

Minutes of the meeting of the Learner Experience Committee held on Tuesday, 8 June 2010 at 4.30pm in the Boardroom of the College.

Present: Robin Talbot; Cath Richardson (Items 1-8); Michael Doyle; Jill Killin (Items 6-13)

Also Present: Chris Nattress, Deputy Principal Curriculum & Quality; Graham Johnstone, Head of Faculty; Steve Wilkinson, Programme Area Manger (Construction); Maggie Szuster, Student Services Manager (Jane Murray (Clerk)

Apologies: Dan Carter

11/10 Chair

As the structure of Committees was changing, a permanent Chair had not been appointed. Jill Killin had stepped in on an interim basis, but had been delayed.

Agreed – that Robin Talbot assume the Chair until Jill Killin arrived.

12/10 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 23rd February 2010 at 4.30 pm were agreed and signed as a correct record.

13/10 Declarations of Interest

On her arrival, Jill Killin declared an interest in item 6 as her husband was a student on one of the courses. It was agreed that there were no issues that would make this a prejudicial interest.

14/10 Cumbria Shootings

In the wake of the events of 2 June 2010 the temporary Chair asked if any students, and for that matter staff, had been affected and what support was being offered.

There were three students who had been affected and were being offered support. The counselling service which was open to staff was being offered to students. A non-denominational service by the College chaplains had taken place on the first day of term (Monday), and the one minute's silence would be observed on Wednesday.

It was also noted that one of the children killed in the coach crash had been a school link student and that the other had applied to the college.

15/10 An Introduction to Construction

Employing 13 full-time and 8 part-time staff, courses are delivered in brickwork; carpentry & joinery; painting and decorating; plumbing. Four units are designed to simulate a realistic working environment and have been recently modified to allow wheelchair access.

Prospective students are assessed during a two-week induction process before decisions are reached on the appropriate level of course.

Full time courses up to level 3 are offered in all subjects apart from painting and decorating owing to a lack of demand.

School provision takes year 10 & 11 students through the majority of trades leading to a formal level 1 qualification and achieves a 60% progression rate.

In 2009-10, there are 210 full-timers in the 16-18 age group, and 50 in the 19+. There are 136 part-timers in the 16-18 age group, and 192 in the 19+, which includes apprenticeship and back to work programmes, as well as the Construction Skills Certificate Scheme. On the school links programme there are 64 students in the 14-16 age bracket.

As part of course work, the students will respond to requests from the local community and recently helped to restructure the garden areas for a local scout group in Workington.

Changes to the Curriculum Framework (QCF) is challenging at the moment, with some of the skills requirements not due to be released until 1 September 2010. There had also been a reduction in apprenticeship places. Home Housing has recently asked for 12 full-time students at level 2.

A further challenge at the moment is the renewal energy sector. There is a lot of work to do to address envisaged demand, with no skills' training currently being provided in Cumbria. A number of courses are being developed to meet demand in this area in line with the Energy Coast Masterplan. Consideration is also being given to develop level 4/5 courses in this area.

Current courses: Solar Thermal Hot Water Systems; Domestic Heat Put Installer Training; Solar Photovoltaic training; Unvented Hot Water Systems; Heating & Hotwater System design and specification; Certificate in Energy Efficiency for Domestic Heating.

Plans for future courses: Renewable Energy Awareness; Install & Test Domestic Photovoltaic Systems; BPEC Woody Biomass: Wood Fuel for Domestic Heating; Domestic Wind Power Systems.

Work was continuing on plans for a new construction centre, however, with uncertainties arising through the change of government, it was not known at this stage whether funding would still be available.

Agreed – that the presentation had been most helpful and appreciated.

16/10 Chair

Agreed – that Jill Killin resume the Chair.

17/10 Quality & Curriculum Report

The Deputy Principal Curriculum, Quality & Partnerships, updated the Committee on a number of key issues:

The strengths and weaknesses analysis from the curriculum review was presented to Governors and it was noted the flooding impact was likely to have an impact on Attendance, Retention and Achievement Rates, although measures taken to mitigate the effect were likely to have improved the situation. This included increased tutorial and 1-2-1 support; flexibility in attendance, timetabling and catch up sessions; online learning materials, and moving learning closer to learners where possible. Headline figures for LSC (now SFA) retention rates were 89% for all courses and 88% for long courses. The expectation was that there would be a 1-2% dip in ARA rates for this year.

