

HARLOW COLLEGE FURTHER EDUCATION CORPORATION

STANDARDS AND CURRICULUM COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held at Harlow College on Friday 16 June 2023, 10am

Membership: *Jon Bouffler
 *Rod Bristow (Chair)
 Hannah Cheesman
 *John Godley
 *Stephen Isherwood
 *Liz Laycock
 *Karen Spencer

*denotes present

In attendance Becky Jones, Vice-Principal
 Paul Whitehead, Vice-Principal
 Kirstie Craig, Assistant Principal
 Laura Wedgbury-Glew, Assistant Principal
 Kelly Edwards, Executive Director – Quality
 Simon Boyce, Executive Director – Student Services
 Viv Kimeng, Head of Academy
 Maria Staines, Head of Academy
 Ruth Lucas, Head of Governance

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Hannah Cheesman due to work commitments, Will Allanson and Wendy Martin.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the Standards and Curriculum Committee meeting held on 14 March 2023 were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting, subject to one typographical change.

4 Matters Arising from the Minutes (not mentioned elsewhere on the agenda)

There were no matters arising.

5 Key Performance Indicators and Quality Improvement Plan

5.1 Study Programmes

The Standards and Curriculum Committee received and considered the report on Study Programmes, presented by Laura Wedgbury-Glew, Assistant Principal.

Governors were informed that retention is currently at 92.8% and whilst this is an improvement compared to last academic year, it is not at the level the College wants it to be. A lot of work is being undertaken in terms of looking at the relationship with students and the best strategies for retaining them. It is envisaged that this will have a positive impact on the achievement rate. A-Levels and IT have seen improved retention levels from 75.4% and 77.5% respectively last academic year with current levels of retention being 81.5% and 95.1% respectively.

A Governor asked how this compares to historical data and if the College is satisfied with the levels. Laura Wedgbury-Glew confirmed that the College was pleased with the levels.

A Governor asked if the gap is being closed. It was confirmed that the College is closing the gap and that the data this year is better than last year. Paul Whitehead confirmed that whilst the retention rate is higher compared to this time last year, there is a need to convert this into achieving students.

Laura Wedgbury-Glew reported that there is still a challenge in enhancing the curriculum in trade areas due to the volume of students and staffing issues. A Work Placement Officer has been appointed to address this and structural changes have been made so that teams are smaller, easing the burden and giving staff more time to work with students.

A Governor asked about the new system being implemented by the Retention Task Force. Paul Whitehead reported that applicants are categorised when they apply to the College. Those that applied on time are prioritised for enrolment, followed by those who applied late over the summer and then those who applied after this. The late applicants need much more focus to ensure they are on the right track therefore the enhanced enrolment procedures and prioritising enrolment for those who applied in a timely manner will help address retention. The new system means that staff are not inducting new students and interviewing new students at the same time.

A Governor asked how the College's retention figures compare to national figures. Becky Jones reported that retention in 17/18 was 96%, 20/21 91%, 21/22 91% and 22/23 93%, with the national benchmark being 92.9%.

The Standards and Curriculum Committee noted the report on Study Programmes.

5.2 Adult Education

The Standards and Curriculum Committee received and considered the report on Adult Education, presented by Maria Staines, Head of Academy.

Governors were informed that the overall achievement rate is currently 88% which is an improvement compared to last academic year however it is an area which still requires focus.

Known destinations has increased from 27% last academic year compared to a current position of 40% this year. Collecting this data can be problematic as the

courses are often very short and there are often difficulties in contacting students to collect this data once they have completed their course.

Achievement rates are improving, with Level 2 AAT predicted at 73.1% compared to 51.6% last year and Level 3 AAT predicted at 78.9% compared to 30% last academic year. Achievement on long courses is predicted to be 81.3% compared to 70.9% last year. There is strong performance on Level 3 Counselling programmes, with a predicted achievement rate of 94.4% and there has been significant improvements for HE Access courses which is currently at 90.1%.

A Governor asked about the A-Level retention rate of 66.7% and asked if the College could do AS-Level and A-Level for adult learners. Becky Jones reported that this was introduced last year however there is a challenge with adult learners with them knowing exactly what they want to achieve. The College will offer Access courses next year to adult learners rather than A-Levels.

The Standards and Curriculum Committee noted the report on Adult Education.

5.3 Apprenticeships

The Standards and Curriculum Committee received and considered the report on Apprenticeships, presented by Kirstie Craig, Assistant Principal.

