

**Minutes of the meeting of the
Academic Standards & Quality Development Committee
held on Friday 22nd November 2013 at 8:00am
in Room 814, Matthew Boulton Campus**

Present:	Apologies:
Ian Oakes (Chairman)	
Gala Albas (Student Member) (GA)	
Veronica Docherty (VD)	
Jenni Ord (JO)	
Tim Sunter (TS)	
Dagen Thompson (Staff Member Academic) (DT)	
In Attendance:	
David Beasley (Acting Clerk)	
Roger Minett (Executive Director Academic Affairs) (RM)	
Barbara Hughes (Director of Quality) (BH)	
Mukesh Kumar (Executive Director Curriculum) (MK)	
Julie Nugent (Executive Director (JN)	

Welcome & Apologies for Absence

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and particularly the new committee members. All Committee members were present.

Declarations of Interest

JO said that she was chair of Health Education West Midlands, which had commissioned some of the college's medical services. There were no other declarations save for those already declared in the Register of Interests.

Item 1 – Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Chairman led the Committee through the minutes of the meeting held on 20th June 2013 and it was agreed that they were a true and accurate record of the meeting.

Matters Arising

The Chairman confirmed the status of the matters arising from the June meeting:

- Para 3. Prepare a report on the geographical patterns of students – covered under Agenda Item 9.
- Para 4. The combined Self-Assessment Report to be available for the autumn meeting – covered under Agenda Item 5.
- Para 8. Circulate the Management Structure Chart to members – the Clerk had circulated this on 20th November.

Para 9. Move the autumn committee meeting to November – action completed. RM advised that bringing the meeting forward had created some challenges in having the reports completed in time.

Para 9. Circulate the Committee and Programme Management Board work plan to Board members – this had been done.

[The Chairman agreed to take the agenda items out of sequence in order to accommodate attendees' availability.]

Item 9 – Geographical Patterns of Students

9.1 JN tabled a report looking at the high level trends in student patterns saying that the information was reviewed regularly by the Executive as an input to the College's Marketing and Communications Strategy. She highlighted some of the key features of the data in terms of the local catchment area, as illustrated by the charts in the report. Governors asked concerning the impact of Sandwell College's new building and the trends for the students drawn from the local schools, particularly Perry Beeches and Great Barr, stating that market share was an important topic for the Committee. JN said that the overall numbers were holding up and that the report was a snapshot as recruitment took place all year round. The cause of the dip in the Stourbridge student numbers was questioned, was it merger-related or did it partly reflect the investments made by Dudley and Halesowen colleges? JN said that the changes made in the approach to student recruitment for the merged college should feed through into the figures for 2014/15.

9.2 The Chairman thanked JN for her report, noting that it was work in progress and asked for further analysis at the next meeting.

ACTION:

A follow-up report to be produced on student patterns for the spring committee meeting – JN.

Item 2 – Performance, Success Rates & Achievements 2012/13

2.1 RM tabled a glossary of terms and supporting results tables to accompany the report. He took the Committee through the key items in the glossary, emphasising the significance of the National Average definition as including 6th form colleges as well as general FE colleges. He reminded the governors that the published national average data was always one year behind the current year, in this case they were 2011/12 figures.

2.2 RM then presented the headline performance figures for 2012/13 as set out in the report, explaining that the results reflected combined data from the two colleges. Referring to the table of results on page 1 of the report for Long courses, he reported that the Level 1 success rates had increased by over 5% to nearly 85% for 16-18 courses and by over 16% to 88% for 19+ courses. The success rates for Level 2 courses had increased by similar margins and those for Level 3 courses had also increased. He was pleased to report that the consolidated college-wide success rates for internal delivery had increased by 5.72% to 87.44%, a notable result.

2.3 Turning to the results for the Functional Skills courses and referring to the results table on page 2 of the report, RM reported that in three of the four categories, the success rates had improved significantly over those in 2011/12. He said that the slight decrease in the Level 2 16-18 success rate was being evaluated but was probably down to student withdrawals. Improvements implemented related to student

advice and guidance and assessment were expected to have an impact on the 2013/14 results.