The Parents' survey results were generally very positive, but there were issues around communication and reporting to parents which were being addressed and a feeling that there were further improvements to the course progression and careers advice to learners that could be made. Parents wanted to see the no-smoking policy enforced.

Although overall the picture was positive, steps were also being taken to address issues from the learner survey. This again included issues with communication, particularly with regard to timetabling changes. The curriculum review had equally highlighted continued concern over the quality of the learner experience in Childhood studies and care, and there were continued calls from students for social space within the college.

14-19 provision was showing steady progress and the College was working with the schools on issues of timetabling. The future of Diplomas under the new Government was uncertain.

In addition to the new courses on renewable energy, a bid had gone in by Theatre by the Lake to develop and manage the Carnegie Theatre in Workington, which could provide the College, as a partner organisation, with additional performing arts provision.

The unfortunate impact of the changes to the Qualification and Curriculum Framework were again highlighted. Asked what the impact would be if there was no new curriculum by 1 September, the Committee was advised that the College would go with the existing curriculum. There were literally thousands of qualifications in the scheme and the impression was that the changes had been badly implemented.

The SAR timetable was received.

Resolved - to note the update and approve the SAR timetable.

18/10 Higher Education Update

The Committee was reminded that there was under-recruitment last year of around 16-17 students. This was within the tolerance level, but steps were being taken – marketing, providing opportunities to prepare for HE through study skills training and induction programmes – to ensure a good uptake in the coming year.

Asked whether thought had been given to other models of delivery, such as the Highlands and Islands and Cornwall models which provided more flexibility in rural areas, it was confirmed that alternative means of delivery such as these were under consideration.

Agreed – to note the update.

19/10 Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy

Of particular interest to the Committee in the strategy was the use of new technologies in teaching, including the provision of web-based learning and mobile phones. The strategy was to make more use of new technology for learning and there was agreement that the processes would need to be sound to ensure that the learning was not interrupted by social distractions.

It was noted that although the strategy was in draft form, that only minor amendments were expected.

Resolved – to approve the Teaching and Learning Strategy

20/10 Learner Voice

The Committee learned that two staff and three students had participated in an educational visit to Lille, with French, Polish,

Hungarian and Italian students. Eleven students had also been selected by Young Cumbria to participate in a visit to Gambia where they will help out in a local school. They are currently learning how to be peer mentors.

In carrying out a review of a particular area, feedback from students have highlighted inconsistencies in staff expectations, with some allowing mobile phones or food and drink, while others don't.

Students have participated in a pilot for interviewing staff, which if it proves successful, will become the norm for interviews for curriculum staff.

Text and e-mail feedback is now available to students.

The need for a social space for students continues to be a concern, with a demand for facilities such as pool tables.

Forum meetings have continued, with a number of issues raised, such as new tools, alternative software and PC access at lunchtime.

Asked whether there is a student union, the Student Services Manager advised that there had been one, which had disbanded. However, work would continue to sustain at least a strong forum with the addition of an Executive.

Agreed – to note the update

21/10 Draft Learner Engagement Strategy

With most issues in the Learner Engagement Strategy already discussed, the Learner Engagement Strategy was received and noted.

22/10 Equality and Diversity

The differences in achievement in gender across a number of curriculum areas was received and noted. Of particular note, however, was the fact that postcode analysis showed that students from socially deprived areas were achieving at a rate of 2% less than average. This was the first time that data had been received in this way and it was hoped to do further analysis in the coming year and also to consider ways in which to bridge the gap.

Equality and Diversity training was continuing for all staff.

Agreed – to note the update.

23/10 Complaints' Monitoring

A log of complaints was received and noted. Of most concern was the delay to resolving the complaints with performance dropping to only 33% of complaints resolved within the agreed timeframe in the last quarter. The Deputy Principal acknowledged the need to take a hard look at why this was happening and to sharpen up the process.

24/10 Confidential Session

Resolved – to move into confidential session.

25a/10 Safeguarding Monitoring

The Committee received and noted the Safeguarding update and noted that the Safeguarding policy was due to go to Cumbria Childrens' Board for external consideration.

The meeting closed at 7.15 pm.