Governors were informed that achievement is currently at 50% and the best-case year-end position is predicted to be 60%. There are currently 41 learners aiming to complete before the end of the academic year and if all of these materialise, the 60% rate will be achieved, however a realistic figure at this point in time is 58%.

The retention rate is currently 68% against a target of 65% and is an increase from last year's 52%. The Apprenticeship Accountability Framework, against which providers are judged, has a target retention rate of 60%.

Destination data was highlighted which shows that 93% of apprentices remained in the same sector, with 81% of those apprentices remaining with their current employer. On successful completion, 82% of apprentices received a pay rise and 51% of apprentices secured a promotion once fully qualified, the majority being in engineering and business. This demonstrates that apprenticeships are being placed onto the correct programme.

A Governor asked if there was any national data on destinations and Paul Whitehead confirmed that there was not any and that the College decided what questions to ask the apprentices.

Governors were informed that the DfE has confirmed that the College will remain in enhanced monitoring next academic year which is the lowest level of monitoring. It is reported that 54% of providers are in some form of DfE monitoring. Currently the College is currently monitored for achievement, retention and end point assessment organisation. Next academic year the monitoring will be solely for achievement if the College does not achieve the 60% achievement rate this year.

A Governor asked when would this decision be reviewed again. Paul Whitehead confirmed that it is formally assessed at year-end based on year-end data and the outcome is published in January. Senior managers meet regularly with the ESFA and share Governor reports and papers and the ESFA are not raising any particular concerns.

A Governor reported that this is an incredibly positive picture however another Governor asked despite good achievement and aiming for a 60% achievement rate, this is not a high figure. Governors were informed that last year the national figure was 47% and before Covid it was 66%. A Governor asked if 66% was acceptable. Karen Spencer reported that the Government has put in large Standards and Frameworks with multiple elements and there is an issue with accreditation of components. This is the same concern as with T-Levels and a similar drop is expected with T-Levels. Paul Whitehead reported that qualifications with multiple components bring the achievement rate down and the length of programme is a risk to retention.

A Governor asked about the 58% withdrawals due to earning more money and Paul Whitehead reported that there is an issue around the system and the risk with apprenticeships is the same as with T-Levels.

Kirstie Craig reported that new systems that have been implemented are ensuring that the College is moving in the right direction.

A Governor asked if the College is nervous around the labour market going forward. Kirstie Craig reported that no teams have indicated that redundancies are imminent however a number of apprentices have moved into self-employment which means they can no longer be an apprentice. Karen Spencer reported that the College's apprentices are very focused on fine hand skills which are less likely to be affected by advances in technology.

The Standards and Curriculum Committee noted the report on Apprenticeships.

5.4 Maths and English

The Standards and Curriculum Committee received and considered the report on Maths and English, presented by Viv Kimeng, Head of Academy.

Governors were informed that there have been some positive trends, particularly with Functional Skills.

Viv Kimeng reported that the national rate for achieving a grade for Maths and English is 82% and the College is currently at 80%. Attendance at exams has been good at 80%.

The national rates for English and Maths Functional Skills is 74% and the College is currently at 80% with more results still to come in.

There is still work to be done particularly around attendance however strategies that have been implemented are starting to see improvements.

Governors were informed that 52.2% of College learners are on some form of Maths and English programme.

Karen Spencer thanked everyone involved in the exams and reported that Governors should not underestimate the effort for delivery and the exams. The College had to be closed when exams were taking place as there were between 500 and 700 learners sitting the exams, with a third of maths learners have some form of access arrangements.

A Governor asked if levels of anxiety are expected to decrease now exams are being sat. Karen Spencer reported that many have anxiety as they failed Maths and English at school.

A Governor asked if the College had any concerns around over-predicting teacher-assessed grades (TAGs) as the progress in English in 20/21, a TAG year, is 91.9%, whereas in 22/23, a non-TAG year, this is 77.5%. Karen Spencer reported that the College's TAGs were lower than other Essex based colleges. The College's TAGs were based on students undertaking exams in-house with full mocks being undertaken in 20/21 and TAG s were based on mock results as well as teacher assessment.

Karen Spencer reported that the College has less volume undertaking the November resits. Previously these captured students with a Grade 1 and if they withdrew, they still counted in the College's results, therefore the College has stopped the November resits.

A Governor asked if it was being suggested that there is not really a decline and that it is a separate issue, more around timing and less around achievement. Becky Jones reported that the students undertaking the exams in 21/22 and 22/23 were Year 9 students when Covid hit and the gap the College needed to bridge was much greater and it was therefore harder to get students to the required level.

