
Minutes of the Students, Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee

**held on Wednesday 16th March 2011 at 4:30 pm
in the Board Room, Hagley Road Centre**

Present:

Jenni Ord (Vice Chair)
Lynette Cutting (Principal)
Henrietta Kubwimana (Student)
Tracey Pearce
Tim Sunter

In attendance:

Louise Jones (Vice Principal)
Elaine Giles (Vice Principal) p/t
Kevin Stevens (Assistant Principal)
Mozz Baker (Head of Tutorials & Learner Voice) p/t
David Beasley (Interim Clerk)

Presentation on the Tutorial Framework

Prior to the start of the formal meeting, Mozz Baker, Head of Tutorials and Learner Voice at the College, gave a presentation to the Committee on the tutorial framework. Jenni Ord commented that it was very informative and encouraging and gave confidence in the work that was being done in this area. She noted that the tutorial provision was under review given the significant reduction in external funding in this area and said that she would be interested in the outcome. The Principal stated that she was confident that there would be improvements despite the financial constraints because of the new leadership.

1 Apologies for Absence

- 1.1 Apologies had been received from Ian Hart (Committee Chair) and Tom Skidmore (Student Governor). The Committee Vice Chair had agreed to chair the meeting in Ian Hart's absence.

2 Declaration of Interests

- 2.1 No interests were declared.

3 Are we living our Values?

- 3.1 The Chair reminded the meeting to take account of the core values, as set out at the end of the agenda, in determining decisions.

4 Minutes of Previous Meeting

4a Approval

The minutes of the meeting held on 1st December 2010 were approved and signed as a true record.

4b Matters Arising

- 4b.1 Para 3b.1 Governors' Mentoring The Clerk reported that at the January Governance & Search Committee meeting, mentor governors were assigned to all the recently appointed governors.

- 4b.2 Para 6b.2 Equality & Diversity Action Plan Louise Jones advised that the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy Group had been re-formed and met earlier that day; the Equality & Diversity Action Plan would be provided to members once the Strategy was in place. The Chair, who had attended the meeting, said that there was a lot of work to be done by the end of the year but that it was a positive meeting.

5 Governance Items

5a Committee Work Programme

- 5a.1 The Clerk explained that the Committee Work Programme was designed to support the responsibilities of the Committee as defined in its Terms of Reference, by setting out the programme of work over the academic year, and identifying those items that were delegated by the Corporation to the Committee and those that were to be reviewed and recommended to the Corporation for approval. The document would be reviewed annually in the light of changing priorities and requirements. The priorities assigned to the items were intended to reflect their level of significance or risk and hence to inform the amount of time for their review at Committee meetings.
- 5a.2 The Committee discussed the significance of the item prioritisation and the relative importance of the Risk & Performance Report and the Quality Strategy, noting that the reports related to how students were progressing were also important. The Committee also noted the importance of knowing that actions were followed-up. The Chair said that there was a balance to be struck between the time available at meetings and the level of detail needed for the Committee to fulfil its function properly; a key element was having the headline messages highlighted for each report presented. The Principal noted that she had discussed with the Clerk the idea of including a 'Points for Governors' section on the Report front sheet as an aid to members and this would be trialled later in the academic year.

The Committee Resolved:

To approve the Students, Curriculum & QA Committee Work Programme for 2010/2011.

6 Reports for Information

6a HE Strategy – Outline Proposal

- 6a.1 Elaine Giles summarised the content of the College's Higher Education Strategy Outline Proposal, explaining that the potential impact of changes in government policy and the associated changes in the fees and funding framework gave an opportunity to explore potential opportunities for new ways of working together and for FE to influence the provision of HE. The Committee asked about the factors influencing the choice of institutions and the timing of the resulting Strategy. Elaine Giles said that the Strategy was currently a work in progress and would be in place by the end of the academic year. The government's policy was changing rapidly and the approach being taken was in terms of what was available and how soon engagement could be effected.

The Committee Resolved:

To note the Report.

[Elaine Giles left the meeting at this juncture.]

