

MORLEY COLLEGE LIMITED

QUALITY & STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 15 MARCH 2011

Present:

John Stephens	(Chair)
Margaret Andrews	(Governor)
Linda Gainsbury	(Governor)
Beryl Griffiths	(Student Representative)
Linda Linehan	(Governor)
Kathy McLauchlan	(Staff Governor)
Ela Piotrowska	(Principal)
Jenny Scribbins	(Chair of Governors)

In attendance:

Cass Breen	(Deputy Principal)
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Clerk:

Graham Cooper	(Clerk to the Governing Body)
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1. Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence.

The Clerk advised the Committee that Ian Gorman had resigned as Student Governor and that confirmation of the election by the Student Executive of a nominee to replace him was expected shortly, with the appointment then to be considered at the next meeting of the Governing Body.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair congratulated the College's management team on the outcome of the recent inspection, noting this as a great endorsement of the work that had been undertaken over the past few years.

2. Minutes and actions of meeting held on 16 November 2010.

The minutes were agreed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chair.

3. Matters arising other than on the agenda

a) College Self-Assessment Report 2009-10

The Committee noted that the grades for key areas in the final report had been agreed as follows:-

Overall Effectiveness	2
Capacity to Improve	2
Outcomes for Learners	2
Quality of Provision	2
Leadership & Management	2
Governance	2

4. Deputy Principal's Report (CB)

The Deputy Principal presented her report. As a full report had not been made to the autumn term meeting of the Committee due to her absence, she had included in this report a brief review of activities carried out in the College during 2009-10, set out in line with the balanced scorecard. Additionally, the report included an update on term 1 2010/11 in relation to curriculum and quality issues, specifically including measures taken to improve success rates and the quality of course outlines (being matters arising from the previous meetings) and further quality improvement activity focused on areas for improvement identified in the recent Ofsted report, also attached. Complaints data for term 1 was also reported, along with the full year 2009-10 Complaints report.

Having reviewed the report, the Committee discussed the following specific aspects:-

a) RARPA:

The Deputy Principal reported that participation in quality improvement systems by tutors continued to be much improved, but that there had been a slight dip in overall performance in Term 1 compared to prior year. The quality of individual returns was generally good, but with some variability. CAMs and the Quality Officer were increasingly reviewing individual folders before OTLs and when returned in order to focus on poor performance and instances where returns are incomplete.

With regard to the small number of tutors resisting change, the Deputy Principal advised that this comprised a mix of those who needed help and support and a small minority who refused to participate. There was a process in place to tackle this, involving a staged approach to letters from the department administrator, CAM, and then the Deputy Principal. Whilst acknowledging that, at the end of the day, refusal to participate represented a breach of contract, the Deputy Principal stressed that only a very few extreme cases existed, no absolute confrontations had taken place, and that the improvements achieved had resulted from working with tutors who were struggling, to help them and to enable them to do things better.

b) OTLs / 'Learning Walks'

The Deputy Principal noted that the carrying out of OTLs was both labour intensive and expensive, with the additional costs of training for observers. The College was considering a pattern of fewer full OTLs, focusing those on new tutors and those who had received poor grades at past observations. For others, the CLT were considering introducing 'learning walks' – themed short visits. These would address a range of issues, e.g. attendance, E&D, planning documentation and the course files. The Deputy Principal sought views from the Committee as to whether such visits should be pre-advised to tutors. The Committee discussed the rationale and gave examples of previous experience of this type of class visit, highlighting the potential for initial resistance by tutors. The Committee recommended that:-

- Visits should be announced in advance, to the extent that tutors are advised that visits will be taking place during a particular week focused on a particular theme, but that the announcement should not specify which classes are to be visited;
- The rationale for visits – that these are about securing improvements, and a means of doing so without spending valuable resources on formal OTLs, should be clearly communicated; and
- For the visits to add value, individual feedback should be provided to tutors.