The Committee agreed that it would be useful to have the profile of students in future reports.

A Governor reported that a common theme in the papers is with Maths and English and linking walkthrough judgements to embedding Maths and English. Karen Spencer reported that some staff are not comfortable with this and whilst training has been delivered for staff, it is a work in progress. For some staff who struggled with Maths and English at school, it is hard for them to embed it into their teaching. Kelly Edwards reported that the College is working on the process however it will take at least a year to see a positive change in the walkthrough data and that staff are being allowed time to practice these skills.

A Governor reported that low attendance stands out and what are the consequences of students not attending. Karen Spencer reported that letters are sent home and students are subject to the College's disciplinary process. The only other option available is to exclude them, however this would result in the College losing students completely. A Governor highlighted that if there are a lot of learners who are uninterested and disengaged, it has a negative impact on others keen to learn. Paul Whitehead reported that Maths and English is a condition of funding and that feedback from induction indicates that students have a lot of fear going into the lessons having been told at school they have failed therefore it is a big hurdle to get them back into the classroom. Viv

Kimeng reported that often the message given by schools creates a fear and having to continue to study Maths and English is seen as a punishment. Laura Wedgbury-Glew highlighted that employers are employing individuals without having Maths and English therefore some of the incentive in achieving these qualifications is removed. Becky Jones reported that the College is adapting its approach to encourage students to attend, such as asking students to teach Maths and English staff about their vocational course in order to build a relationship in the first instance.

The Committee acknowledged that whilst Maths and English remains a challenging area, there is a lot of positive work being undertaken. However questions still need to be asked.

The Standards and Curriculum Committee noted the report on Maths and English.

5.5 Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Equality and Diversity Impact Measures (EDIMs)

The Standards and Curriculum Committee received and considered the report on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Equality and Diversity Impact Measures (EDIMs), presented by Paul Whitehead, Vice-Principal.

Governors were informed that the College is closing the gaps in achievement rates for those with a disability, high needs funded learners, those of free school meals, those on bursary and those from other ethnic groups. The gap for looked after children and care leavers is getting bigger due to the increased volume of enrolments.

The College's ESOL enrolments have doubled however retention issues have been made worse as learners are being moved out of the area quickly once they become adults as there is not enough adult ESOL housing in the local area. The College is ensuring that the ESOL learners have a clear pathway through the College for them to move from ESOL provision to vocational areas in the College if their language skills are sufficient. Level 1 ESOL needs to be achieved for this to happen and there is a possibility that some learners can be fast-tracked therefore jumping levels. The College is confident it has the right processes in place to support these learners going forward.

A Governor asked if the College is expecting the number of ESOL learners to plateau. Paul Whitehead reported that this is not yet known however the College is planning on the same level for next year. Some learners come to College with very low levels of English and need longer here to achieve their qualification. ESOL learners are recruited throughout the year and the College is still seeing the same volume coming through at present.

Paul Whitehead highlighted the need to close the gap in apprentice achievement from other ethnic backgrounds. Although some success has been seen, the level is still low.

The Standards and Curriculum Committee noted the report on SEND and EDIMs.

5.6 Learning, Teaching and Assessment

The Standards and Curriculum Committee received and considered the report on Learning, Teaching and Assessment, presented by Kelly Edwards, Executive Director – Quality.

Kelly Edwards reported that there is a focus on developing teaching skills and that 24 sessions have focused on the craft of teaching. On staff development days, morning sessions have been dedicated to staff development and afternoon sessions are an opportunity for staff to practice what they have learnt with their teams.

The Power of 3 completion rate is currently 30% and this runs from January to January. The Power of 3 provides supported experiments to address something that is identified as “not yet met” in walkthroughs.

The College currently has a figure of 92.5% for “best practice”, “met” and “not seen today” with the walkthroughs completed so far this cycle. The Quality Team moderate all walkthroughs and the document is used as tool for improvement particularly around the judgements “not yet met”.

Governors were informed that a new system has been implemented in relation to embedding of maths and English as 57% is not good enough. There is now a three-step process in place for lesson plans and lessons and it is expected that the embedding of maths and English is part of every lesson.