- 2.4 Governors asked if there were any particular trends in the results and said that it would be useful to see the granular data in support of the functional skills success rates, given the emphasis placed on this topic in the new inspection regime. They also asked if any of the factors behind the improvements could be transferred to the other areas. RM replied saying that the majority of the results had increased and that, on the whole, the information, advice and guidance provided, together with the increased rigour of in-year monitoring that had been introduced, had been the key factors. He added that the challenge provided by the series of Programme Monitoring Boards and improvements in the way that student course data was managed were also significant factors. The Chairman was pleased to note the good results reported.
- 2.5 RM then summarised the success rates for apprenticeships, explaining that they were based on completion of course frameworks and timely completion. He reported that the overall timely completion rate had reduced by 6% to 59%, adding that although these results were still 2% above the national average the College needed to do better. RM reported that overall workplace learning success rates had declined by 4.2% over 2011/12, saying that a significant contributory factor had been the issue of one of Stourbridge College's sub-contractors going into liquidation in June. In the light of this unforeseen situation the College had taken over the provision and had asked the SFA to amend the end dates, which they had agreed to in the interests of the affected students.
- 2.6 Governors asked a number of questions concerning the apprenticeship results, the factors impacting on performance and the situation of the failed sub-contractor. They asked for a better understanding of the contextual framework for the workplace learning provision and an analysis of the sub-contractor base in terms of the Sector Subject Areas and student numbers, given that there was an issue in respect of the balance between internal delivery and outsourcing, recognising that cost and quality were linked. Governors asked about the College's forecasting and monitoring systems in relation to having an earlier warning of problem areas. RM said that they were improving their forecasting and in-year monitoring and Governors should see the impact.
- 2.7 The Chairman brought the discussion to a close by noting that there were some corrective and improvement actions in hand and asking that a sub-contractor report be brought to the next meeting so that the issues could be reviewed in more detail. He concluded by saying that he was pleased to note the improvements made in most of the areas as a result of the actions taken over the past 2-3 years, whilst recognising that there was more work to be done. He thanked RM for his report.

ACTION:

A sub-contractor report on workplace delivery to be presented at the next Committee meeting – RM.

APPROVAL:

The Committee noted the Performance & Success Rates Report for 2012/13 and the overall improvement in success rate results over 2011/12.

[JN left the meeting at this point.]

Item 3 – Complaints Report 2012/13

- 3.1 BH presented the Complaints Report covering the previous academic year, noting that there were two key messages:

- the customer base had got stronger in the sense that people were more inclined to register complaints formally,
 - there was a need to reinforce the message to staff that it was important to address a complaint when it was first raised and with the appropriate behaviours.
- 3.2 BH reported that 122 complaints had been reported formally during the year, 17% more than in 2011/12. She said that a contributory factor in the increase was likely to be the increase in student numbers. There was no particular pattern to the complaints, they ranged across curriculum areas and academic and vocational courses. BH said that the highest proportion of complaints related to Student Services, enrolment and college facilities, and this correlated with the previous College SAR. In order to address this, there had been considerable investment in information, advice and guidance for students, plus on-line materials, and the College had reviewed its entry criteria. She concluded her report by saying that there had been a few complaints related to staff behaviour. The College always tried to respond in a professional manner but this was an aspect that needed on-going reinforcement.
- 3.3 Governors asked for confirmation that the report was based on the 2012/13 data for BMet only, and discussed whether the Student Voice could be engaged more and if, as a counter-balance, the College could also report on compliments received. In response to a question, KM confirmed that the College had implemented a 'you said, we did' exercise and that this had been coordinated centrally. It was agreed to have a progress report at the next meeting. The Chairman thanked BH for her report.

ACTION:

A complaints progress report to be presented at the next Committee meeting – BH.