c) Complaints

The Committee noted with satisfaction the significant reduction in the number of complaints, the care taken to resolve complaints, and the detailed analysis thereof. Whilst resolution times for some complaints was noted as quite long, the Deputy Principal advised that unfortunately some complaints of a vexatious nature involved repeated correspondence and took longer than the norm to resolve.

d) Measures to improve success rates

The Deputy Principal's report included details of measures in place to improve success rates in both Access and Skills for Life, and she noted that recent results in ESOL had been very encouraging. The Committee asked that some analysis be provided at a future date as to which measures have worked well and which not so well in securing improvements. The Deputy Principal noted that the current year Self Assessment Report would provide a suitable opportunity to do so.

e) IFL membership

The Deputy Principal reported that around 80% of academic staff were members of IFL, though it had been considered likely that this figure would reduce sharply as Government funding for membership had been withdrawn. From March 2011, a fee of £68 would apply, payable by virtually all staff. However, the AoC had now reiterated that it is a legal obligation of all tutors to be registered, and that College's should ensure compliance.

5. ILT Strategy (CB)

The Deputy Principal presented a copy of the College's ILT strategy, setting out the commitment of the College to the use of ILT to improve the quality of students' experience, raise levels of achievement, increase responsiveness, grow provision and improve resources in the College.

The strategy document was accompanied by an action plan covering the period up to and including 2012-13, identifying that a number of actions had already been completed. The Deputy Principal advised that work was underway with CAMs to develop individual action plans for their areas, which would then be incorporated within the SAR development plans,. She also highlighted the significant improvement that inspectors had observed in the use of ILT since the previous inspection.

The Chair suggested the use of charismatic champions to drive forward progress, and also suggested that the College should seek opportunities for external funding. The Committee discussed the potential of the Virtual Learning Environment to facilitate learner networks and discussion groups, and its use as part of staff development by providing a means of sharing best practice. The Deputy Principal also advised that use of ILT was to feature as part of a planned Best Practice Day.

The Chair of the Property Strategy Committee referred to a discussion that had taken place at the latest meeting of that Committee in relation to the need to keep pace with technological advances. Specifically, in the context of investment in renewal of the College's network server hardware, the potential for use of 'cloud computing' had been raised. The Principal noted that this had also been discussed at the recent meeting of the Finance & Resources Committee, and that since then the College had received an offer of some free consultancy on the matter, which she was intending to take up. Whilst the reality might be that it is too early for the College to make any significant changes in this area, it would be useful to factor any advice into decisions on investment in new equipment.

Difficulties regarding email communication with tutors was noted. Whilst all are required to have a College email address, some do not use this as a regular method of communication, leading to a build-up of non-actioned emails.

6. Curriculum Areas – Restructuring and changes to Leadership & Management

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6. Curriculum Areas – Restructuring and changes to Leadership & Management (EP)

The Principal provided the Committee with an update regarding plans to review and make changes to the leadership and management of the curriculum area over the next two terms, as part of the College's aim to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of resources. Some changes had arisen from the Curriculum Review and Development process. She also advised that, under report to the Finance & Resources Committee, a review was also to be undertaken of support services. In view of the external context of cuts in funding, there was a need to review all functions of the College to explore possible efficiencies whilst securing effective services.

At the Governing Body and CLT strategy event on 22 January, Governors had agreed that the CLT should proceed with the closure of the Exercise department, as it was no longer financially viable. The consultation arrangements for this were now being finalised, with the consultation to be completed by the end of the current term. The Principal advised that the closure of Exercise would have a range of repercussions, with implications for the balance, size and scope of other departments:-

- Although Exercise would be closed, provision of exercise courses for the over 50s would continue, the intention being that these would be managed within the Health department as part of the work the College does to support the health and well-being of the community.
- A review of the scope of the Access and Health Department would need to be undertaken as part of the current review of staffing in Access.
- The Closure of Exercise would also have repercussions for the size of the Dance and Drama department, under which Exercise currently fell, with possible implications for the leadership and management of the department. Dance and Drama was not tenable as a stand alone department, and the CLT's current thinking was to move Drama to be part of Music and Dance to be part of Health.

