

Curriculum and Student Matters Committee

Tue 27 February 2024, 17:00 - 19:00

MS Teams



Attendees

Present: Andrea Ferguson (Independent Governor - Chair), Ann Harrison (Independent Governor), Steven Tomlinson (Independent Governor), Chris Fletcher (Independent Governor), Anna Dawe (Principal), Rebecca Turley (Staff Governor), Jennifer Connor (Staff Governor), Aston Aldred (Student Governor), Emilie Hoyland (Student Governor)

In attendance: Joanne Platt (Director of Governance), Anne-Marie Francis (Vice Principal - Curriculum), Louise Brown (Vice Principal - Corporate Services), Dave Harrison (Vice Principal - Data and Funding), David Wilson (Head of Department) for Item 4, Shirley Collier (External Board Reviewer) as an observer.

The Director of Governance confirmed that the meeting was quorate.

The Chair welcomed Chris Fletcher and Shirley Collier to the meeting and introductions were made.

Meeting minutes

1. Apologies for absence

CSM-24-02-01

Apologies for absence had been received from Jenny Bullen and Susan Snape.

2. Declarations of Interest

CSM-24-02-02

There were no declarations of interests.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising

CSM-24-02-03

The Committee reviewed the minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2023 and agreed that they are an accurate record of the meeting. There are no actions outstanding. The Committee also noted an update on a previous action in relation to the diversity of students on certain courses, noting that this data is now included in all relevant KPI dashboards, to enable Governors to monitor this on an ongoing basis.

Resolved: The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2023 for signature by the Chair.

Platt, Joanne
10/06/2024 10:15:18



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The Committee received a presentation on Engineering, noting that it focused on areas for improvement (AFIs) as highlighted in the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).

It was noted that provision ranged from Level 1 to Level 5 programmes both full and part time and including apprenticeships, and included Automotive Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and Civil Engineering. There are also bespoke programmes including food manufacturing and upskilling programmes available. It was noted that there are many strengths including excellent destination data, outstanding facilities, industry experienced tutors, which enables teaching to react to industry needs and use industry to develop learners, and there are good links to professional associations, such as the Royal Academy of Engineers and the Worldskills Centre of Excellence. There is also a positive culture of excellence and there has been significant growth in recent years. It was noted that this year has seen improvements in Automotive attendance and that exam support sessions is rising grade profiles. There has also been investment in new innovations and staffing and new courses to meet local needs.

The Committee noted that the Department has two inter-related visions - to break through perceived glass ceilings to make education the tool to inspire engineering students to achieve greatness in their chosen fields and for the College to be the aspirational destination for all Engineering training requirements across not only the Borough but to be used as the benchmark of quality on a national scale.

Governors discussed the approach taken to prepare students for exams, which includes group sessions and 1-1 drop in sessions and the introduction of mock examinations.

Governors also discussed the challenges in recruiting and retaining good staff and the approaches taken by the College to address this and also noted the potential future risk of losing staff to Higher Education institutions where pay is higher.

It was noted that staff are being upskilled to ensure they are up to date with developments, and in particular in relation to EV Vehicle maintenance where there is a current need for this in relation to general EV maintenance whilst also having due regard to future alternative power such as hydrogen.

Governors asked where the Department expected to be at the next College SAR and were pleased to note that this is expected to be a Grade 2.

The Committee thanked the Head of Department for his honest presentation and discussion of the challenges faced by the Department.

The Committee noted the presentation.

Jennifer Connor joined the meeting at 5.15pm.

5. Curriculum Reports and KPI Dashboards

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The Committee considered a report providing a summary of the start of year activity for 16-18 programmes together with KPI data for Term 1 of 2023-24. It was noted that there has been significant growth in 16-18 learners and this includes increased numbers of progressing learners which was a key action identified for improvement the previous year. Retention is strong and ahead of the same point last year and this will map to overall achievement and is being closely monitored to ensure learners remain on programme and achieve above their potential wherever possible. Attendance continues to underperform and is below target, with a range of interventions, discussed with Governors in the meeting being in place to motivate learners to attend, including Right Start, Right Track checks, tracking and 1-1 support for students with low attendance and class rewards and trips for attendance and achievement. Entry / Level 1 learners continue to have the lowest attendance and these learners are often those presenting with complex needs and challenging home lives. In response to questions from Governors, it was confirmed that attendance in Maths and English is the main concern and is impacting on overall attendance, as attendance at L3 and A-Level is on or above target.

The Committee noted that GCSE resit results saw 238 students achieve a grade 4 or above in either Maths or English including seven learners on the T- Level resit pilot.