APPROVAL:

The Committee noted the Complaints Report and the actions being taken.

Item 4 – Higher Education Annual Monitoring Report 2012/13

- 4.1 RM presented the HE Annual Monitoring Report, explaining that in the light of experience the College's quality procedures that were combined 2 years ago had since been split out again; there was a separate monitoring system in place for all HE courses. He added that in the light of the merger with Stourbridge College, the HE Strategic Plan was to be reviewed and updated.
- 4.2 RM referred Governors to the 'Progression and Achievement' table in the report, noting not only the very high level of achievements for some programmes but also the two courses noticeably under-performing, the Foundation Degrees in Early Years and Teaching Assistants.
- 4.3 Governors asked at what point a decision would have to be made to discontinue a course that was under-performing, and what the options were for retaining students. The Chairman asked that any under-performing courses be reviewed in March/April 2014.

ACTION:

The College to review under-performing HE courses in March/April and report back to the Committee – RM.

APPROVAL:

The Committee noted the HE Monitoring Report and the actions being taken.

Item 5 – College Self-Assessment Report 2012/13 & Quality Improvement Plan 2013/14

5a College Self-Assessment Report 2012/13

- 5a.1 BH presented the draft College Self-Assessment Report (SAR) for 2012/13, explaining that it needed to be placed on the SFA's gateway by early December and that it was important that it gave an honest picture of the College's strengths, the areas for improvement and the grades. BH said that the overall assessment of the College was 'Good with Outstanding Features', and referred Governors to the assessed grades for each Subject Sector Area in the SAR. The SAR was used to inform the staff development programme and the Quality Improvement Plan. She then invited questions on the draft SAR content.
- 5a.2 Governors made a number of suggestions on aspects of the wording in the draft SAR and the evidence supporting the assessment of the grades. In response to a question on value-added data, RM confirmed that this would be available in 2-3 weeks time. Governors commented on the importance of all the stakeholders understanding the College's position and how the supplier base was managed. The recently appointed governors pointed out that it was too early for them to be able to answer questions such as 'does the governance really work?', noting that they had not been through an annual appraisal/governance self-assessment yet. There was a discussion on the inclusion of information related to the current academic year, and it was agreed that it would be good to check the SAR that references to data were clear with regard to their applicability to 2012/13.
- 5a.3 RM pointed out that the grades were based not solely on success rates but on a number of other factors, environment, outcomes, level of improvement etc, and that the College would be robust in defending this approach as being valid. It was agreed that a college's environment and catchment area would be factors invoked by most inner city colleges. When challenged on the proposed SSA grades, RM said that SSA 3, Agriculture, Horticulture & Animal Care, graded as Requiring Improvement, should be re-assessed as it had relatively small student numbers. Governors raised a concern at the possibility of closing down provision, especially that taken up by students with special needs, albeit that it was important for the subject areas to achieve good grades.
- 5a.4 Governors welcomed the fact that Equality & Diversity were mentioned in the SAR, and noted the importance of ensuring that the provisions of the 2010 Equality Act were complied with, e.g. the publishing of the College's Equality Objectives. Governors suggested that the SAR content be reviewed to ensure that Safeguarding had sufficient prominence. The Committee confirmed that they were content to agree the SAR and recommend it to the Corporation subject to the incorporation of changes arising from the various comments made.

ACTIONS:

- (1) Circulate the EMSI Report referred to in the SAR – Clerk.
- (2) Implement clarifications to SAR wording as per Governors' comments – BH.
- (3) Review compliance with Equality Act requirements – BH.
- (4) Ensure Safeguarding given sufficient prominence in the SAR – BH.

APPROVAL:

The Committee agreed the Self-Assessment Report 2012/13 and to recommend it to the Corporation for approval, subject to the incorporation of Governors' comments.

