035 Quality Monitoring**

Matt presented paper 151/22/L&Q providing an update on quality monitoring.

The Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) 2021/22 identified key areas for improvement within the College. Progress made since term 2 was reasonable, with many headline areas of improvement moving from red to amber RAG rating. However, despite the clear intent and strong implementation of several key actions, it was too early to demonstrate impact. Instead, this would be evident at the end of the academic year and/or at the end of 2022/23 term 1. This state of play was reflected in the current position statement that the College was making reasonable progress against each area for improvement highlighted in the legacy college Ofsted reports and wider post-merger actions. The strategy remained to secure a *reasonable progress* judgement during the imminent monitoring visit and a *Good* judgement during full inspection. Matt stressed that improved student support including tutorials were key to driving attendance and retention. Prue agreed, noting the importance of initial advice to students when they first came to College and asked how this was managed. Emily stated that the College was continuing with the *Flying Start* programme to support students in the next step on their learning journey including moving up to College and beyond. The programme also enabled the College to make sure the right students were on the right course. Tim noted the increased focus on careers with the FE sector, particularly the Board's responsibilities. Frances outlined some of the ways the careers strategy ensured students were on the right course including taster days, the application and interview process and the *swop not drop* initiative and highlighted the benefits of benchmarking with similar colleges.

Governors **Noted** progress against the actions identified in the QIP.

### 036 Teaching, Learning & Assessment Update

Emily presented paper 152/22/L&Q providing a review of activity undertaken to monitor and improve the quality of teaching, learning & assessment.

There was a good understanding of teaching, learning and assessment (TLA) across the College and overall the quality of TLA was good, however there were some significant areas requiring improvement. Emily noted that there was a variety of processes for monitoring improvement and so the focus was to create a single, effective and coherent TLA mechanism. Sharing good practice was key. In summary:

- There was a varied and regular programme of staff development (CPD) but its impact needed to be assessed to ensure it was more focused and effective.
- The Teaching Excellence team and Learning Champions were experienced practitioners but a more robust approach to measuring impact needed to be developed to ensure long term improvement and better student outcomes.
- Areas of focus for Highbury campuses were Maths & English and reviewing assessment feedback. Intervention in these areas was underway.
- There had been a positive impact to the focus on digital learning at Tangier Road leading to improved engagement and outcomes. A new digital strategy was being developed for the whole College.
- External Quality Review was a peer review scheme that had been used at Tangier Road to good effect and would be rolled out across the wider College.

Mike thanked Emily for the helpful report and asked what proportion of teachers were currently not good enough. Matt stated all College sites had work to do as the quality of teaching was mixed, with Tangier Road campus teaching good or better and Highbury campuses' teaching good, with some areas requiring improvement.

Governors **Noted** the TLA update and the proposal to align the processes for monitoring and improving TLA.

### **037 Student Wellbeing & Safeguarding Report**

Frances presented paper 153/22/L&Q providing an update on student wellbeing and safeguarding activity carried out since the last meeting.

The report comprised minutes from the College's Safeguarding & Wellbeing Board meeting held in May 2022 and included trends within the College, including the higher incidences of student harassment/bullying, self-harm and suicidal thoughts. The report also summarised the outcome of the external safeguarding audit carried out in March highlighting positive areas, areas requiring improvement and the College's resulting actions. Finally, there was a health and wellbeing report outlining current provision to students and priorities for 2022/23 (including a health and wellbeing strategy). Frances noted that from October/November 2022 the new Management Information System (MIS) would have a tutor/pastoral module meaning that there would be a single safeguarding referral process. In response to a question, Frances confirmed that all safeguarding staff were familiar with MASH and the subject was covered at the last All Staff training day. She confirmed that the College was complying with the 12 standards for effective early intervention and safeguarding practice. Another governor shared his positive experience of de-escalation training for staff. Finally, Prue asked if there were enough counsellors as student feedback in the autumn term reported there weren't enough. Frances confirmed there were now six counsellors as well as additional volunteers.

Governors **Noted** progress made with safeguarding as well as student health and wellbeing arrangements at the College and the actions in place to strengthen these.

### **038 Careers Report**

Frances presented paper 155/22/L&Q providing an update on the work of the Careers Teams and progress against the Gatsby Benchmarks within the College.

The report highlighted the College's careers activities during the year, reviewed the Gatsby Benchmarks (linked to the Quality Improvement Plan) and updated governors on the developing Careers Strategy following Board agreement to the Careers Education, Information and Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) policy.

Gatsby was a non-statutory framework to support the development of a careers programme for colleges to meet their legal requirement to provide independent careers guidance to students up to 18 years (25 years with an Education, Health and Care Plan). Prior to merger, each college had achieved 100% on six of the eight benchmarks. Progress was being made to achieve 100% on all eight benchmarks, with latest reports showing achievement in one additional benchmark was likely. Tim noted the governing body's new responsibility concerning careers guidance as well

as the importance of the local context. Katy noted that careers advice/guidance needed to include apprenticeships. Paola stated that she would raise the Committee's request to nominate a careers link governor for 2022/23.

Governors **Noted** the Careers Report and recommended that a governor be appointed a careers link governor to support the College's legal requirements in this area and the development of a Careers Strategy.

### 039 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Update

Frances presented paper 154/22/L&Q setting out the College's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy as well as retention rate equality and diversity data.