It was agreed that worsening attendance, and in particular in Maths and English, but corresponding strong retention will be drawn to the attention of the Governing Board in the Committee Chair's report to the Board in March.

The Committee noted the report.

5.2. Adult Provision and Dashboard

The Committee reviewed the Adults report and KPI dashboard, noting that there has been a further increase in the number of enrolments to adult programmes – currently a 17.7% growth compared to the same time last year, which is largely attributed to a growth in ESOL and Entry and Level 1 programmes.

It was noted that overall adult attendance is currently below target, due largely to adult discrete programmes at all levels. Strategies to address attendance have been in place since last term and have seen some improvement.

The Committee noted that retention of adults is good and currently above target at all levels at headline, however there is close scrutiny of poor attendance that presents a risk to future retention.

It was also noted that there continues to be a significant amount of curriculum development of adult programmes to meet the needs identified in the LSIP.

The Committee noted the report.

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5.3. Apprenticeship Provision and Dashboard

CSM-24-02-07

The Committee reviewed the Apprenticeship report and KPI dashboard, noting that enrolment is strong with a 13% increase compared to the same time last year. Enrolment of 16-18 is good and there has been a growth in the number of students progressing to apprenticeships through targeted activity.

The Committee noted that apprentice attendance in classroom sessions has dipped and while the majority of apprentices' attendance at higher level is strong, Levels 2 and 3 headline attendance is impacted by a small number of programmes that are recording far lower than normal attendance rates.

It was noted that all ESFA performance measures are on target to be achieved, although the number of learners past their planned end date continues to be a potential risk area due to the size of the College's provision.

The Committee noted that investment in a newly developed Professional and Personal Development programme for Apprentices is ongoing.

Governors noted a lot of good work in relation to apprentices and it was also noted that the Teaching and Learning Academy is very active across the College and in the wider GM arena as the lead in the LSIF Education and Workforce Project. Internally the Academy is leading on new CPD provision through membership of the Supply Chain Sustainability School and the College's status as a World Skills Centre of Excellence. Governors asked for further detail about the Supply Chain Sustainability School, which was provided in the meeting.

Governors also discussed a dip in student satisfaction for day release apprentices, noting that this related to a specific cohort of older students and was being addressed.

The Committee noted the report.

5.4. HE Provision and Dashboard

CSM-24-02-08

The Committee reviewed the HE report and KPI dashboard, noting that retention is high and currently above target at 93.8%. As with 16-18 and adults, attendance is below target at 90.4%, and it was noted that this is adversely impacted by small cohort sizes but remains under close scrutiny.

The Committee noted that February is early in the reporting structure for HE, so there is little on which to report at this point in time. However, no cohort is currently a cause for concern and, as retention is high, the College anticipates positive outcomes across HE provision.

The Committee noted the report.

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The Committee received a presentation on curriculum reform, showing reform that is in progress now and future reform in relation to the proposed Advanced British Standard (ABS) and its impact on T Levels and A Levels, to be delivered over the next ten-years, which may be impacted by a change of Government. It was noted that consultation is underway in relation to the overarching aims and principles of the ABS, the framework and qualifications, the proposal for 'English and Maths for all', assessment and grading and making it work (the change process). The College will be responding to the consultation, which closes on 20 March.

The Committee was advised on the impact of the L2 and L3 reforms that are already happening on its current and planned T-Level offer and how the current T-Level Maths and English pilot is positively impacting on students to minimise the potential wider impact of the reforms, including de-funding, particularly in relation to vocational programmes.

The Committee also noted the areas where potential alternative academic qualifications (AAQs) would be considered for funding to reduce the impact of de-funded vocational qualifications. Most current L3 qualifications will be replaced by AAQs and Technical Occupational Qualifications (TOQs) and English and Maths is now crucial to progression from Level 1/2 to Level 3 (T-Levels) in the future, which will impact particularly on students with SEND (currently around 25% 16 to 18 year old's nationally). It was noted that 60% of 16 to 18-year-olds on current Level 3 VTQs start at 17 or 18, and don't join college with 5+ GCSEs including English and Maths so Level 2 progression routes are vital in the College's planning.

The Committee considered the impact of the reforms on retention, noting that current Level 3 VTQs are often 1+1 or one-year programmes, whereas T-Levels and AAQs will be 2-year programmes. In terms of adults, it was noted that current qualifications are not defunded for adults, but T-levels are not available to adults and the College currently has 284 adults infilling on 16-18 programmes (students who have turned 19). In terms of placements and assessment, it was also noted that T-Levels require greater teaching / staff time and require face to face placements at scale which must be completed in full to secure achievement.

