

New College Corporation

Student Achievement and Standards Committee

29 September 2008

Minutes

Present: Mr A Pickerin (Chairman)
Mr D Hopkins
Mr G Clark
Mr P Boulter

In attendance: Mrs B Tyley
Mrs E Vingoe
Ms A Rosser
Mr R Mason
Mr P Taylor (Clerk)

1 Apologies

Dr S Ali.

2 Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Student Achievement and Standards Committee of 25 February 2008 were confirmed.

3 Declarations of Interest

None.

4 Student Achievement 2007/08

Mr Clark introduced the report (copy in minute book) for the Committee, explaining that the report summarised student achievement data for 2007/2008 and analysed exam results in 2007/2008 across a range of courses.

Having briefly summarised the measures used, he drew the Committee's attention to the fact that in 2007/08 84% of 16-18 year old student enrolments were to advanced level courses, a significantly higher proportion than that at the time of the College's incorporation in 1993.

Mr Clark described the improvements in retention, achievement and success rates over the year, while noting that the success rate overall remained 1% below the sector benchmark. He summarised the most significant changes in retention, achievement and success rates set out in the report and which are described in detail in appendix 1 to the report. He referred to Table 4 in appendix 1 to the report which displayed rate movements and benchmark comparisons by curriculum area, which approximate to those used by Ofsted. He noted in particular the rate variations between curriculum areas, and commented that there were also variations within areas. He referred to the improvement in overall success rates from 80% to 82%, the improvement in overall College retention rates from 88% to 89%, and that for achievement rates from 90% to 92%.

Turning to the section of the report on exam results, Mrs Vingoe summarised the main features of the 2007/08 exam results set out in the report and referred to the detailed figures contained in appendix 2 to the report. She reported in particular the sustained high pass rate of 97% at A2 and the improvement at AS from 88% to 90%, and noted the improvement in the achievement of higher grades at both A2 (32% to 36%) and AS (26% to 29%). She referred also to the very good pass rates in most vocational courses at levels 2 and 3, and the excellent higher grades in First Diplomas and National Certificates at level 2. She reported that notwithstanding an increase in pass rates, the achievement of higher grades in National Awards was down, but that of higher grades achievement had risen in National Diplomas.

Overall she concluded that there had been a definite improvement in exam results across the College.

Mrs Tyley summarised for the Committee the changes in value added measures (ALIS and ALPS), and noted that improvements were evident in both measures. She reported that although there was some variation between subjects, there were some outstanding and excellent value added scores in individual courses.

In extended debate on the report and the detail shown in the appendices, members commented very favourable on the improvements across the College. Mr Boulter questioned whether the availability of Educational Maintenance Allowances (EMAs) had impacted upon retention. Ms Rosser commented that they had been useful in assisting students to complete their studies, although their precise impact is difficult to quantify, and reported that problems in the national system had led to delays in students receiving payments. Mr Pickerin commented that the improvements were very welcome and reflected well on the College and the teaching staff. Mrs Tyley responded that there were improvements in teaching which perhaps the observation of teaching and learning scheme was not fully reflecting. Mr Hopkins commented favourably on the College achievements and noted particularly the very marked improvement in the achievement of higher grades at National Diploma level. By way of a summary response, Mr Clark identified the major factors

underpinning the improvements, namely that: the teaching and learning reflects a more positive attitude to improvement; there is more IT available and it is in demand; teacher attitudes have developed with a more positive attitude to experimentation; targets and their use have become more sophisticated; resources generally have improved, and; there has been a consistent management focus upon improvement as a central theme with managers becoming more confident in their role.

After further debate on matters of detail, members of the Committee expressed their pleasure and satisfaction at the position described in the report which represented the most positive achievements considered by the Committee since its inception, and wished their congratulations to be passed to all concerned.

The Committee resolved to receive the report.

5 Areas of Concern

Mrs Tyley introduced the report (copy in minute book) for the Committee, explaining that it provided an overview of progress made in areas of concern 2007/08, and using the student achievement data now available identified courses or areas that will be targeted for intervention and support in the current year. In reviewing areas of concern 2007/08 she summarised the achievements in the identified areas, the detail of which is set out in the report and in appendix 2. She noted that analysis confirmed that improvements in performance data were evident in 9 of the 12 areas identified. She drew the Committee's attention to the intervention undertaken in Computing and ICT and the success of the improvements in: course design; teamwork; monitoring; and more targeted support for students. She reported that continuing concerns and a lack of progress had led to the decision not to offer AS Critical Thinking in 2008/09. She also drew attention to the considerable improvements in Applied AS Travel and Tourism and in Biology and Human Biology AS. Mr Pickerin commented favourably on the programme of intervention and support as evidenced by the progress made in Maths which had previously figured prominently in Areas of Concern reports.

