



**Minutes of the meeting of the Quality and Curriculum Committee on  
Wednesday 25 February 2009 at 5.00pm in Room 3F099, York College**

- Present:** Alison Birkinshaw  
Kevin Deadman  
Andrew Lindsay  
David Maughan Brown  
Andy Mendus (Chair)
- In Attendance:** Robert Grierson, Quality Assurance Manager  
Richard Hinde, Clerk to the Governing Body  
Graeme Murdoch, Deputy Principal Quality Assurance & Support (QA&S)  
Bob Saynor, Assistant Principal Lifelong Learning & HE  
Clare Wareing, Assistant Principal 14-19 Vocational

The meeting started at 5.05pm.

**Action**

**09.01 Apologies for Absence / Declarations of Interest**

Apologies were received from Louise Lawrence-Crockford. It was also noted that Bob Saynor would be joining the meeting later. There were no declarations of interest.

**09.02 Minutes of Previous Meeting – 10 November 2008**

Subject to clarification of the following points, the minutes of the meeting held on 10 November 2008 were approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chair. In relation to minute 08.42 on the Strategic Plan 2008/11, it was stated that future updates could be more “descriptive”. It was also noted that it was a Post 16 Strategy Meeting that had been arranged.

**09.03 Matters Arising**

a) Action Summary Sheet

The action summary sheet was considered and it was noted that all items had been actioned or carried forward as appropriate. Progress with the College’s Level 1 provision was also queried and a brief verbal report provided. The Chair stated that it would be good for an update report on this to be provided at the next meeting of the Committee, explaining what had been done and what had been achieved, including value-added. The Chair also suggested that it would be appropriate for this report to then be presented at the subsequent Governing Body meeting.

**DPQA&S**

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b) Information, Advice & Guidance

The Deputy Principal Quality Assurance & Support (DPQA&S) presented the report identifying the structure of Information, Advice & Guidance (IAG) activities within the City of York; exploring the College’s approach to IAG; and considering issues going forward such as the Common Application Process and the College’s application for the IAG Quality

Standard (matrix).

It was noted that the Connexions advisers in York schools were employed and managed by the City of York Council. The Committee expressed its dismay that in this context their attendance at recent College events had been so disappointing, and encouraged the College to review this with the Council.

It was reported that the East Riding had introduced the Common Application Process and the College was receiving applications through this system, whereas the City of York had deferred its implementation, most likely towards the end of 2010. It was stressed, however, that it was essential for the College's application processes to be accessible to all and that the "digitally dis-enfranchised" should not be overlooked. Discussion took place about research undertaken into the most common routes for students to access the College. Although the College was adopting innovative ways of promoting itself and communicating with potential learners, it was explained that the vast majority of students came on the recommendation of a friend or family member.

It was noted that the College's Student Services had held the IAG Quality Standard since 2001 but that the College was now seeking to expand this accreditation to the whole College. To this end, the College would be subject to a four day inspection in October 2009.

c) Any Other Matters Arising

None.

#### **09.04 LSC Reports**

a) MLP Report 2007/08

The Deputy Principal Quality Assurance & Support (DPQA&S) presented the report with data from the LSC showing overall improvements in respect of the proportion of the College's provision that was below Minimum Levels of Performance (MLPs).

It was reported that the LSC set 'Minimum Levels of Performance' for all courses, and expected all providers to meet or exceed these. They issued Notices to Improve if more than 15% of courses by length of programme (long or short) had success rates below their published minima, and this could be a precursor to removing funding in future years.

The DPQA&S explained that while no College curriculum area had breached this 15% rule in 2007-08, nevertheless overall 7.9% of long courses, 4.1% of short courses, and 35.1% of very short courses were below MLP.

It was explained that whilst the College would not receive any Notices to Improve from the LSC, any individual qualification that performed below the MLP in 2007/08 had been issued with an internal Notice to Improve

as part of the College's self-assessment process. Progress reviews carried out during February 2009 had indicated that significant improvements were being realised during 2008/09.