In terms of L2 reforms, it was noted that L2 qualifications should prepare students for further study or training at L3 where possible, including apprenticeships and will also lead directly to employment in some occupational routes.

The Committee noted the actions the College is taking in response to the reforms, including English and Maths resits alongside T-Level, an increased focus on developing industry placements at scale and quality, CSCS card attached to Level 2 Construction qualifications (akin to a licence to practice), licence to practice attached to Level 2 Health and Social care qualifications, a review of AAQ specifications and A-Level pathways, for potential expansion, rolling out a pilot in technical education in schools and T-Level roll out continuing where the offer is right and meets student need.

The Committee noted that further updates will be provided as the reforms develop and thanked the VP Curriculum for her helpful presentation and in particular the plans to address defunded qualifications. Governors also commented that the plans for the Advanced British Standard will push students to make career choices earlier and make it more difficult to change those choices later.

The Committee noted the update.

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The Committee considered a report on student and employer feedback, noting that in relation to students, the College gathers feedback from a range of sources including focus groups, meetings and student surveys and 'You Said, We Did' sessions taking place to provide feedback to students. The SPOC (Student Perception of Employer) 1 survey for apprentices was finalised after the last report to the committee in November 2023 and the Committee noted that the vast majority of questions received high satisfaction rates.

A mid-year survey has replaced Curriculum Review surveys and although these are not yet finalised in terms of responses, there are emerging issues that can start to be addressed. The emerging trends for Study Programme provision and discrete Adult provision is so far positive with an improvement in the majority of headline ratings relating to overall satisfaction, course organisation and the quality of teaching and learning. New questions have been added to the survey this year including responses in relation to FREDIE Values which were introduced this year and whilst the results are lower, this is a new initiative in the early stages of development.

In terms of employer feedback, the internal survey to gather this data is not yet available. However, it was noted that employer feedback on the external gov.uk website remains relatively unchanged this year with only one additional employer responding since November 2023.

The Committee noted that satisfaction data from apprentices during their induction (SPOC 1) showed a small number of responses below 90%, which, upon investigation showed this related to a specific cohort of learners only, and actions to address concerns have been taken.

In terms of 16-18 programmes, classes starting on time remains a theme which may be exacerbated by the punctuality from a minority of students which has been seen during lesson observation. Maths and English satisfaction is also on a downward trend.

Day release apprenticeship interim results are showing lower headline satisfaction rates along with issues relating to the timeliness of feedback and awareness of progress on these day release elements of their apprenticeships. This is a repeated issue and the replacement of Smart Assessor with OneFile is a key strategy in addressing this issue with training taking place for curriculum staff. Governors asked for more information in relation to this and it was confirmed that OneFile is a much better solution, which includes data from enrolment throughout a student's time at College.

Governors asked if the introduction of the FREDIE values alongside the British Values would confuse students and it was confirmed that the British Values were broader, more civic in nature and aligned to the PREVENT agenda.

The Committee noted the report.

8. Strategic Chapters: Mid-year Update

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The Committee reviewed a report on progress towards achievement of the Quality Strategic Chapter, noting that many of the activities delivered or planned for the remainder of the year have been discussed under previous items at this meeting or previous meetings of the Committee.

In relation to innovative teaching practice and programme design, it was noted that further development to the Level 2 offer now includes Level 2 progression pathways including T-Level Foundation programmes into all pathways and that the revised entry criteria for Maths / English enrolling on T-Levels resulted in 12 learners re-sitting GCSE in November and eight of the students gained a Grade 4 or Grade 5. The four remaining students are now receiving one to one support via the Tutor Trust. In addition to Tutor Trust one to one support, the College is offering a rolling programme of small group support to Pagefield learners on their GCSE English resit. A very small sample of these learners took the exam in November and saw an increased pass rate of more than 50%.

The Teaching and Learning Academy coaches are working across construction and engineering with new and new to FE teachers to develop pedagogy and focused preparation for examination techniques and there has been further developments to embed the new Teaching and Learning Academy with a specific focus on vocational updating in engineering, construction and green technologies.

Governors discussed the number of students leaving their programmes early and it was confirmed that the numbers were in line with the average retention for the sector and that the College works closely with the Council's Engagement Team to ensure that students are supported and it was noted that Wigan's NEET figures are lower than the GM average.

Governors discussed the Entrepreneurship Programme, noting that this is intended to help students who want to set up their own business, and is supported by College Alumni who have gone on to start their own businesses.

The Committee noted the report.

8.2. Place and Productivity

The Committee reviewed a report on progress towards achievement of the Place and Productivity Strategic Chapter, noting that many of the activities delivered or planned for the remainder of the year have been discussed under previous items at this meeting or previous meetings of the Committee.

