

Minutes of Academic Planning and Quality Committee Meeting

Monday 8 September 2020 at 5.30pm

Held at Richard Huish College in the Redwood Suite and virtually using Microsoft Teams

Governors Present: Mary Tighe (Chair), Barbara Barratt (Vice-chair), Yuqi Cao (Student Governor), David Griffin (RHC Chair of Governors), Jonathan Langdon (Chair F&GP), Nikki Lewis (Staff Governor), Matt Morgan (Staff Governor), David Tomaney (Governor)

Also in attendance: Emma Fielding (Principal), Becky Flower (Vice Principal: Student Support), Sarah Fox (Vice Principal: Curriculum & Quality), Sarah Gardner (Clerk)

APQ 01 Apologies for Absence (agenda item 1)

Apologies were received from CS (Student Governor).

APQ 02 Declarations of Interest (agenda item 2)

No declarations of interest were received.

APQ 03 Minutes of the Previous Meeting (agenda item 3)

RESOLVED: that the Academic Planning and Quality Committee minutes dated 29 June 2020 be agreed as an accurate record and duly signed by the Chair with the inclusion of an amendment to page 2 of the minutes and the insertion of the word 'budget' 'The F&GP Committee recommend to Corporation a "22k *budget* surplus'.

Matters Arising Report 2019-20 – on agenda or deferred due to COVID-19 priorities.

APQ 04 Start of Year Update (agenda item 4)

The Principal thanked governors for their patience in what has been a challenging and very different start to the year and extended a warm welcome to Sarah Fox in her new role as Vice Principal (Curriculum & Quality).

- The Principal presented a PowerPoint updating governors on enrolments, start of year reflections, timetable arrangements, staffing and health and safety. CIS, Exams, IT, Estates and admin have done a huge amount of work around timetabling, appeals, site preparation and fielding parent calls. SMT have also worked a very long summer.
- Student numbers are fluid at present but are looking very positive and are much higher than at the same point last year. GCSE grading has boosted student numbers with higher GCSE results nationally resulting in more students accessing Level 3 courses. Bridgwater College are no longer offering their International Baccalaureate which has resulted in additional enrolments. Governors will be updated fully on student numbers at the Corporation meeting on 21st September.
- The Principal was asked about student numbers in Biology and Psychology and how these large subject areas are being managed during the Covid situation. A Year 2 Sociology group has been merged with existing classes where numbers were quite small and this has freed up teaching capacity to allow another Psychology group to run. Biology is currently carrying numbers in the mid 20s in large and well ventilated classrooms. It is possible that another

column in Biology may need to be opened and more staffing added but there is capacity to increase staffing in this area if needed.

