

MORLEY COLLEGE LIMITED

QUALITY & STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 15 NOVEMBER 2011



Present:

John Stephens	(Chair)
Mike Lake	(Chair of Governors)
Kathy McLauchlan	(Staff Governor)
Ela Piotrowska	(Principal)
Mark Windisch	(Student Governor)

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

Apologies had been received from Linda Gainsbury, Beryl Griffiths and Linda Linehan.

2. Minutes and actions of meeting held on 14 June 2011.

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

3. Matters arising other than on the agenda

a) Class Closures

The Deputy Principal tabled information on course cancellations for Term 1 2011/12 compared to Term 1 2010/11. Some overall improvement was evident, though it was considered that further progress was desirable. Overall course cancellations were 12.9% compared to 14.6% in the previous year. In terms of percentage of Guided Learning Hours ('GLH'), this represented 7.1% compared to a prior year 6.4%. A breakdown of the figures by department revealed a variable pattern, and the following were specifically highlighted:-

- **Literacy & Numeracy and ESOL** – The Principal and Vice Principal considered that there were problems with the data for these areas, and this would be investigated further.
- **Art and Design** – It was important to note the figures for this area, given the size of the department – in terms of GLH, closure rates were broadly the same year on year.
- **Music** – It was very pleasing to see an improvement, with course closures down from 18.6% to 14.4%, which represented 12.8% down to 9.8% measured by GLH.
- **Languages** – This was the biggest area of concern, with closure rates measured by GLH up from 14.1% to 16%. The Deputy Principal highlighted that this was indicative of a continued decline in the critical mass of courses in the languages department.

The Committee commented that it could be useful to review the data disaggregated between daytime and evening courses. Additionally, as discussed at previous meetings, the Deputy Principal noted that some of the closures were a result of attempts at innovation in the curriculum that had not proved successful, whilst others were indicative of a decline in the core course offering. The main concern was that Languages largely fell into the latter category.

b) Restructuring and changes to leadership and management

The Principal advised that the planned restructuring had been completed. Drama had moved to become part of the Music department, and Dance had moved to Access & Health, with the majority of Exercise, where significant external room hire costs were incurred, having been closed. Early signs of improvement in Drama and in Dance were very encouraging. With these changes completed, a review of Exercise was now underway.

c) Languages / Community learning

The Student Governor asked whether an idea that had emerged previously to teach Somali languages to Somali children had been followed up, and expressed disappointment when advised by the Deputy Principal that no specific programme had been developed. However, the Principal advised that Morley was very much engaged across the breadth of very diverse local communities that it served, and acknowledged that there was scope to explore further the role of the College in the different language needs of those communities. A recently completed Bilingual course was a good example and might help to guide progress. The Deputy Principal advised that the relevant Curriculum Area Managers were collaborating on this matter.

The Chair of Governors asked to what extent the College was engaged with that part of local government responsible for Citizenship, and whether there was a role for the College in helping people to master the challenges that were part of that process. The Principal advised that this was not a specific area of focus, and that there were often challenges engaging with local government on specific initiatives, but the College had been extremely successful in its contract with Lambeth Council for the provision of community learning, and was now a member of a strategic partnership for Lambeth. The Principal had also sought to increase engagement with Southwark, and had provided a positioning statement with options as to how Morley might feature as part of community learning provision, but as yet no response had been received.

The Chair made reference to a potential move being debated by Wandsworth Council to restrict the provision of social housing, whereby new tenancies for council homes would be restricted to people who were either in employment or enrolled on a training course. If the policy was adopted, and if it were to spread to other boroughs, training provision would move up the agenda considerably as a consequence.

5. Deputy Principal's Report (CB)

This item was taken next. The Deputy Principal provided a report on progress over the last three years on key College Performance Indicators, including Success Rates, Observations of Teaching & Learning ('OTLs'), Recognising and Reporting Progress & Achievement of non-accredited courses ('RARPA'), Attendance Rates and Complaints. The Committee noted the very positive trends, and the following specific aspects were discussed:-

- a) Success rates:-** The Deputy Principal advised that success rates for Access had dipped and then improved during the period, and that these compared well with other providers. She reminded the Committee of the considerable work that had been done, particularly in implementing a much more rigorous approach to assessing the suitability of potential students, and withdrawing individual students at an early stage if issues emerged. Success rates for Access were generally the subject of a lot of external scrutiny, and it would be important to ensure that efforts were maintained. The College now had a very strong team in place to manage this, but there were concerns regarding the impact on students of the changes to benefits (and the consequent need for students to take on loans), which were to be expected to come into effect in 2013/14.
- b) Skills for Life:-** Good progress was noted in this area of work that had been abandoned by many other providers in view of low achievement and skill levels.