A Governor asked if focusing on embedding maths and English in each lesson is detracting from what learners need to learn in a vocational lesson. Karen Spencer reported that it can fit well in a vocational lesson however teaching staff need to be explicit about it. Kelly Edwards reported that the three-step process is in lesson plans and will be explicit going forward however it will take time to embed this. Some staff are being mandated to undertake specific training around this. A Governor asked what would happen if staff do not improve. Kelly Edwards reported that there is no sanction however it would be highlighted at the next walkthrough. Each team has a Learning Co-ordinator, an Assistant Academy Manager, a Head of Academy and Executive Team member, all of whom take a consistent approach to teaching and learning and are able to support any staff member who is struggling with this. Karen Spencer highlighted that the digital work is widely adopted across the College however it took some time to embed and this is a similar situation with embedding maths and English.

A Governor reported that whilst 93% of walkthroughs with “best practice”, “met” and “not seen today” being reported is very high, the percentage of “best practice” has not improved over the years and asked if more effort is needed with this or is there a need to improve in order to get the best teaching. Kelly Edwards reported that the College’s level of what is classed as “best practice” is very high and incredibly hard to achieve. Governors were informed that the guidelines and criteria have changed. The Committee agreed that the comparison figures should not be included if they are measured differently in different years as it looks like the College is plateauing. A Governor reported that whilst it will take staff time to embed skills, students do not have the same amount of time. Karen Spencer reported that the figures connect to the Power of

3 however the way they are presented could look as though there is an issue at the College which does not exist. Becky Jones highlighted that the percentage of “not seen today” and “not met yet” are decreasing over time and the “met” is increasing. Governors thanked staff for their encouraging explanation of the figures.

Kelly Edwards highlighted the upcoming digital projects the College is involved with.

The Committee had a discussion around the use of AI and how it will be addressed by the College. Kelly Edwards reported that the College is currently waiting for further guidance on this, for example from JISC. Nothing has been published by the Government or Awarding Bodies on this yet therefore the College has made a statement itself due to the lack of a statement from elsewhere. A Governor asked how the College will know if AI has been used. Kelly Edwards reported that staff should know the quality of work their students are able to produce and if a piece of work submitted varies from this and is of a different standard to other pieces of work, then the student would have to undertake an alternative assessment, such as a verbal assessment. A Governor asked if there has been any conflict with students on this approach and Kelly Edwards confirmed that there has been none to date. Technology is used as a tool and the College cannot stop students from using it however they need to understand how to use it effectively.

The Committee noted that a lot of really good work is being undertaken on learning, teaching and assessment.

The Standards and Curriculum Committee noted the report on Learning, Teaching and Assessment.

5.7 Personal Development, Behaviour and Attitudes

The Standards and Curriculum Committee received and considered the report on Personal Development, Behaviour and Attitudes, presented by Simon Boyce, Executive Director – Student Services.

Governors were informed that changes made to the tutorial programme has had a positive impact on students and this is confirmed in the most recent student survey results. Lots of work has been undertaken in this area and there is a focus group that has been established to take this forward including introducing more student-led tutorials.

The College has been pleased with the uptake in enrichment activities and the impact the activities are having on skills and behaviours, with 84% of those who completed the most recent student survey stating it has had such an impact. For next academic year, the target is to engage with 75% of new students and 25% of returning students.

Student voice and the student ambassador programme has been a success this year with increased levels of engagement. This will be built on going forward.

There has been significant growth in school engagement and the level of engagement has doubled since the pandemic. A Governor highlighted that this

is really positive if it underpins improvement in schools engaging with the College.

A Governor asked about the student behaviour section in the report and suggested that the impact of the College's zero tolerance approach to certain behaviours is missing from the report.

A Governor highlighted the increased number of disciplinaries this academic year compared to last year and asked for details of how the College is addressing this to be included in future reports. Paul Whitehead reported that disciplinary panels issue sanctions to students and ask them to engage in activities to address their behaviour.

A Governor asked about the achievement of 100% T-Level industry placements. Simon Boyce highlighted that a lot of resource had gone into achieving this which has had an impact on other areas of the College. Paul Whitehead reported that the number of T-Level students are relatively low. Karen Spencer highlighted that retention on T-Levels is low at 61% and this is predominantly due to employers offering students jobs once they have completed their industry placement.

The Standards and Curriculum Committee noted the report on Personal Development, Behaviour and Attitudes.

5.8 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

The Standards and Curriculum Committee received and considered the KPIs for 2022-23, presented by Becky Jones, Vice-Principal.

The Standards and Curriculum Committee noted that the KPIs had been covered in agenda items 5.1 – 5.7 above.

A Governor asked about the recruitment gap in 16-18 learners and Governors were informed that this is reported into the Resources Committee. Change will not be realised until next academic year however with the significant increase in school engagement, this should improve next year.