It was noted that the College has been successful in securing Local Skills Improvement Funding as part of a GM bid and is leading on projects in Engineering and Education and is a partner provider in projects in construction, health and social care and digital. The College has been successful, as part of GM Colleges in securing funds from Innovate UK (Further Education Investment Fund) for a project targeted at promoting innovation amongst local employers in GM frontier sectors.

The Committee noted the report.

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The Committee reviewed the HE Strategic Update report, noting that the College has received an overall Silver award under the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and that the College's second area of Higher Technical Qualification's (HTQs) in Construction Management and Quantity Surveying has been delivered from September 2023.

It was noted that HTQs have also been approved in HND Digital Technologies for England HTQ (Artificial Intelligence Solutions and Applications) and will be delivered from September 2024. The College is working collaboratively within the IoT network with the University of Salford and ADA to develop the qualification to be taught at the College utilising funding from the Higher Technical Skills Injection Fund.

Cycle 3 of the HTQs including Engineering and Manufacturing, Education & Childcare and Business and Administration are currently in review for delivery commencing in September 2024. The College has requested an exemption to the HTQs in Engineering due to suitability for employer needs.

It was noted that Office for Students funding has enabled renovation of the Learning Resource Centre at Pagefield, increasing current capacity from 75 students to 123 students and opened to students from September 2023. A Virtual Reality Cave is also now in operation at the Centre for Advanced Technical Studies.

The GM IoT launched from September 2023. This includes the renovation of existing mechanical workshops and electrical and electronic laboratories and purchasing of specialist equipment.

The Committee noted that the College is seeking to ensure that relevant curriculum areas are involved in the mapping process of the occupational standards to the HTQs to drive changes / amendments / awareness with the awarding body. In relation to Pearson, the Committee noted that updates to specifications are not always timely, leading to inaccurate information. Revisions to guidance for HEIs regarding integrated apprenticeships are also beginning to raise questions regarding the sustainability of such partnerships and the Committee noted that the College is in discussions with IfATE and the DfE in relation to this.

It was noted that regulations now require the awarding bodies for L6 apprenticeships to be the End Point Assessor (EPA) with degree awarding powers and that not all HEIs appear to have the appetite to become EPAs. This may create a significant risk in the system nationally, so the College is keeping a watching brief on this to see how it develops.

The Committee noted the report.

10. QIP Update

The Committee reviewed an update in relation to the 2023-24 Quality Improvement Plan (QIP), noting the progress that has been made in the priority areas identified as areas for improvement in the current year.

The Committee noted that Heads of Department meet with the Head of Quality to update Departmental QIPs each term and the progress within Departments is translated into overall improvements across College. This work is overseen by the Vice Principal for Curriculum and the Vice Principal for Employment and Skills and triangulated through reviews, learning walks, observations and focused intervention.

The Committee noted that two actions within High Needs provision are not on target and that to facilitate swifter pace in response to this work an EHCP working group has been convened to ensure greater consistency, which is key to success in achieving overall objectives.

In relation to Apprenticeship provision, it was noted that a pastoral plan is in development in consultation with employers and implementation of this plan will address the area for improvement and ensure good practice in relation to raising awareness of the Prevent agenda with apprentices.

The Committee noted that there had been good results on GCSE resits and that improvements have been made in Animal Management, which was one area for improvement in the SAR.

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The Committee noted the update.

11. Update on Access and Participation Plan

CSM-24-02-15

The Committee received an update on the development of the new Access and Participation Plan (APP) for approval in 2024, noting that the new APP will cover a maximum of four academic years, from 2025-26 to 2028-29. The plan must be submitted by 1 October 2024.

The Committee was advised of the timeline for the development of the APP and process for communicating with students in relation to its development, which had been well received and that members of the Students' Forum had offered to support its development. An operational plan has been developed for engagement and consultation with students to ensure the OfS expectations will be met and this will serve as an action plan for the next few months. This approach will also be developed for the whole provider expectations. A communication channel has been created for students to be able to provide feedback on the new plan. The next phase of communication to students has commenced.

The data analysis of the OfS Access and Participation dashboard has been completed as well as the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR) following comprehensive analysis of the OfS Access and Participation dashboard indicators for Wigan and Leigh College.

The Committee was advised of the challenges in accessing external data, noting that internal data is used to fill gaps as an interim measure.

Governors asked when they would see a draft of the APP and it was confirmed that an early draft should be available by March, for consideration by the Committee at its next meeting.