Discussion took place about specific provision and the reasons why internal Notices to Improve had been necessary. It was explained that perhaps the biggest influence on success rates was the course teacher and their relationship with the learners. This was said to be key to continuing future improvement.

In relation to MLPs generally, it was noted that some of the MLPs for A Levels were actually above 2007/08 national averages. It was also noted that school sixth form provision was not measured in the same way.

#### b) FE Success Rates 2007/08

The Deputy Principal QA&S presented the report with a copy of the FE Success Rates document produced and published by the LSC on its Provider Quality Gateway in January 2009, relating to the College's performance. Improvements in success rates had been significant, across both age groups and at all levels.

It was reported that overall success rates for the College in 2007/08 had increased from 71% the previous year to 76%. For 16-18 Long courses success rates had increased from 71% in 2006/07 to 77%. For 16-18 Short courses success rates had remained the same as the previous year at 76%. Success rates for Adult Long courses had increased from 66% to 71%; and for Adult Short courses from 75% to 78%.

Consideration was then given to the further breakdown of data by level, Division, gender, ethnicity and age. It was noted that the improvements in success rates were largely down to improvements in achievement and that further work was still required in seeking to improve the College's retention levels.

In relation to Equality and Diversity, it was noted that - consistent with the national trend - success rates of female learners were better than those for male learners. It was also noted that overall the College's BME learners attained higher success rates at 81% than their non-BME counterparts at 77%.

Members then went on to consider how much the College had improved in relation to the sector as a whole by looking at the percentile change from 2006/07 to 2007/08. It was noted that improvement had been very significant and that the College's success rates had improved at a much greater rate than the sector as a whole.

The Deputy Principal QA&S then reported on the one day Ofsted inspection visit that had recently taken place within the College. It was reported that six key areas had been reviewed, and in three of these areas Ofsted had found that significant progress had been made. In two

areas, which Ofsted had already identified as strengths, reasonable progress had been made; and in Key Skills Ofsted had also found that reasonable progress had been made. It was reported that as a result of this visit, the College's risk category had remained as "good". Ofsted had also indicated that the College's Self Assessment Report judgements were good, and that the College's Work Based Learning results were good. No negative comments had been made.

Discussion then took place about possible ways that the College could try and improve learner attendance rates further, whilst acknowledging that the College's current retention rate was already above the national average.

(It was agreed to defer agenda item 5.1 until the arrival of Bob Saynor.)

#### **09.05 Learner Success: Previous Year Achievement Results**

##### b) Employer Engagement

The Deputy Principal QA&S presented the report on the College's Employer Engagement learner success rates for 2007/08 which showed significant improvements in Work Based Learning, Train to Gain and Construction Skills. It was explained that the main improvement factors had been a review of delivery pattern; enhanced student progress tracking; and better data capture. It was also explained that whilst the results showed a marked improvement over previous years, the current economic climate and its effect on job security was a serious cause for concern.

The Principal stated that the Assistant Principal Employer Engagement was a great asset to the Employer Engagement team and was a key driver in helping to achieve the improvements sought.

#### **09.06 Learner Recruitment: 14-16;16-19; 19+; HE; International; Employer Engagement**

The Deputy Principal QA&S presented the report providing the latest data on College recruitment as at 6 February 2009, together with a summary of key issues arising from initial analysis.

(Bob Saynor joined the meeting at 6.10pm.)

With 16-18 Learners (excluding apprenticeships) it was reported that there was an increase of 121 learners compared with the 2007/08 outturn and the College was achieving 96.04% of its LSC year end target. The College was forecasting reaching a year-end position for 2008/09 of 3580 learners which was 97% of its target. The latest Standard Learner Numbers (SLN) forecast, together with forecasting of provision not yet enrolled, brought the College to 95.24% of its SLN target (4985.95 SLNs compared with a target of 5234.97 SLNs).

