

Minutes of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (FE)
held remotely on Tuesday 23 March 2021

Present: John Nicol (Chair)
Jennette Arnold
Kate Murrie
Abigail Appleton (Principal)
Katie Seekings
Ellie Arbuthnott (Student Governor)

In attendance: Justin Gregory (Head of Higher Education)
Xaviere Hughes (Head of Further Education)
Linda Watkins (Clerk to the Governors)

The meeting was quorate as six Members were present. The Chair commented that all papers for this meeting and the combined meeting were extremely clear which answered potential questions from Governors. This was reiterated by Governors with staff commended on the quality of their reports.

1. Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the last meeting: 24 November 2020

It was agreed that the Chair should sign the minutes as a true record.

A timetable would be issued to Governors with invitations to see some lessons. The Chair reported that he had attended a music performance clinic online which had been fantastic. **ACTION HEAD OF FE/CLERK**

The Committee agreed: -

- To approve the minutes of the last meeting

4. Update on managing the impact of COVID-19 and supporting students remotely

The Head of FE summarised that attendance has been good with tutors using innovative practice in English and maths to maintain student engagement. A flavour of activities was outlined including music performance clinics, peer interviews for HE applications, live externally facing projects, sharing resources and visiting speakers. There had been excellent practice and evidence of team work with some student facing roles deployed to make wellbeing check-in calls to students and help with lateral flow testing. Students participated in a live project for Herefordshire Council to design marketing material 'hands face space'. There have been staggered returns with all students due to return after Easter.

COVID-19 guidelines are updated regularly and accessible on the website.

The Committee agreed: -

- To recognise the hard work by the Head of FE and staff to support students during the lockdown and pandemic

5. Performance Data 2020/21

The Head of FE presented the report showing attendance is good at 93% overall; a 3% improvement compared with last year. Students' progress and learning is being tested to ensure students have been engaged in learning during lockdown. The music course has slightly lower attendance at 89% which reflected a few students with poor attendance who are being supported individually by teaching staff and the wellbeing development lead with ongoing monitoring. English and maths attendance is 86%. There are concerns about the level of student engagement with strategies embedded to address.

A Governor raised the risk that students could log on to lessons but not necessarily participate, particularly if cameras are switched off. It was confirmed that attendance is on track and also that it is crucial to evidence student engagement. There was another question about students who might be reluctant to contribute to online lessons asking if different approaches are being used to address this. Teachers regularly review techniques and share best practice. Some students have found lockdown challenging which had been reflected by their engagement. Students who are uncomfortable using cameras are encouraged to engage by using the 'chat function' on Teams which has been used with high levels of contribution from students. A question followed if these students would have been disengaged before the COVID pandemic noting that a proportion of students were likely to have required support to engage. Teaching techniques are tailored to support students who lack confidence. It was noted that some students have been working in challenging situations to study at home with shared equipment and rooms with siblings. Additional support and wellbeing checks have been offered. The Student Governor commented some students are not motivated to work remotely but work better in College with other people around them.

Retention is good at 98% overall. A few students have left their courses during lockdown. UAL have issued new guidelines for special consideration and reasonable adjustment. A Governor asked for the latest overall retention which would be provided.

ACTION: HEAD OF FE

Applications for 2021/22 are buoyant with a 7% increase on last year and a significant increase to the Foundation course. This could have been impacted by the pandemic resulting in some students deciding to take a creative gap year. Station Approach accommodation is also attractive to applicants. In-year progression will increase with 124 Level 3 students this year.

Online processes adopted to liaise with applicants were outlined including social media and Zoom interviews. Applications to Digital Futures are slightly lower at this point in the year which could have been affected by remote communication and limited visual resources and images to share online as a new course. The College is working with schools and will introduce tours to campus next term. A Governor asked if parents understand the content of the course based on the title which needed to be clearly iterated to parents.