The strategy set out the College's EDI principles as well as its duties under the Public Sector Equality Duty and how impact would be measured. It was a proactive strategy that sought to ensure EDI was embedded in the College. Key elements were:

- The Tangier Road campus, predominantly delivering Level 3 A Level provision for 16- 18 year old students, had a three year declining trend in the retention of those claiming a bursary and who resided in a household based in an area of deprivation.
- The retention rate for 16-18 year old Tangier Road students who declared a learning difficulty/disability was 2.8% lower than those who do not.
- The retention rate for 16-18 year old students claiming a bursary, residing in a household based in an area of deprivation and who declared a learning difficulty/disability studying at the Highbury campus, North Harbour and Arundel Centre had improved from 2020/21 and was tracking broadly in line with those students who were not claiming a bursary, did not live in an area of deprivation and had not declared a learning difficulty/disability.
- The Adult retention rate at the Highbury campuses was tracking in line with the final outturn in 2021/22.
- The Adult retention rate at Tangier Road campus was 6.3% higher than the 2021/22 outturn year to date.
- BAME students were being retained well, 1.7% higher than non BAME students year to date.
- There was a 1.4% year to date retention gap between male and female students at Tangier Road campus (in favour of male students). Students who were in receipt of an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) or were classified as High Needs Students (HNS) based at all campuses were retaining better than their peers who were not claiming an EHCP or were classified as HNS.

EDI data was scrutinised on a monthly basis and intervention strategies were being put in place at course and department level to narrow achievement gaps this year and better support students in 2022/23. Prue noted the role of equality and diversity in teaching and learning, underlining the importance of supporting teachers in using a range of teaching styles. Frances confirmed this was picked up through the curriculum and tutorial programme. Prue then noted the importance of monitoring improvement progress against targets and Frances confirmed that targets for 2022/23 were being developed. Paola agreed to forward to Frances the diversity statement recently agreed by Search & Governance Committee that would be considered by Corporation on 21 July 2022, suggesting it could be referenced in the strategy.

Governors **Noted** the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and the retention trend data and actions being taken to address achievement gaps.

#### 040 Office for Students Registration

Matt gave a verbal update on the Highbury College Board decision to de-register with the Office for Students (OfS) and cease higher education (HE) provision. He noted the decision had been based on the financial viability of a small number of students and had the College not made this decision, it would probably have been asked to drop HE provision. However, the College was now in a different position, with a new Board, Senior Management Team (SMT) and focus. Matt noted that the HE partnership arrangement with the University of Portsmouth had not significantly progressed. There was a clear need to grow the College's income and HE provided an opportunity which the new leadership team believed merited further exploration. Any direct HE offer would need to address gaps in the local market and have a clear quality framework. Senior managers had agreed the importance of undertaking a review to ensure the College would be able to meet OfS requirements. Matt invited governors' views, stating that it would need to be a Board decision.

Tim noted that the case made to the Highbury College Board to de-register had been strong and was based on the quality and cost of its HE provision. He noted the OfS's onerous regulatory requirements but believed the context had changed and direct HE provision was an opportunity worth pursuing if the College was able to meet these requirements. Matt noted that it might be harder to re-register with the OfS in the future, whereas stopping the de-registering process now and carrying out a more detailed exploration of direct HE provision would not exclude de-registering at a later point if it was not considered to be viable. Katy stated that she would shortly speak with the OfS and the University about HE provision. There was a broad consensus that exploring direct HE provision was appropriate and the Board would consider the matter in due course.

#### 041 Complaints & Accolades Annual Report

Frances presented paper 156/22/L&Q providing an update of complaints and accolades received since September 2021 to date.

The number of complaints received appeared low as issues raised were usually resolved informally and not recorded. A system to record informal complaints was currently being developed. Complaints about teaching/staffing and first aid were the highest, although the latter were not upheld. All accolades concerned the positive experience of students from teachers and learning support staff as well as external stakeholders. Frances confirmed that a single *Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy* had been agreed and a single process was being set up to ensure all formal and informal complaints were recorded in one place. In response to a query, Frances stated that informal was used to refer to how a complaint was raised ie through a teacher and that all complaints were treated equally. Governors **Noted** the Complaints & Accolades Annual Report.

#### 042 Review of Terms of Reference 2021/22 & Business Plan 2022/23

Paola presented paper 157/22/L&Q setting out the annual review of performance against the Committee's terms of reference and the 2022/23 business plan.

Governors **Noted** the Committee's performance against its Terms of Reference in 2021/22 and **Agreed** the Committee's 2022/23 Business Plan.

#### **043 Strategic Risk Register**

Maria joined the meeting to present paper 158/22/L&Q setting out the quality and learning risks from the strategic risk register.

Maria stated that there were 25 risks on the strategic risk register, six of which related to curriculum, quality/teaching, learning and assessment. Of these risks, risks 11, 19 and 25 were significant, two were high and one was acceptable:

- Risk 11: Failure to achieve Ofsted 'good' or better teaching, learning and assessment in FE provision, may lead to poor student retention and success, reduced student recruitment, reduced funding and damage to reputation.
- Risk 19: Failure of the curriculum offer to meet the needs of regulatory bodies, learners and employers, and in an increasingly competitive market, may lead to low achievement and success rates, failure to achieve success in inspection, failure to achieve student recruitment targets, significant reductions in funding, and damage to reputation.
- Risk 25: Failure to properly manage Apprenticeships provision and pass RoATP process, including Assessor caseloads and practice, may lead to poor quality, poor Ofsted outcomes, reputational damage, lost opportunity to grow provision, and loss of funding for the College.

In response to a question, Maria stated that an updated version of the full risk register, including mitigating actions, would shortly be considered by Audit Committee and then Corporation (it was a standing item on both agendas). Tim wondered if, based on what the Committee had heard regarding apprenticeship performance, the risk profile could be reduced. Maria noted that this had been discussed by SMT recently and it was likely changes would be made.

Governors **Noted** the curriculum and quality/teaching, learning and assessment risks on the strategic risk register.

Maria and Samantha left the meeting.

**Minute 044 was confidential.**

The meeting ended at 4.40pm.