16-18 Apprenticeships were currently 92 below target which was almost

the same position as reported in December 2008. The College remained concerned about meeting the year-end targets, as in the current economic climate there continued to be evidence that employers were reluctant to take on Apprentices, which was leading to conversion from Apprenticeships to full time FE programmes. There had also been changes during the year as students had lost employers and the College was likely to see a continuation of switching between 16 -18 Learner Responsive and Apprenticeship provision.

With Adult Responsive (19+) Provision (excluding Apprenticeships) The College was currently achieving 65.69% of its year-end target, based on learner numbers and 81.68% of its year end SLN target. It was currently forecasting a year-end position which was 87.45% of its targeted learner numbers.

19+ Apprenticeships were currently 32 below target, with the same concerns as for 16-18 Apprenticeships. With FE Workplace NVQs and Train to Gain, it was reported that Train to Gain would enrol throughout the year, and the College's present forecast was that it would achieve its targets.

Construction Skills were very close to target. HE provision was above target, and International recruitment had continued to be below target.

#### **09.07 Learner Success: Previous Year Achievement Results (continued)**

##### **a) 19+; HE; International**

The Deputy Principal QA&S and Assistant Principal Lifelong Learning and HE presented the report showing the success rates for adult students for the previous year and the preceding four years.

It was reported that outcomes for 2007/08 showed significant improvements over previous years and this had been the result of targeted student support and closer attention to data accuracy. It was stated that one of the criticisms made by Ofsted in January 2008 was that whilst the College was improving outcomes, it was doing so slower than the sector as a whole. If the outcomes in terms of percentiles were considered it was now clear that the improvements made in 2007/08 were greater than those realised by the sector as a whole.

With Higher Education overall success rates had improved by 10% on 2006/07 to 69%, which had largely been as a result of significant improvements in student achievement.

Success rates for International students overall was said to be high at 84%. This was said to be due to high outcomes in both retention and achievement.

#### **09.08 Learner Attendance and Retention 2008/09**

The Deputy Principal QA&S presented the report on learner attendance and retention for the year to date as at 16 February 2009. It was reported

that College attendance overall was 87% against a target of 88%, and the impact of the recent snow and the College's 4 week rule was being investigated. Retention was said to be positive across all ages and levels of provision except for Adult Long Level 2 courses, and the possible reasons for this were currently being investigated. Discussion took place about the pros and cons of the College issuing attendance certificates to try and boost attendance levels, together with the significance of College references provided to prospective employers or other training establishments.

The Committee also considered the levels of student withdrawals and the reasons and timing of these. It was noted that the reasons were very varied and there were no obvious primary causes across all categories. However for part-time students the impact of the economic climate had been significant. The Committee requested that for future reports it would be beneficial to be provided with the actual numbers of withdrawals as well as with percentages.

DPQA&S

#### **09.09 14 – 19 Diplomas Update**

The Assistant Principal 14 -19 Vocational presented the report updating on the current position regarding 14 –19 Diplomas within the College. It was reported that the academic year 2008/09 had seen the first intake of students onto the new 14-19 Diploma and the College was currently running 2 lines of learning. These were in Society, Health & Development (SHD): Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3; and in Engineering Level 3.

It was reported that whilst recruitment had been strong, the Diplomas had not been without challenges and the Committee went on to consider these. It was explained that the expectations placed on Level 1 and Level 2 SHD courses were very significant – being equivalent to 7 GCSEs within 10 months and this had posed problems. It was noted that a uniform entry requirement had been set across York for this year but it was now clear that this had been set too low. The College would be introducing what it considered to be the most appropriate entry requirements for the next year's intake. It was also felt that the design of the diplomas was too theoretical and not practical enough for the majority of learners. It was noted that members of the College's SHD team sat on a number of influential national bodies and were ensuring that the College's experiences and concerns were being made known. Progress with the two year Level 3 course was said to be good.