The Committee noted that the deadline for submission was 1 October, which would necessitate a special meeting of the Committee and Governing Board to approve the APP prior to submission. It was agreed that Jen Connor would liaise with the Director of Governance in relation to this, so that the special meetings can be built into the annual committee and Board cycles of business to be approved by the Governing Board at its 2 July meeting.

The Committee noted the report.

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The Committee considered a report on the process and timeline for the approval of the 2024-25 Accountability Statement which will be aligned to the approval of the College's new Strategic Plan and, in view of revised DfE guidance, the Governors' Skills Review and Skills Statement. It was noted that monitoring arrangements for the 2023-24 Accountability Plan had been built into the programme KPI dashboards and reports and the updates on the strategic chapters that are reported to the Committee and the Governing Board.

It was noted that the Skills Review Task and Finish Group is well advanced in its review and had updated the whole Governing Board at the January 2024 Strategic Away Day. Activities are on-going and the review is not complete but the Board is on track to finalise its findings ahead of the revised 30 June submission deadline.

The Committee noted that the Governing Board is scheduled to meet in May to finalise the Accountability Statement, but the revised DfE submission deadline provides an opportunity to defer this meeting to mid-June so the Board can approve the Accountability Statement (incorporating the Governors' Skills Statement) alongside the new Strategic Plan for 2024-2027.

The Committee noted that the DfE has fed-back to the whole of the sector that responses around national and local priorities were too general and vague in the first Accountability Statement submissions. An updated LSIP for Greater Manchester has recently been published and had been shared with members of the Committee, which will enable the College to address this concern in the 2024-25 submission.

The Committee noted that Curriculum planning is now well advanced and the final sign-off by the Committee of the 24-25 curriculum offer will be during the summer term.

The Committee noted that the May meeting of the Governing Board would be deferred to mid-June to facilitate the revised DfE submission date for the Accountability Statement alongside the Board's approval of the new Strategic Plan.

The Committee noted the report.

13. Equality and Diversity Annual Report

The Committee considered the Equality and Diversity Annual Report for 2022-23, noting that following feedback from Governors last year, this year's report includes FREDIE values and has been reduced in size, to make it easier to read.

The report identifies the progress made in achieving the College's Equality Objectives for 2020-2024 and it was noted that the College has made good progress against five of the objectives and continues to make progress in relation to staff disclosure of protected characteristics particularly for newly recruited staff, although the high target has not been achieved to date. Other areas identified in the 2022-23 College SAR relate to male achievement for adults being lower than females in relation to ESOL provision and the growth in male participation and it was noted that the achievement gap is narrowing for adults identifying with a mental health related issue but that the gap remains an area for additional focus.

The Committee noted that the equality objectives are due for review at the end of 2024 and that there was a Board Development session on the FREDIE values scheduled to take place at 4.30pm on 19 March, before the meeting of the Governing Board.

The Committee agreed that the new style of reporting was easier to read and was pleased to see the FREDIE values incorporated into the report.

Resolved: The Committee agreed to recommend the Equality and Diversity Annual Report for 2022-23 to the Governing Board for approval.

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14. Link Visits Report - Catering, Construction and Additional Learning Support

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The Committee reviewed the Spring Term Link Visits report, noting that attendance was better this term, with more Governors attending the visits.

In each visit, the afternoon included a curriculum intent conversation with managers, a discussion on the strengths and areas for improvement in the department and a reflection on the Self-Assessment Report and grading for the area. Governors had the opportunity to observe teaching and learning and meet with students and test the impact of the quality of education by having students demonstrate their skills development. There was also opportunity for a staff focus group discussion.

The Committee noted that feedback from this visit was very positive particularly in relation to the Governor's assurance that the college is pursuing high quality teaching and learning and the quality of the student experience.

The Committee noted that the Link Visits provide Governors with a way to triangulate data through direct engagement with staff and students and that the College should continue to hold the visits once each term.

Governors were reminded that the next Link Visits are scheduled to take place on 15 May.

The Committee noted the report.

15. Items for inclusion in the Committee Chair's report to the Governing Board

CSM-24-02-19

The Committee agreed the items to be included in the Committee Chair's report to the Governing Board.

16. Any other business

CSM-24-02-20

There were no items of other business.

17. Date and time of next meeting: Tuesday 4 June 2024 at 5.00pm

CSM-24-02-21

The meeting ended at 7pm.

18. Actions:

CSM-24-02-15: Jen Connor to liaise with the Director of Governance to schedule special meetings of the Committee and the Governing Board in September 2024, before the 2024-25 Committee and Board Cycles of Business are submitted to the Governing Board for approval in July 2024.

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