6b&c Curriculum Review Reports

- 6b.1 Louise Jones explained that these reports, new for this year, had been put together to provide a view on overall performance in each of the main curriculum areas, as part of the mid-year Curriculum Review. In the case of the Report related to Vocational & Professional Studies, some issues related to retention had been identified that were being looked into, but overall it was an improving picture in 2010/2011. In the Creative Industries, Humanities & A-levels area the success rates were not expected to be quite as good as 2009/2010 but that was a

challenging result to match. The Principal asked members if they felt that these reports were useful. The Chair said that it was useful to see the relative team strengths and the associated trends. There were two further area reports to follow and they would be consolidated into an annual report.

6b.2 The Committee asked whether the targets were being set appropriately across all areas. Louise Jones said that the targets for retention, attendance and achievement were set in line with national benchmarks. The Principal added that she had a concern about setting different student satisfaction targets for different areas as the College needed to be addressing any underlying issues and concerns. She suggested that the Student Council could pick up the question 'How do we stop students from dropping out?', and the key reports should go to the Council which should be treated as a focus group for this topic. It was agreed that it would be useful for the reports to go to the appropriate Link Governors.

6b.3 The Chair said that it was important to understand the risk factors, and the Committee asked a number of questions related to the following-up of improvement actions:

- (1) How are 'notices to improve' followed-up?
- (2) Were there situations where staff capabilities needed to be improved?
- (3) Should the Committee have more feedback on 'notices to improve'? Would it help the staff if they knew that Governors were receiving reports on follow-up action plans?
- (4) What was the College's target for clearing 'notice to improve' status?

The Principal and Louise Jones responded with the following statements:

- (1) A 'course tracker' tool was used to monitor and review progress on improvement actions on a regular basis. The reviews were rigorous and the tool was a valuable assistance to improving performance. It was agreed to ask Luke Adams to present the tool at a future Committee meeting.
- (2) Staff capability reviews were held and under-performing staff were managed very closely, and ultimately removed, having ensured that staff had every opportunity to improve; in the end the students were the priority.
- (3) The outstanding notices to improve should be cleared by the next Committee meeting in May.

6b.4 The Committee asked concerning the apparent discrepancies between some of the Learner Numbers and Funding Targets/Actuals in the reports. Louise Jones explained that in the absence of an Assistant Principal for Finance & Information last year some of the target information was not as rigorous as it could have been. The Principal added that she had asked that internal targets were all signed-up to and linked across the management team structure.

The Committee Resolved:

To note the Curriculum Review Reports.

6d Learner Performance Report

6d.1 Louise Jones summarised the key points in the report, setting out the retention and attendance performance for each of the curriculum areas. Six teams were at or above target for both retention and attendance, 6 teams were at or above either retention or attendance targets but down on the other, and 1 team was below target on both. The report provided a commentary on the course withdrawal patterns and contributory factors; retention and attendance were reviewed regularly by the Assistance Principals. The report included a number of graphs showing the retention profiles for each team and the equivalent profiles for 2009/2010, including the markedly improved profiles for the BSS and Built Environment teams.

The Committee Resolved:

To note the Learner Performance Report.

6e Learner Voice Report

- 6e.1 Louise Jones explained that this report was the 'Entry Survey' report of students' perceptions of their College experience, identifying any underlying areas of concern and actions taken to address them. The follow-up report would be presented at the next meeting. The Chair said that this was a key report. Louise Jones said that there had been no significant improvement in the overall satisfaction of students, which had remained slightly below target. In the Vocational and Professional Studies areas satisfaction levels had improved significantly and back to the levels of 2007/2008 and 2008/2009. In the Construction and Motor Vehicle team, satisfaction levels were improving but remained below the national average. In Creative and A-Levels, the satisfaction rating was above the national average but had slightly decreased since 2009/2010. In Foundation Learning, year-on-year, satisfaction levels remained above the national averages with a very high proportion of students who were 'Extremely Satisfied'.
- 6e.2 Louise Jones reported that Focus Groups had been instituted to look into specific areas of concern based on survey responses, with each issue raised having an associated action plan. The Report included an overall analysis of the students' views with associated areas for improvement, together with a breakdown per curriculum team.
- 6e.3 The Committee asked questions on the areas identified for improvement and the associated actions in the Report, particularly related to Equality & Diversity (Page 6) and Safeguarding (Page 8):

- (1) Would the travel issues identified arise with the new build at Brierley Hill?
- (2) Were there any continuing concerns related to racial or ethnic tensions at the College?