- There have been transport challenges with buses. The middle of the day is the most problematic at present.
- A number of new staff have been linked to areas where there has been growth. The new Chief People Officer is now in post and will be attending the Corporation meeting on 21st September.
- Timetables have changed dramatically and are now operated on a fortnightly Week A and B basis to allow students to experience as much face to face delivery as possible. Sessions are 3 hours in length which is very different and challenging pedagogically. Upper and lower sixth students have staggered start and finish times, staggered comfort breaks and teaching staff and students should not be on site when they do not have a timetabled lesson. Feedback from students on the new timetable has been really positive and teaching staff also feel positive about the changes. Teaching staff have been coming up with some really creative ideas to keep students engaged during the longer lessons and have risen to the challenge brilliantly. Rooms are deep cleaned between each session and are also 'fogged' regularly. The Chair asked how other sixth forms have adapted their timetables. Bigger FE colleges have returned to their normal timetable and other sixth forms are doing more blended learning.
- The LC is being used as a dedicated study space with a track and trace system in place for students who are unable to leave the site. This is supervised by staff on a rota basis.
- Tutor groups now have a maximum of 12 students and this is working well.
- The IT and Estates Director and team have done a huge amount of work on site safety in an environment where official guidelines change frequently. A large set of government guidance was received a few days before the site was due to reopen to staff and SMT are meeting weekly and reviewing guidance daily. There is a senior health and safety meeting each week.
- Building works to the front of the building have been largely completed with cladding still to be installed on the back of the building and the hall. Reception is mostly finished and the lecture theatre is now a fantastic and usable space.
- National guidance is being followed with regard to sports provision with full contact sport for under 18s being unlikely to be in place until January and basketball expected to be reinstated within weeks. Over 400 students have signed up for sports enrichment activities and this will be looked at in a few weeks.
- Face masks are worn in corridors and social areas by all on site, including visitors.
- The Director of Apprenticeships has been invited to the Audit Committee meeting in November and will give a more detailed and accurate update on Apprenticeships. A short discussion took place around the financial aspect of the apprenticeship provision. RHC has recently received an award from Corporate Vision Magazine for Best Apprenticeship Provider in Somerset. This is great news and governors are pleased that the apprenticeship team have received much deserved recognition.
- The Principal updated governors on the Self Assessment process. At this point in the year work would usually have begun on collating information for the CSAR and QIP but due to the Covid situation and losing 5 months of the last academic year it would not be possible to complete this. Significant progress has been made with digital capacity during lock down but the Principal and VP: Curriculum & Quality feel that the QIP feels more relevant and curriculum intent is still as it was so they would like to refine the process. Improvements still need to be made around adult learning and it is important for the tutorial system to continue to work well and for students to receive feedback to ensure that they have a positive experience. The Principal will report back to governors around pastoral support at the next meeting and the Chair agreed that this is an excellent proposal.
- SFO will be meeting with Course Managers and APs to look at curriculum mapping for their courses and to talk about opportunities. Governors will be updated at the next meeting.

APQ Results and Exams (agenda item 5)

5

- The VP: Curriculum & Quality presented a PowerPoint with an update on exam results data, appeals, autumn exams and Summer 2021 exams and assessments.
- Teachers looked at evidence and used their professional judgement to award a CAG based on the grade that they considered students would have been more than capable of achieving. Teaching staff and SMT were not prepared to make a judgement on which students would have

under-performed in their exams. Grades were checked and brought in line with the sixth form report and grades were also checked through gender and other variables to ensure that there was no unintended bias. Attainment this year was broadly higher across all courses but Level 3 vocational needs focus and will be monitored going forwards. Ofsted may visit before Christmas but there will be no graded inspections until January 2021 and colleges will not be held accountable for Summer 2020 results.