English and maths progress was presented noting face to face delivery was introduced in the autumn, followed by staggered delivery before moving to online delivery during lockdown. Teachers are working extremely hard to maintain student engagement. English and maths will continue to be delivered online until Easter. A curriculum support tutor has been supporting students who attained prior GCSE qualifications in English but are finding written work challenging. The online learning platform Century Tech is available; students have used this less frequently during lockdown as they have become overloaded with online learning.

MOTs were completed for each student in January with follow up letters sent to parents following assessments outlining any concerns. Teachers have been in contact with assessors regarding centre assessed grades and submission of digital evidence of

students' progress. Students' work is being recorded with assessments signed off in readiness for an exam board at the end of the year. Students are also being supported to make different stages of their learning visible on the visible platform.

The Committee agreed: -

- To note the report, key issues and supporting statistics
- To acknowledge the increase in staffs' workload to support students, particularly some students who have heightened anxiety levels

6. Teaching, Learning and Assessment

The Head of FE reminded Governors that teachers were previously observed using a BRAG rated professional development cycle. This changed to a self assessment process completed before Christmas which was shared with curriculum teams before staff were paired with staff in different curriculum areas. Technical Demonstrators are part of the process who are a fundamental part of students' teaching and learning experience. A Governor suggested introducing external reviews to verify teaching and learning and share best practice which could be achieved with a peer observation partner. This would be discussed further at the combined Committee meeting.

The FE team submitted a continuous improvement plan. The SAR includes a staff development plan to address the learning lag, development cycle and careers support. The College is working with Hereford Careers Hub on meeting Gatsby Standards and British Values.

The Committee agreed: -

- To note the report on teaching and learning agreeing Governors would be invited to see teaching, both online and in College

7. Leadership and Management

SLT are discussing options to use the campus more effectively to accommodate FE student growth next year.

Annual quality calendars have been developed for FE and HE incorporating actions to embed the strategy. A marketing calendar for events will also be prepared and made available to Governors.

The Committee agreed: -

- Governors were aware of the immense pressures on SLT to continue to focus on the College's strategic direction whilst addressing additional operational issues during the pandemic

8. Identification of Key Risks

- I. Challenge of transition for students to make up for lost learning skills as a result of COVID-19
- II. Consolidating the digital curriculum
- III. Art and Design Level 1 and 2 which is a small team and new way of working
- IV. GCSE English and maths
- V. Ofsted EIF
- VI. Recruitment to digital futures
- VII. Student wellbeing and mental health following lockdown

9. Any other business

There were no items.

Minutes of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee
(HE and FE Combined Meeting)
held remotely on Tuesday 23 March 2021

- Present:** Abigail Appleton (Principal)
Jennette Arnold
Kate Murrie
Tim Newsholme
John Nicol (Chair of the meeting)
Mike Rookes
Katie Seekings
Ellie Arbuthnott (Student Governor FE)
Hannah Jones (Student Governor HE)
Jordan Knight (Student Governor HE)
- In attendance:** Justin Gregory (Head of Higher Education)
Xaviere Hughes (Head of Further Education)
Linda Watkins (Clerk to the Governors)

The meeting was quorate as ten Members were present.

1. Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

It was agreed that John Nicol, as chair of the meeting, should sign the minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2020 as a true record.

Matters arising had been actioned.

The Committee agreed: -

- To approve the minutes of the last meeting

3. Draft Minutes of the Academic Board – 26 February 2021

These were noted

4. Consumer Markets Authority (CMA)

The Head of HE reminded Governors that the Office for Students (OfS) is the regulatory authority for HE which includes CMA rules as part of the conditions of registration. The College completed an annual CMA audit and an additional audit relating specifically to COVID-19. The action plans were presented to the Committee which evidence practices and provide assurance that the College is compliant to CMA obligations during the pandemic.

Changes made to practices in response to COVID-19 have been communicated to students and are focused on the students' experience.