The Principal also advised that, following the inspection, it was clear that a review of the Languages department needed to be undertaken. The inspection had confirmed the lack of strategic leadership, which had been a concern of the CLT for some time. A review of the department was therefore planned, with a possible outcome being a merger of the department into the current SfL, Community Learning and ALS department. This would have further repercussions for the balance, size and scope of departments.

The Committee discussed the rationale and suitability of the proposed moves of subject areas. The fit of Languages with SfL, Community Learning and ALS, in particular was a subject of differing opinions. The Principal highlighted a commonality of skills involved in teaching ESOL and teaching foreign languages. The resultant size of such a merged department was also an issue, however, and there were various scenarios, such as separating out Community Learning or ALS, which might be considered when looking at the detail alongside the College's other plans.

The Principal acknowledged the potential of these reviews to have a de-stabilising and adverse effect on morale. However, the CLT considered these, and the review of support services, to be essential to improve the efficiency of the College and to create a stable structure for the College to face external challenges as it moves forward into the next academic year.

The Committee gave its support to the proposed reviews proceeding in line with the process outlined. In doing so, Governors, stressed the need for the approach to be seen by staff as fair and even-handed, with clarity of rationale, criteria and communication. The Committee also urged that the process be completed by the summer, so that any staff taking on new responsibilities would be in post by the beginning of the next academic year.

7. Assessment Policy (CB)

A copy of the College's Assessment Policy was received by the Committee for noting. The Committee observed that the process for tutors and students jointly setting and agreeing learning objectives ought to be more explicitly set out within the policy. The Deputy Principal agreed to amend as appropriate.

Action:- Deputy Principal to ensure that the process for jointly setting and agreeing learning objectives is more clearly set out in the policy.

8. AOP Key Performance Indicators Update (EP)

The Principal presented in-year data to January 2011 for KPIs relating to curriculum performance. The following aspects were specifically discussed:-

Retention rates on long courses had improved significantly, providing a good indicator for improved success rates for 2010/11.

OTLs: Whilst the data indicated that numbers were behind target, the Deputy Principal believed that this had now caught up. The wider issues relating to OTLs had already been discussed as part of the Deputy Principal's Report.

Enrolments; The Principal highlighted current issues with regard to enrolments, which were falling short of target, meaning that the College would also not achieve the target that had been set for an increase in fee income. She advised that the CLT were considering ways to boost enrolments for the summer term. The Principal and Deputy Principal advised that differing views were held with regard to the extent to which enrolment levels had been adversely impacted by fee increases. The key to increasing enrolments would, however, be reaching new audiences, and it would be important, as part of the College's new marketing strategy, for Curriculum areas to work with the Marketing team. The Chair of Governors advised that she had requested the Principal to prepare a paper for discussion at the forthcoming Governing Body meeting on strategies to increase new student recruitment for the start of the next academic year.

9. Equality & Diversity Steering Group Report (EP)

The Committee reviewed and noted the contents of the report and the accompanying data. One aspect specifically highlighted was the ongoing trend of an increasing number of younger learners. The data as at 1st March showed 50% of learners to be aged below 45 years of age, and only 28% to be aged over 55 years.

10. Any Other Business

Noting that this was to be her last meeting of the Committee, Margaret Andrews expressed her extreme satisfaction with the improvements that she had observed during her term of office, both in terms of the nature of reporting to the Committee and the underlying improvements at the College that this represented. She congratulated the College Leadership team on those achievements. The Chair expressed the Committee's thanks for Margaret's significant contribution to the work of the Committee over the period.

11. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting is due to take place at the College on Tuesday 14 June.

Graham Cooper
Clerk to the Governing Body

Signed 
John Stephens, Chair