5b College Quality Improvement Plan 2013/14

- 5b.1 BH presented the draft College Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) for 2013/14, saying that Governors should see a direct correlation with the SAR. BH explained that the document was the top-level QIP for the College, each department having its own improvement plan.
- 5b.2 Governors reviewed the improvement items in the QIP for the current year and asked to see the signed-off QIP for 2012/13 as a point of reference. There was a discussion on the review cycle for the improvement actions and it was agreed that there would be a progress update presented at the spring and summer Committee meetings.
- 5b.3 Governors asked concerning the impact of the merger on the staff as one might expect grumbles, disruption etc, noting that there had been concerns expressed by Stourbridge staff on the lack of feedback in relation to the setting of targets and budgets. RM explained that in terms of staff morale, all-staff meetings were being held at all sites and combined data was now being provided by the Programme Monitoring Boards. Budget allocations were done differently in that they were only disseminated once student numbers had been confirmed.

ACTIONS:

- (1) Implement clarifications to QIP wording as per Governors' comments – BH.
- (2) Circulate signed-off QIP 2011/12 – Clerk.
- (3) Present QIP Progress Report at subsequent Committee meetings – BH.

APPROVAL:

The Committee agreed the Quality Improvement Plan 2013/14 and to recommend it to the Corporation for approval, subject to the incorporation of Governors' comments.

Item 6 – Teaching & Learning Strategy 2013/14

- 6.1 BH presented the Teaching and Learning Strategy and summarised its key components as set out in the report. She explained that the lesson observation scheme had been revised and now included more short notice inspections. The aim of the Strategy and its implementation was much better data and improved curriculum delivery. Governors confirmed that the practices in place at Stourbridge College had been similar and asked about the staff consultation process. BH confirmed that staff had been consulted on the changes, via the directorates and also through the unions; it was important that staff understood that they would be seen more frequently. Governors said that it was good to see the targets stated for lesson observation grades, although 10% for Grade 3 represented c.150 teachers.
- 6.2 The Chairman thanked BH for her report.

APPROVAL:

The Committee noted the Teaching & Learning Strategy 2013/14 and would continue to monitor its impact.

Item 7 – Inspection Action Plan & Governors' Briefing

- 7.1 RM took the Committee through the Governors' section of the Inspection Action Plan, and then led the Governors in a discussion on the most appropriate form of pre-inspection briefings and their timing. It was agreed that 2 x 2 hour sessions would be arranged for Committee members. Governors requested a handout containing responses to the question posed in the Inspection Framework 'what governors need

to know'. RM confirmed that there would also be a follow-up KIT session on Inspection on 29th November.

APPROVAL:

The Committee noted the report for information.

Item 8 – Learner Voice Enrolment & Induction Survey

8.1 BH presented the key points in the report.:

- The enrolment survey during August and September achieved a higher number of responses compared to 2012-13.
- Overall satisfaction levels were good and improving in most areas compared to the previous year.
- BMet was in the upper quartile of responses compared to 78 general FE and tertiary providers.

8.2 BH reported that, generally, feedback had been positive to the survey with some good points being fed back by the students. A better response had been obtained this year as a result of students being able to complete the survey on-line.

8.3 The Chairman thanked BH for the report, saying it had been improved.

APPROVAL:

The Committee noted the report for information.

Item 10 – Harborne Academy Update

10.1 RM reported that the new building was now open and staff and students had been in it since half-term and were delighted with the facilities. Chris Hilton, currently Principal of Black Country UTC, had been appointed as the new Academy Director/Head Teacher from January 2014. RM completed his update by saying that the completion of Phase 2 of the works, including the demolition of the old school buildings, was scheduled for February 2014.

10.2 The Chairman congratulated the College on the achievement.

Item 11 – Any Other Business

11.1 RM reported that the College had just won the AoC's Beacon Award for Employer Engagement.

The meeting closed at 10:15am.

Date of Next Meeting – Thursday 6th March 2014.

Signed.....*J. Rocherty*.....Date.....*6/3/2014*.....
Chair of the AS&QD Committee