Consumer protection is a fundamental ongoing obligation covering the quality of advice offered to students before enrolment, programme delivery and an open and fair complaints process. CMA have recognised the impact of COVID-19. The College retains records of its decision-making and communications with applicants and

students.

The action plan evidencing compliance to CMA during the pandemic showed recent changes to assessment dates, with term dates extended to increase students' access to workshops; these were communicated to students. Student Governors confirmed that there had been effective and prompt communication with explanations.

The Committee agreed: -

- To note the action plans evidencing compliance to CMA showing that the College is focused on student experience and learning
- The CMA audit will be completed annually with the action plan reported to the Committee to evidence compliance to CMA requirements

5. Update on the Cross-College Mental Health Action Plan

The Principal summarised the purpose of the action plans explaining that the Incident Management Group regularly review the action plan to support student and staffs' wellbeing and mental health during the Covid-19 pandemic. The College's Mental Health Group also reviews this alongside the whole College mental health action plan.

The College completed Universities UK Step Change's self assessment audit in the autumn. RSM, internal auditors, audited mental health arrangements which gave substantial assurance and was a positive report evidencing effective processes were embedded to support students to feel safe and build resilience. During lockdown support staff were deployed to check-in with students about their wellbeing. Mental health and wellbeing is part of HE development for curriculum design. The College is refreshing the APDR system for staff to ensure clarity of objectives, professional development and support to make the process less stressful and more supportive to staff.

The Committee agreed: -

- To note the mental health action plan evidencing robust processes to support student and staff wellbeing

6. Policies and Strategies

The following policies were presented which had been discussed by the Academic Board.

- I. The Behaviour and Disciplinary Policy and new Harassment Policy are interlinked with the complaints policy, fitness to study policy and attendance policy for HE. This will be a supportive process for students to enable them to continue their studies and achieve.
- II. The Complaints Policy was discussed with minor changes proposed to paragraph 66 to include a request from the complainant for attendance to meetings by a Union Rep under ACAS rules. Paragraph 68 that meetings will not be recorded in accordance with data protection legislation. Equality, diversity and inclusion will be added to the policy explaining that the policy will not disadvantage anyone from the protected groups. Details of retention of evidence for storage of complaints will be added. Mediation is a new feature in the policy which would look at different perspectives, personalities and cultures. Mediation could be offered informally at stage 1 before progressing to stage 2 and formal stages. The HE Operations Administrator had systemized timescales in the policy.
ACTION: PRINCIPAL
- III. The Admissions Policy was agreed subject to an amendment to include

the approximate cost of the study programme for HE students which was already included for FE interviews and auditions. This was oversight and would be amended. Clarification was sought about the requirement to declare spent criminal convictions noting that this met the legal requirement and applies to HE and FE students, even if they are under 18 years old. **ACTION: PRINCIPAL**

- IV. The Freedom of Speech Policy had been revised to take account of guidance published by the DfE. This is about promoting freedom of speech and protecting students. There was an error in 3.7 which should read HE providers and not HE provisions. **ACTION: PRINCIPAL**

The Committee agreed: -

- To approve the Complaints Policy in principle with final sign off by the Chairs of the HE and FE Committee **ACTION: CLERK TO THE GOVERNORS**
- To approve the Admissions Policy subject to the minor change proposed
- To approve the Freedom of Speech Policy subject to the minor typographical error

7. **Letter from the Gavin Williamson MP, Secretary of State: Freedom of Speech**
Correspondence from the Secretary of State for Education was noted.