The Standards and Curriculum Committee noted the KPIs.

5.9 Quality Improvement Plan (QIP)

The Standards and Curriculum Committee received and considered the QIP, presented by Becky Jones, Vice-Principal.

The Standards and Curriculum Committee noted that the QIP had been covered in agenda items 5.1 – 5.7 above.

The Standards and Curriculum Committee noted the QIP.

6 Higher Education

6.1 Higher Education Development Plan

The Standards and Curriculum Committee received and considered the Higher Education Development Plan, presented by Becky Jones, Vice-Principal.

Becky Jones reported that good progress has been made with the Development Plan and the College is looking to grow its provision.

Approvals have been gained for new HNs in Computing and Healthcare Practice and approval is being sought for a HN in Quantity Surveying. In addition, a new part-time offer has been planned for next academic year.

Governors were informed that Engineering retention was not good however an interim Awards Board met on 15 June 2023 which confirmed the three students are progressing well and there are good levels of student satisfaction. Seven students have applied for next year and there is a good pipeline of students going forward.

Work is ongoing with ARU to establish top-ups and ARU is keen to support the College with this. The College has realigned its provision to ensure progression routes are in place.

Governors noted that all other aspects of the Development Plan have been met.

The Standards and Curriculum Committee noted the Higher Education Development Plan.

6.2 OfS Regulatory Requirements

The Standards and Curriculum Committee received and considered the report on OfS regulatory requirements, presented by Becky Jones, Vice-Principal.

Governors were informed that the report provides a regulatory update to give Governors' assurance on what the College is doing to comply with OfS regulatory requirements.

Governors were informed that the College is fully compliant with all OfS regulatory requirements and that the College is not participating in the Teaching Excellence Framework as it does not meet the threshold for participating.

The Standards and Curriculum Committee noted the report on OfS regulatory requirements.

6.3 OfS Reportable Events

The Standards and Curriculum Committee noted that there has been no OfS reportable events since the Committee last met on 14 March 2023.

7 Qualification Reform

The presentation on qualification reform will be presented to the Corporation at its meeting on 6 July 2023 as it is relevant to all Governors, not just those sitting on the Standards and Curriculum Committee.

8 Policies for Approval

The Standards and Curriculum received and considered the following policies, presented by Becky Jones, Vice-Principal:

- Academic and Assessment Regulations;
- Academic Appeals Policy;
- Academic Code of Conduct for Staff on Student Assessment;
- Academic Misconduct Policy HE/FE;
- Academic Performance Policy and Procedures;
- Freedom of Speech and Events;
- HE Access and Participation Statement;
- HE Learning, Teaching and Assessment Policy;
- HE Scholarly Activity Plan;
- HE Student Engagement Policy;
- HE Student Protection Plan;
- HE Student Recruitment, Selection and Admissions Policy.

Governors had reviewed the policies and the proposed amendments in advance of the meeting.

A discussion was held around the use of AI as detailed in the Academic Misconduct Policy HE/FE. It was agreed that in Section 2.5, the following should be added in *“where the College suspects the use of AI, students will be required to complete a further method of assessment”* and in Section 3.3, the following should be added in after the first sentence *“The College will ensure that staff are trained effectively”*.

A Governor asked if freedom of speech was an issue for the College. Karen Spencer confirmed that it was not an issue however the College is required to have a policy on it. It could become an issue when close to general elections as the College invites the main political parties into College to hold hustings.

The Standards and Curriculum approved the policies listed above, with the proposed amendments and the additions to the Academic Misconduct Policy HE/FE as outlined above.

9 Any Other Business

There were no items of any other business.

10 Dates of Future Meetings, Terms of Reference, Calendar of Business

The Standards and Curriculum Committee received the dates of future meetings, the Committee’s Terms of Reference and the Calendar of Business, presented by Ruth Lucas, Head of Governance.

It was agreed to remove point (g) of the delegated powers in the Terms of Reference *“to propose, direct and report on Governor Training including induction, mentoring, the Pair Scheme and continuing Governor training and development”* as this is now covered by the Search and Governance Committee.

The Standards and Curriculum Committee approved the dates of future meetings, the Committee's Terms of Reference and the Calendar of Business, subject to the amendment above.

Key Points From The Meeting For Corporation:

1. Item 1 – Key Performance Indicators

To receive and note the current position.

2. Item 2 – Quality Improvement Plan

To receive and note the current position.

3. Item 3 – Qualification Reform

To receive a presentation on qualification reform.