

Minutes of a meeting of Learning & Quality Committee held virtually (Microsoft Teams) at 4pm on 23 September 2020

Present: Stephen Burke, Tim Jackson, Tim Mason & John Royston-Ford
(Chair).

Apologies: Nazir Ahmed.

In Attendance: Helen Brennan Director Student Services (Minutes 28-33)
Pat Denham Interim Vice-Principal Quality & Learning
Paola Schweitzer Clerk to the Corporation
Penny Wycherley Interim Principal

M i n u t e s

1 – Standing Items

28 Apologies for Absence

Nazir Ahmed sent his apologies.

29 Membership

The Chair welcomed Tim J to his first Committee meeting and noted that Nazir would shortly be leaving the College. Given that Max Craft was the Board's safeguarding lead, members **Agreed** that Paola ask him to join the Committee.

30 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

31 Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 June 2020 were **Agreed** as a correct record.

32 Matters Arising

Minute 26: Learner voice: Reporting the learner voice was ongoing. The College would be collecting learner views following induction as part of a more general student survey, with results informing staff training before half term. Survey results would be brought to the next meeting. Tim asked to be invited to student focus groups.

Minute 27: Data & Quality Monitoring: Tim J noted the decision to reduce the attendance target from 90% to 87% and agreed that an unreachable target was unhelpful. He asked if targets were set at departmental level to ensure staff continued to have a focus for improvement. Penny confirmed that course targets were set through the SAR process.

2 – Matters for Discussion & Decision

33 Safeguarding and Child Protection Performance Impact report 2019/20

Helen presented paper 2704/2/L&Q summarising the College's work with vulnerable students during the Covid-19 lockdown period. The College prioritised the education, welfare and safety of its most vulnerable learners (including those with EHCPs aged over 18 and apprentices) in a number of ways including:

- *Financial support:* increased free meal payments and top up phone payments.
- *Access to teaching and learning:* laptops and paper workbooks were provided as well as bite sized learning activities in May for the 104 most vulnerable students (i.e. Looked After Children and/or students in receipt of the vulnerable young persons' bursary) with more students attending from 15 June.
- *Welfare and wellbeing support:* The College was in regular (often daily) contact with 366 vulnerable students including those with high needs, children under the care of social services and pre 16 students. An additional 300 vulnerable learners were contacted weekly. The College worked with the City Council to ensure there was a shared understanding of the most at risk learners and this improved collaboration was likely to continue in the future.

The impact of this activity could be measured through in-year retention at between 92.5% and 99% and achievement between 90.5% and 97.8%. Helen cautioned that these were best case figures as data was still being processed. She believed achievement for vulnerable learners eligible for free meals was more likely to be around 80% (not 90.5%). Updated data would be brought to the next meeting. The report concluded that robust mechanisms were in place during lockdown to safeguard the wellbeing learning and achievement of the College's most vulnerable learners and parents/carers had given positive feedback about the support given. Whilst there were some concerns about individuals' mental health and a potential grooming incident that was referred to the police, there were no major safeguarding breaches.

Members congratulated the Student Services team on their hard work and the impressive retention and achievement figures. There was a brief discussion about how safeguarding incidents were reported and Helen clarified that the Board received an annual report summarising the number and nature of referrals. Although there were some safeguarding issues during lockdown (for example one vulnerable young learner didn't return the College's calls so the matter was referred to social services who subsequently confirmed he was safe) there were no significant incidents. Members **Noted** the Safeguarding and Child Protection Performance Impact report 2019/20 and Helen left the meeting.

34 Apprenticeship Update (paper 2705/20/L&Q)

This paper outlined the current status of the College's apprenticeship provision. The focus remained on getting apprentices to completion and onboarding new apprentices.

Pat stated that due to Covid-19 and in common with all colleges, there was concern about completion as some apprentices had been furloughed and end point assessment waiting times had increased. The College was monitoring this area closely. Current retention was 79.2% but would reduce to 76% due to Covid-19 withdrawals. There were 160 apprentices in September (below the 200 from 2019/20 but the comparative timeframe was to the end of October). Recruitment was expected to reach 185. There would be a wider opening of new starts in March. The second cohort of Pharmacy Technician apprentices would shortly join the College, bringing the total number to 40. Penny noted that the College was doing well in comparison to other providers. Tim M asked what extra support was being given to furloughed apprentices and Pat confirmed that the College was providing a great deal of support, with assessors maintaining contact with all apprentices including those on

furlough. Members **Noted** the apprenticeship update.

35 **VP Learning and Quality Monitoring Report (paper 2706/20/L&Q)**

This paper advised members on learning and quality matters at the start of 2020/21.