With the Level 3 Engineering course it was reported that all 16 learners remained on the course and were making good progress. However, with the current economic climate, placing all of the College's students with engineering companies, was proving to be difficult as some of the College's experienced work placement providers were no longer able to participate.

It was reported that in September 2009 the College would see 5

additional lines of learning offered in ICT; Hair & Beauty; Manufacturing; Creative & Media; and Business Administration, and the College was endeavouring to learn from its SHD and Engineering experiences in order to share effective practice and resources. The Committee then went on to consider what the College considered to be the potential difficulties or weaknesses going forward.

#### **09.10 Learner Destinations**

The Deputy Principal QA&S presented the report outlining the destinations of the College's full-time students who had completed a qualification at the end of July 2008.

(Clare Wareing left the meeting at 6.50pm.)

It was reported that the proportion of students who had progressed onto 'positive' destinations was 79.7%, compared with 81.3% in 2006/07 and 82.1% in 2005/06. The number of "unknown" destinations was reducing, and was very low compared to other colleges. However the number of students opting for an "other" destination such as voluntary work, or a gap year had increased. The College was currently carrying out further analysis on this as it was believed that many of the learners in this category were actually waiting to move on to a "positive" destination.

It was noted that progression to HE had reduced marginally to 34.8% (from 35.9%) which was contrary to the College's aims, and the College was seeking to promote this type of progression further. However, it was also explained that the College's HE numbers had been capped for the next academic year, and the College would be penalised if it recruited above the level of HE provision that it had undertaken this year.

#### **09.11 Learner Satisfaction Survey**

The Quality Assurance Manager presented the report on the College's First Impressions Questionnaire for 2008/09, which had been carried out in November 2008. It was reported that 2441 returns had been received which represented a response rate of 65%. It was reported that 16 responses had improved; 4 had stayed the same; and none had gone down. The top response with 95% was for "I feel I am on the right course". Second was "I am treated fairly and equally" with 94%; and third was "I am enjoying College" with 93%. The least positive response with 72% related to the College's publicity brochures and leaflets.

Analysis of the results in terms of gender, ethnicity, disability and age was then considered.

The Quality Assurance Manager then circulated copies of the "Listening to Learners" poster the College had subsequently produced highlighting the key results; identifying what learners had said they wanted and showing what the College was doing in response.

Discussion took place about the LSC's online survey under Framework

For Excellence, and it was explained that as a result of this the College would not be carrying out its own On Programme Questionnaire but would instead be issuing a revised End of Year Survey. Discussion also took place about lesson timetabling and the length of College days; and about the pricing of food in the College's food outlets.

#### **09.12 Observation of Teaching & Learning**

The Quality Assurance Manager presented the report with the summary of the College's Observations of Teaching & Learning (OTL). It was reported that the current grade profile was that 74% of observations were "good" or better. This was down from 78% on the previous year due to the College specifically targeting under-performing areas. The number of OTLs carried out had also increased significantly from 128 to 232 compared to this time last year.

It was noted that there were still some subject areas with very few observations recorded. The Principal assured the Committee that this was being monitored closely, and that she or other members of the SMT would carry out the required observations if a curriculum area was unable to do so. The Principal also confirmed her intention that all part-time tutors would be observed and if necessary coached / mentored this year.

**QAM**

It was explained that further work had to be carried out to try and drive up the quality of teaching where observations had been judged "satisfactory", without placing undue pressure on staff. It was noted that moving a proportion of satisfactory lessons to good would be an important and achievable contributor to improving overall College performance. The Principal commented that it was not realistic to expect 100% of outstanding lessons from any College. Other elements of the OTL scheme were outlined including peer reviews, and it was said that Governors were welcome to take part in any observation. Clarification was sought as to whether the results provided also included all part-time lecturers.