Turning to the proposed categorisation of the areas of concern for 2008/09, Mrs Vingoe summarised the main features of those subjects or areas appearing in categories A, B and C. In the category of 'serious concerns' were included: Product Design, which despite some improvement was retained from 2007/08; Health and Social Care which was previously in category B but particularly at AS level had concerning falls in retention, achievement, success, and higher grade rates; and English Literature A2/AS where there was poor achievement and higher grades, and very poor and falling value added. By way of offering context for the latter, Mr Clark noted that for the curriculum area as a whole, the success rate is very high. Mrs Vingoe outlined the major factors behind those subjects or areas appearing in the 'some concerns' and 'potential concerns' categories. She referred in particular to the

circumstances associated with the Design Crafts National Diploma, Geology AS, Psychology AS and Key Skills and Basic Skills Numeracy in the 'some concerns' category, and Fine Arts AS, Computing AS/A2 and the Use of Maths AS in the 'potential concerns' category. She noted that the latter course was relatively new and was designed for students who might not be considered 'natural' mathematicians. Mr Clark referred to concerns emerging in the summer term 2008 in the Art, Design and Media curriculum area and described the temporary arrangements put in place with Mrs Tyley taking responsibility for managing the area in the autumn term 2008.

Mrs Tyley noted that there were more areas identified in category C ('potential concerns') for 2008/09 than in 2007/08. Mr Pickerin commented that given the overall improvements across the College considered earlier in the agenda, he felt that this increase did not represent a weakening of the College's position rather it was evidence of increasing vigilance from the College's managers.

Mr Clark announced that he had received notification of the College's Music Technology subject area had been awarded the status 'good' by the Good Schools Guide.

The Committee resolved to receive the report.

6 Quality Improvement

Mr Clark introduced the report (copy in minute book) for the Committee, explaining that it summarised some of the key outcomes of the quality improvement process in 2007/08, and that performance data, student feedback and an assessment of progress made with planned improvement actions are used to assess the College's current position.

Mr Clark reported that the College had made significant progress in raising student achievement in 2007/08 and had met or exceeded many of the targets established in the Quality Improvement Plan. He referred members to the full review of the Plan set out at appendix 1 to the report. He set the context for further actions by summarising the extensive curriculum changes planned nationally over the next few years, and referring to the Post-16 consultation currently being undertaken locally. He referred to the importance of generating further improvements in performance and standards by: organisational changes; implementing a learner involvement strategy; and implementing the LSC's 'Framework for Excellence'.

On **organisational developments**, Mr Clark tabled two short papers providing a summary record of the organisational changes proposed for 2008/09. He commented that the Senior Management Team was small and the structure maximised the use of other managers and teams through a small number of management groups, committees and a range of potentially time-limited 'Action Groups'. Mr Clark summarised the structure and its major features, highlighting in particular the work of the Operational Planning Group

meeting weekly to draw together operational matters and handling scheduling, and the functions of the Estates, Environment and Security Committee as well as those of Health & Safety and Equality & Diversity Committees. He described the intended function of Action Groups and noted the central importance of the Quality Improvement Group to be managed by Mrs Tyley which will work to improve the use and availability of student performance data by course teams, student services and managers. A key element of the structure design was that the Action Groups are to be flexible, capable of adapting to changing circumstances and priorities.

On **learner involvement**, Mr Clark described the main features of the learner involvement strategy designed to put the 'voice of the learner' at the centre of the College's activities. The strategy included a greater emphasis on collecting and acting upon in-course feedback, and the establishment of a student council, opportunities for students to join management groups and committees and continued rigour in responding to student feedback and complaints. He explained that the overall intention of the strategy is to effect a cultural shift in how the College operates.

Ms Rosser and Mrs Vingoe provided the Committee with further detail on the elements of the strategy including the establishment of the student council and the use of learner feedback. Mr Clark referred members to the results of the May 2008 learner survey set out at appendix 2 to the report. In debate, members commented favourably on the survey results noting with satisfaction the students' ratings well above the national benchmarks.

On **The Framework for Excellence and Self Regulation**, Mr Clark referred to the introduction by the LSC of a number of changes to how overall performance is assessed through the Framework, essentially condensing the many elements of student achievement into the single indicator of 'success rates'. Other indicators will involve learner satisfaction, employer satisfaction and financial matters. The new Framework is to be 'piloted' by all colleges in 2008 and extended to school sixth forms and other providers at an as yet unspecified date. He reported some of the difficulties the College had experienced in obtaining LSC guidance on key elements of the framework. Mr Clark noted that annual Ofsted monitoring visits will continue for colleges such as New College, assessed as 'satisfactory'. The College will receive the Ofsted visit on Thursday 16 October 2008. Mrs Tyley described the way the College was working with other like colleges in Stoke, Manchester and Leicester, undertaking cross-thematic reviews with peer input.

The Committee resolved to receive the report.

7 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Student Achievement and Standards Committee will be held at 5.30pm on Monday 1 December 2008.