Covid-19 update: Regular COBR meetings with managers ensured that problems could be resolved immediately. Extensive work had been done to ensure the College conformed to social distancing, ventilation and hygiene requirements. The blended learning timetable would continue. Learning would be monitored by learning walks, remote observations and learner/staff feedback. Learners who were unable to access IT outside College were being issued with laptops. College WiFi areas had been expanded and enhanced.

16 to 19 Additional Funding: The College had received £214k ESFA additional funding to support 16-19 learners who had experienced disruption to their learning arising from Covid-19. Funding would be used to support improvement strategies in maths/English/practical assessments/study skills/examination preparation and wellbeing.

High value courses for college leavers: a one-year offer for 18 & 19 year olds. (Covid-19): This funding will be allocated from November 2020 to support young people into work, an apprenticeship or other work-based training. It was a short-term offer for an additional study of high value level 2 and 3 qualification for up to a year and represented a £400 uplift per learner to cover the additional costs of putting on courses at short notice.

Attendance (16-18 and 19+): Whilst attendance overall was below the revised target of 87% at 85.6%, it had improved from the last Ofsted inspection. Attendance for English and maths continued to be poor and would be a focus for improvement in 2020-21. Attendance during the lockdown was generally good in timetabled sessions and tutorials.

Higher Education: Two positive meetings had taken place with the University of Portsmouth to discuss developing a formal partnership. The University was keen to develop joint pathways within Health and Science and Business/Financial Services and a further meeting in September would progress outline requirements for a franchise.

Ofsted: Routine inspections were suspended until January 2021 and guidance had been published on the planned interim phase visits. The College was preparing for an interim visit in the autumn and a full reinspection in the spring. The report provided an overview of recent activities in response to the 2018 Ofsted inspection. There was a focus on articulating learners' starting point using ProMonitor and then sequencing learning through planning and assessment so that progression could be demonstrated. This underpinned many of the weaknesses identified by Ofsted. There was a brief discussion about the SAR which would be considered at the next meeting and then Corporation. It was traditional for governors to be involved in its validation and Penny hoped that would continue. Members were keen to get involved and it was **Agreed** that dates would be circulated. Tim M clarified that there was a College governance section previously.

Tim J acknowledged the amount of work undertaken to create a Covid secure environment and asked if there had been any suspected Covid cases and how it had/would be managed. He noted that the University had its own testing scheme and another FE college was considering purchasing a test system. Penny stated that there had not been any cases to date although some students had tested negative. The Health & Safety manager had drawn up flowcharts for each campus covering the different actions required if a student tested positive. Whilst the College only had a very small number tests, it could access more if necessary. The executive team were closely monitoring the number of Covid cases in the

local population and instigating precautionary measures as necessary, for example the level was now above 7.5 per 100,000 of the population so students and staff were required to wear masks in the corridors. Stephen had come into College recently and had been impressed with how it was laid out and how well everything seemed to be working. Pat stated that any students not following the rules were challenged swiftly and there hadn't been any problems to date. She noted that the College was preparing for partial closure at any time. Best practice was being shared with other FE colleges and Pat welcomed governors' views on what more could be done. Penny suggested Tim J might like to receive her principal updates to staff.

Learner inductions were well attended and would continue over the next month. John congratulated staff on the high attendance. Tim M noted the College's impressive activity and asked what publicity had been instigated. Pat agreed that it would be good to highlight key things and that this could be done when the College had learners' responses to the new academic year. John asked about the College's links with schools, noting that this had been a weakness in the past. Pat was looking to develop a long-term strategy to strengthen relationships. She believed schools and the University could see leadership had changed and was more transparent, demonstrated by the fact that the Vice-Chancellor would shortly visit the College. Tim J was encouraged the College was developing its relationship with the University. Members thanked Pat and **Noted** the Learning and Quality Monitoring Report.

36 Learning & Quality Risk Register (paper 2707/20/L&Q)

There were three risks for the Committee to consider, the most significant of which was the quality of the IT infrastructure. John noted that this was a perennial problem and it was therefore important that the College utilise the DfE funding wisely, particularly as there wasn't enough to carry out all the essential IT work. Penny stated that the Finance & Estates Committee had just agreed priority areas for consideration by the Board. Tim J agreed that, based on what the Head of IT had said at the Governors' Planning Day, investment in the IT infrastructure was crucial. Stephen asked about developing students' IT capability, ie not the networking infrastructure itself but if they had the necessary IT skills for employment. Penny agreed there needed to be an increased emphasis on students' IT employability skills and this was being developed.

The Chair thanked everyone for a very positive meeting and reiterated that governors were available for support at any point.

The meeting ended at 3.40pm