- More students achieved a GCSE grade 4 and above with GCSE grades being realistic and optimistic and based on the grade that students would have achieved on a good day. No students have requested a GCSE resit but the deadline is not until 4th October.
- Disadvantaged students who attract pupil premium will continue to be a focus when compared to their non-disadvantaged peers. Disadvantaged students far out-performed non-disadvantaged students in Core Maths although they underperformed in A Levels when compared to non-disadvantaged students. No hard and fast conclusions are being drawn but accountability measures will be looked at.
- Provisional insights into retention look good. The VP: Curriculum & Quality will report fully on retention at the next meeting.
- The CIS Team and Assistant Principals have done a fantastic job with appeals. The external appeals deadline is 17th September. Historically appeals would be against exam board judgement but with teaching staff assigning CAGs, appeals are now against a teacher's professional judgement and have to run as an internal appeal in the first instance. This is not a nice dynamic but it was important that teaching staff were removed from the process as far as possible to allow the year to start in a positive way. Exam boards have narrowed the grounds for appeal and can now only be lodged with the criteria of bias and discrimination (malpractice) or College clerical error. If it can be proven that either of these criteria have affected a grade then the exam board may look at the appeal. Internal appeals have a one month turnaround and students are allowed to access any information that the College hold around their grade.
- 420 appeal queries were initially received with 277 students querying their CAGs. 26 complaints have been received with 19 becoming detailed cases and 3 students have subject access requests. There are now only 3 internal appeals having reduced the number from 277. There are no external appeals at this time. One appeal has not concluded with the student currently considering their options. The parents and student affected have been through every level of the appeal process and the original grade awarded has been upheld internally as a fair assessment of the student. The Principal commented that the VP: Curriculum & Quality has done an amazing job with the appeals process.
- Autumn exams are running with around 30 students opting to do resits in the Autumn. Fees are being paid by the government as part of a national policy. Students will only be liable for late fees if they miss exam entry deadlines but they are able to enter up to the day before an exam. Existing grades will not decrease as a result of a resit and grades will still stand if the original grade is higher. It is likely that the original Summer 2020 exam papers will be used.
- Governors asked about Summer exams 2021. It is likely that there will be some recognition for the work that Year 1s have missed and that there will be some leniency in fieldwork for Geography, Geology and Environmental Science. The Chair asked if there will be modifications to the scale of field work and if there are restrictions on travel. Local areas only can be used for fieldwork and there are no residential or overseas trips permitted for this academic year. Ofqual may give exam boards permission to run exams in July as opposed to May or June and it is hoped that by the next meeting there may have been an update on the situation.
- Governors were interested to hear how performance increase is reflected across sixth form colleges and if RHC is broadly consistent with the rest of the country. There was very little guidance and different colleges took different approaches. Some colleges significantly over inflated CAGs with the rationale that they would likely be pulled down and would not be the final student grades. Other colleges feel aggrieved because they had projected all of their results down to 3 year averages as a centre. RHC were somewhere in the middle with a realistic approach based on evidence and the best potential grade that a student could have achieved on a good day. Each grade is within tolerance of a 3 year picture but at the top end because it is impossible to gage how students would have performed on the day.
- Governors asked if student destinations will be tracked. HESA data will be available in 3 years.
- The Chair commented that the low number of appeals and exam resits bears witness to how well judged the situation has been by teaching staff.

- The system for vocational courses was different to A Levels – these were ranked and did not receive a CAG. Few vocational queries have been received but the VP: Curriculum & Quality has looked at grades carefully to flag any issues.

APQ Student Support Update (agenda item 6)

6

- The VP: Student Support presented a PowerPoint and updated governors on progress tutoring, student services, safeguarding, KCSIE and international students.
- The Chair asked for an update on student mental health issues. There has not been a huge issue with mental health and students are very excited to be back at College. The Student Support team are working with students who were anxious about returning to the site but there has not been an increase in referrals to MyConcern. From feedback received, students are not anxious about Covid but are concerned about lockdown happening again and the impact that this will have on their exams and on their long term job prospects. There are not many students who haven't socialised during lockdown and social media is not presenting a problem. The Chair commented that this is very reassuring.
- Food is now served at Oak House in the evening. International students have unfortunately experienced a couple of incidents of racial discrimination outside College and the VP: Student Support has worked with them around this and has asked students to report any further incidents. Oak House feels very like a home, especially with having meals served there.
- If any member of Oak House presents with symptoms of Covid, the whole house will need to self-isolate.
- International student numbers are slightly down in Year 1 to 16 students but there will be 4 additional students arriving late due to Visa delays. A couple of students will also be arriving in January. The Principal will ask the Finance CFO to confirm student numbers.
- The VP: Student Support is working with Student Voice to develop more regular forums.
- A new member of staff will be starting in the LC to cover maternity. There is one member of staff absent on long term sickness so the LC is under pressure.
- A Student Liaison Officer has been successfully recruited and will be starting next week. They have just completed a degree at UCL and are particularly interested in working with disadvantaged students with a focus on assisting students with early deadline UCAS entries. The Progression Manager will also be running UCAS workshops over the summer.

APQ AoB (agenda item 7)

7

- Governors will be updated on Apprenticeships and the VP: Curriculum & Quality's reflections on Course Manager meetings at November's Audit meeting.
- The Principal will update governors on retention, attendance and self-assessment at the Corporation meeting on Monday 21st September.
- The Chair asked that slides presented at this meeting be sent out to Governors with the meeting minutes.

Clerk

With no further business the meeting concluded at 7.16pm

Chair (signature)..... Date:.....