#### **09.13 Internal Reviews Report – Two Year Programmes**

The Quality Assurance Manager presented the report on the College's internal review of its two year programmes with Notices to Improve, which had been carried out in December 2008. The key findings of the report and the strengths and weaknesses of these programmes were considered, together with the resultant quality improvement plan. It was **agreed** that the final update of the quality improvement plan should be presented to the Committee at its next meeting in May.

**DPQA&S**

#### **09.14 Inspection Updates**

##### **a) Post Inspection Action Plan (Ofsted)**

The Deputy Principal QA&S referred again to the positive feedback received from Ofsted's most recent visit, and then went on to present the report updating on progress with the College's Post Ofsted Inspection Action Plan. It was explained that overall progress with the actions

contained within this Plan had been good, particularly in relation to qualification success rates (but excluding Key Skills). Whilst improvements in Key Skills success rates had been seen they were not yet at an acceptable level. Work was ongoing with students in relation to Value Added scores. Greater clarity had been provided in relation to the Tutorial Programme, and areas where further work was ongoing were improving student behaviour; reviewing data management systems; and engagement with part-time staff.

b) IQER Outcomes

The Assistant Principal Lifelong Learning & HE presented the report together with a copy of the letter to the College indicating the provisional judgements made in respect of the recent IQER Summative Review at the College. It was reported that the outcome was very pleasing for the College with many areas of good practice identified. Two of the three core themes reviewed had received the highest level of satisfaction possible, and the provisional recommendations were all at the 'desirable' level, which was the lowest possible level of recommendation. The formal report was expected within the next week or so, and the College would produce a draft action plan which would be considered by the College's HE Quality Group on 25 February 2009.

**09.15 SAR Improvement Plan – Progress Report**

The Deputy Principal QA&S presented the report updating on progress against the College's Self Assessment Report Improvement Plan for 2008/09. It was reported that progress against planned actions was good, and that increasingly emphasis had been placed on teaching and learning related activities and this was being taken on board by staff across the College. It was also reported that, as seen earlier in the meeting, a more targeted approach to Internal Reviews was being used to support areas requiring improvement such as IT & Computing; Health & Social Care; and 2 year programmes. Minimum Target Grades were being used with all A level students and most vocational students and OTL outcomes were being used effectively within Teaching & Learning teams.

It was **agreed** that a further report updating on final progress would be presented at either the last meeting of the Committee this academic year or the first meeting of the Committee in the autumn term.

**DPQA&S**

**09.16 Strategic Plan 2008/11 Section Update: QA and T&L**

The Deputy Principal QA&S presented the report updating on progress with the quality assurance sections of the College's current Strategic Plan. Attention was drawn to the wide range of activities that had been undertaken, and it was explained that the impact of these would be realised with the qualification success rates at the end of 2008/09.

It was noted that the next scheduled review of the Teaching and Learning sections of the Strategic Plan would be on 27 February 2009. However, it was stressed that significant work had been undertaken in

relation to 'Raising the Standards' changes to the OTL structures and to issues that impacted on student performance.

It was **agreed** that a final update report would be provided to the Committee at its last meeting of this academic year.

DPQA&S

**09.17 Committee Effectiveness Questionnaire for 2007/08**

The Clerk presented the report with the summary of the Members' responses to the Quality & Curriculum Committee effectiveness questionnaire for 2007/08. It was noted that it had been agreed that the questionnaire would be revised for issue next time. It was also acknowledged that a greater return rate by Members would have made the responses more meaningful.

**09.18 Any Other Business**

It was reported that the Quality Assurance Manager had secured a new appointment as Vice Principal at a sixth form college, and would be leaving later in the year. Members recorded their congratulations to him.

**09.19 Date of Next Meeting**

Wednesday 29 April 2009 at 5.00pm.

The meeting closed at 7.55pm.

**Signed:**

**Chair:**

**Name:**

**Date:**