8. **Student Experience**

- I. The Quality Strategy provides an overarching framework for academic delivery of programmes throughout the College. It will ensure regulatory requirements are achieved and align FE and HE processes to the strategic plan. Separate quality cycles for FE and HE were attached to the strategy. The AQ&S Committee (FE) had previously discussed peer observations with challenge from Governors if these would be robust and objective as a standalone process. A risk had been highlighted that teachers could deliver a showcase lesson for a lesson observation which are accredited and RAG rated; however, lessons observed do not always give an accurate assessment of that lesson. The Head of FE and Head of HE regularly walk through lessons which gives a flavour of teaching and learning. In addition, the Head of FE and Head of HE can also observe lessons with an evaluation of wider teaching, such as students' work, and support teachers to continually improve. Assurance was provided that action can be taken promptly in response to underperforming teachers which does not rely solely on peer observations. This process allows and encourages staff to take risk in their teaching practices. Governors suggested considering the option to introduce external moderation and student observations which give clear feedback. Governors were encouraged by the paper and its focus on teachers being encouraged to deliver high quality teaching to students.
- II. The College is required to submit a report to OfS in April evidencing progress against the Access and Participation Plan (APP) 2019/20. This will be signed off by the Principal as the Accountable Officer. OfS recently released data which will inform the report; this will include a student review and comment. The APP demonstrates the College's commitment to students, OfS and other stakeholders. It is central to the College's values and strategy. The APP also takes account of the impact of COVID-19. The report demonstrated that targets have been achieved with the exception of those impacted by lockdown which have a mitigation. The College assesses current and end of year student continuation rates using the OfS measure of the number of students at the start date compared to 1 year and 14 days from that date. The Student Governor, who is the SU President and part of the Student Council, gave the

Committee reassurance that the Student Council had discussed the report which reflects work undertaken by the College.

- III. OfS correspondence: regulation during the current phase of the coronavirus pandemic was noted with no issues of concern identified.

The Committee agreed: -

- To dedicate additional time to discuss teaching and learning at the next meeting drawing on Governors' experience and challenge to ensure systems are robust. **ACTION: CLERK**
- A report would be provided on the impact of peer observations, difference in practice and the impact to students to date
- To note the positive report evidencing progress to achieve the APP 2019/20
- To note OfS correspondence

9. Any other business

There were no items.

10. Date and time of next meeting

The next meeting was arranged for Tuesday 29 June 2021 with the FE: 2.00 pm, combined meeting: 3.15 pm and HE: 4.30 pm.

Minutes of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (HE)
held remotely on Tuesday 23 March 2021

Present: Katie Seekings (Chair)
Abigail Appleton (Principal)
Hannah Jones
Jordan Knight
Tim Newsholme
Mike Rookes

In attendance: Linda Watkins (Clerk to the Governors)
Justin Gregory (Head of Higher Education)
Xaviere Hughes (Head of Further Education)

The meeting was quorate as six Members were present

1. **Apologies for absence**
There were no apologies for absence.
2. **Declaration of Interests**
There were no declarations of interest.
3. **Minutes of the last meeting: 24 November 2020**
It was agreed that the Chair should sign the minutes as a true record subject to a typographical error. There were no matters arising.

The Committee agreed: -

- To approve the minutes of the last meeting

4. **Key Data for 2020/21 Enrolment, retention and applications 2021/22**
Attendance was good. There was concern that this did not reflect engagement. The online environment has wellbeing challenges for some students with detailed conversations with lecturers about individual student wellbeing and support.

Retention is very good. Some students' progress has been masked by extended deadlines and credits awarded last year following lockdown with some extenuating circumstances this year. Students are being supported. It is anticipated that a few students may choose to withdraw by the end of the academic year.

Applications are less than last year and of concern. The HE environment is competitive and aggressive. Firm acceptances are lower than at the same period last year; it is perceived that some applicants are cautious about value for money and the impact of COVID-19 on their studies. This may change after Easter when restrictions begin to be lifted. The F&GP Committee discussed an analysis of the recruitment strategy agreeing to arranged a brainstorming session in April between the F&GP Committee and AQ&S (HE) Committee to share ideas. **ACTION: PRINCIPAL/CLERK**

The marketing team liaise with careers officers in schools as opposed to departmental heads which is being addressed. The College is attractive as an independent school of arts; however, it does not have the title of a university which could be perceived as less attractive.