Key points arising in the discussion were:

- (a) The inconsistency in the statements on significant issues on page 6 was noted.
- (b) The College was working on ensuring that students didn't need to travel between sites on the same day.
- (c) In discussing the students' concerns about travelling by bus after dark, and the related topic of bus passes, it was agreed that this was a good example of a topic that should be fed back to the Student Council from the Focus Groups as part of the 'You Said, We Did' process. Pauline Hollis would be asked to take up this aspect.
- (d) There had been some concerns about racial group tensions at the College, but matters had improved with the appointment of a second site warden; the Principal said that such issues were sometimes pushed below the surface as there weren't enough open discussions, and that this topic should be linked into the tutor groups for reflection and reinforcement.
- (e) The current College Values were focused on performance and opportunity; was there a value set for students in respect of behaviours, respect and relationships? The Principal advised that this topic was covered in the Students' Handbook, but recognised that the subject needed to be reinforced by tutors regularly.
- (f) The College received regular briefs from the Dudley Safeguarding Board on local issues and concerns of relevance to the schools and colleges.

The Committee Resolved:

To note the Learner Voice Report.

6f Confidential item, minuted separately

6g Risk & Performance Report

- 6g.1 Louise Jones summarised the key points set out in the Risk and Performance Progress Report:
- (1) Confidential item, minuted separately.
 - (2) Attendance was currently on target and this could be improved for the remainder of the year with continued monitoring and targeted actions by curriculum teams.

- (3) Confidential item, minuted separately..
 - (4) Confidential item, minuted separately..
 - (5) In general all teams were focusing on improving performance of courses where notices to improve had been issued, or were otherwise deemed to be at risk from in-year performance. Students at risk were also a key focus and support provided to these learners was being monitored through data and team meetings.
 - (6) The Quality team had achieved amber status – there was a significant level of activity within the team to support curriculum improvement, however it was acknowledged that further improvements needed to be made to the timeliness of reporting and systems for recording, and monitoring actions were being developed to meet curriculum needs. An E&D officer had been appointed in January and as a result, the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) strategy group had been reformed, an EDI strategy and action plan had been drafted and this would result in extensive work being required for most teams across the College in order to comply with the statutory obligations and to re-invigorate a culture of diversity. However, the right level of resources was now in place to achieve this and to support teams going forward.
 - (7) Student Services had achieved amber status. This area of the College was being reviewed and would shortly be re-structured.
- 6g.2 Louise Jones reported that the Principal had undertaken an independent review of the risk process in January, the outputs being used to focus the associated action plans on outcomes and improve the monitoring and accountability systems in place.
- 6g.3 The Chair said that the review of risk action plans linked into the discussions at the last meeting regarding engagement with employers and stakeholders; this was evidence that this aspect was being addressed by the College. It was important to see how the review of risks linked into the overall performance position. The Committee agreed that it was a positive report.

The Committee Resolved:

To note the Risk & Performance Progress Report.

7 Have we lived our Values?

- 7.1 The Chair asked the staff and student members if they were happy that the meeting had addressed the Values. Tracey Pearce said that there was a considerable amount of information she would be taking away and using in her teaching role, and Henrietta Kubwimana said she was pleased with the Committee's focus on learners and would be taking several items back to the Student Council. The Principal said that the meetings were valuable in terms of the issues that were raised and discussed.
- 7.2 The Chair said that the Committee was less strong on looking at issues related to stakeholders and partnerships, but had looked at some broader issues of the curriculum. She said that she was interested in what new skills were needed in the local community and how this should be reflected in the FE curriculum. The Principal said that College was looking at the Wolf Report as part of their Curriculum Planning activity in order to draw out strategic changes. The Chair welcomed this initiative.

8 Any Other Business

- 8.1 No items were raised.

9 Confidential Item Review

- 9.1 The Clerk advised that this item had been introduced to Committee and Board meeting agendas partly because of the requirement to publish meeting minutes on the College's web site, and to ensure as far as possible a consistent approach to highlighting any parts of the meeting agenda or discussion that it was appropriate to treat as confidential from a Corporation or College perspective. The Chair and Principal agreed that there were commercially sensitive items discussed at the meeting that would need to be minuted appropriately or as separate items annotated accordingly.

10 Dates of Future Meetings

Wednesday 11th May 2011 at 16:30
Wednesday 22nd June 2011 at 16:30

The meeting closed at 18:55.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Chair