Details of feeder colleges are collated and used by the student recruitment team. Trends from feeder schools were shared with the Committee which would be used by the brainstorming group. Student Governors suggested visiting their previous schools and colleges to talk about their experience and courses on offer at HCA. A Student Governor suggested sending personalised postcards to applicants which was a positive tool in their personal experience.

The Committee agreed: -

- To note the report and statistics
- Staff were commended for their exceptional work to support students and keep in contact with individual students during the pandemic
- Details and invitations to the brainstorming session to be arranged in April will be issued to the Committee

5. Update on managing the impact of COVID-19 and supporting students remotely

The Head of HE informed Governors that where possible courses had maintained campus learning until the second lockdown was implemented. Staff have adapted to online teaching which is very different to face to face delivery. Challenges were mitigated where possible; examples included student access to resources, click and collect, click and send and request for printing introduced.

Courses are working together as a result of the pandemic. Students have adapted their practices to develop their work off campus. Lecturers and Tech Dems film completion of practical tasks in workshops as part of lectures with student engagement. Student Governors confirmed cross pollination and shared lectures with students engaged and asking questions. Weekly community catch ups have been introduced for students across different courses made possible by digital engagement; this will continue after lockdown. Digital learning will continue to be used as a form of enrichment in future.

Visiting lectures are recorded, with permission, edited and shared to evidence how research informs practitioners. A Student Governor commented that there have been outstanding visiting lectures who have been sourced nationally.

A COVID-19 version of the College's newsletter had been proposed to share the positive practices adopted.

A Governor asked if the lockdown had impacted specific courses noting that courses with practical elements requiring access to workshops have been affected. Plans have been implemented to mitigate this.

The Committee agreed:

- To note the verbal update evidencing teaching and learning practices during lockdown and positive changes with collaboration between courses

6. Quality Improvement

- I. The report gave a summary of objectives for course revalidation for 2021/22 and validation of courses for 2022/23. This focused on the following key areas: community, creative careers and enterprise, wellbeing, curriculum distinctiveness, environmental sustainability, financial efficiency and sustainability, teaching and learning. Progress was discussed highlighting the importance of shared delivery and collaboration between courses with induction and common modules to be introduced. There was discussion about the introduction of 'pass or fail' modules to encourage creative risk-taking by students. The Student Governors commented that they would prefer to be awarded a grade which provides a

reference point on their progress. The Head of HE and Student Governors would discuss informative feedback and implementation of standardised feedback. A Student Governor commented that the Tech Dems have excellent knowledge and provide crucial and powerful learning for students. The Head of HE is working with Course Leaders to seek their input and feedback on the validation document which will be visualised as some areas are linked together.

- II. The Teaching Excellence Framework action plan evidenced progress. OfS are integrating the TEF with new QA systems. HCA has begun preparation by incorporating the TEF action plan into curriculum development and the Access and Participation Plan action plan. There was discussion about graduate outcomes noting that graduates are engaged with the College. The National Student Survey (NSS) is anticipated to reflect the volatile year and impact of COVID-19.
- III. UWTSD have a different approach instead of implementing COVID credits this year. Increased condonement credits will be awarded to students who will be required to achieve a minimum of 30% in a module to evidence their learning. Students could apply for extenuating circumstances if appropriate. The process of Examination Boards has also changed with College pre-boards to include UWTSD.

The Committee agreed: -

- To note the quality reports and progress to incorporate the TEF into QA systems

7. Identification of Key Risks

- I. Student recruitment
- II. COVID-19 creates wide uncertainty to recruitment and working methods causing unpredictable changes which absorb staff time
- III. CMA (due to COVID-19) and specifying offer to students
- IV. Graduates outcomes and NSS
- V. Revalidation and staff capacity

8. Any Other Business

Appreciation was recorded to staff and the Student Governors who had attended the meeting and given their input whilst they have a significant amount of course work to complete.