- c) **Literacy & Numeracy and ESOL:-** There had been a very significant increase in Attendance, Achievement and Success Rates over the period. The Principal noted the huge improvement in the management of this curriculum area.
- d) **RARPA:-** The Deputy Principal advised that the number of tutors engaged in this process continued to be high, as evidenced by OTLs and the return of quality documentation. Issues giving rise to low rates in Exercise and Humanities had been addressed. The Committee discussed the potential merits of the College issuing its own certificates of achievement to students successfully completing non-accredited courses. It was considered that certificates issued by Morley would be valued and recognised as meaningful by students and by third parties. The Principal highlighted the number of courses run by the College and the amount of additional administrative work that would be involved, but she acknowledged the value that could be added, with Languages being an area where this might be particularly appropriate. The Principal therefore suggested that this might be taken forward on a sample basis.
- e) **Complaints:-** The Deputy Principal highlighted that Complaints had reduced by 36% over the last two years. Complaints against teaching staff / quality of teaching continued to be the largest category, but the actual number of complaints was very small and was falling. In response to a request from the Deputy Principal for views, the Committee discussed the issue of response and resolution times, and specifically debated what might be considered reasonable when assessing how well complaints have been dealt with. In this context, the Committee considered 'resolved' to mean having investigated a complaint and having provided a considered answer, and also considered that it might be appropriate to set the criteria for measuring success at:- 80% of complaints resolved within 15 working days. The Chair of Governors stressed that the important factor in dealing with a complaint was to provide a fast, sensitive and considered response, and noted that such a response by telephone could often achieve a much more satisfactory outcome, effectively dissipating feelings that students might have that they have been hard done by, and preventing the need for further time-consuming effort. The Principal noted that this was not a feature of the current process, as there had been a view that an immediate telephone response might compromise the process. The Committee also noted that the method of dealing with complaints had changed during the period, with complaints now handled by the relevant departments rather than the Quality Manager. This was considered by the CLT as an important aspect of getting departments to use complaints as a means of identifying matters for improvement.

4. College Self-Assessment Report 2010-11 ('SAR') First Draft (EP/CB)

The first draft of the SAR, including the individual curriculum area SARs, had been circulated. The Principal advised that SARs for individual support areas would be provided to the forthcoming meeting of the Finance & Resources Committee. The Chair reminded the Committee that one of the key purposes of this term's meeting of the Committee each year was to scrutinise the first draft of the SAR, in conjunction with the Principal and Deputy Principal, and to discuss any issues or concerns emerging, in order to make recommendations to the Governing Body with regard to the content of the report and the performance of the College. Having reviewed the content, he congratulated the CLT at having produced a report that was very clear, easy to navigate, and which clearly represented an honest appraisal. He also believed that the quality of the report had improved over the last few years. He observed, however, that there were evident variations in the quality of the individual curriculum area SARs, with some excellent reflections and very honest self-appraisals demonstrating an excellent grasp of the process in some areas, but a tendency in others to focus on good aspects without sufficiently addressing areas of weakness.

The Deputy Principal acknowledged the variable quality, advising that a lot of work had been undertaken over the past three years with those staff responsible for producing the SAR, but that not all staff had developed the required skills to the same degree. She considered that overall, the College had developed a process for writing, moderating and checking the contributions towards the SAR that was certainly as good as that in place in most other

Colleges. The Principal advised that she regarded the moderation meetings that each of the Curriculum Managers had with her, the Deputy Principal and Vice Principal, as staff development opportunities, and she highlighted the critical importance of the self-assessment process as colleges were increasingly moving towards an external environment in which they would need to demonstrate an ability to self-regulate.

The Chair of Governors acknowledged the amount of work that had gone into production of the report, and that, whilst produced to meet the requirements of external funders, it contained a wealth of information that showed the College in a good light that might be used in a positive way. The Principal advised that aspects would be brought out in an Annual Report that was being pulled together, and which would be presented to the December meeting of the Governing Body.

The Principal brought the Committee's attention to the comments on Governance within the Leadership and Management section of the report and invited Governors to comment and to contribute further comment. The Chair noted that the commentary reinforced the Ofsted judgement of Governance at the College. The Principal advised that she would also be inviting comment from the members of the Finance & Resources Committee, and she suggested that some additional points that emerged from the Governing Body Self-Assessment might be included.

The Committee reviewed the grades contained within the draft report, and endorsed the CLT's judgements. Whilst it was not desirable to see the grade 4 judgements that had been made in some areas, there were evident reasons for these, and the issues giving rise to them were being addressed. The Committee also noted, however, that in some areas there were inconsistencies between the grades and the accompanying commentary. The Principal noted that in part this arose from the moderation process through which grades were revised, but where the commentary had not always been updated to reflect this. The Chair of Governors stressed the importance of consistency in the final report. The Staff Governor suggested that in the future greater consistency in the presentation of individual area reports might be achieved in part by prefacing each section with key information in a consistent tabular format rather than having different descriptive words in each.

The Chair pointed out a number of areas in the report where information was still lacking. He also specifically highlighted, however, the SARs for Visual Arts and Music, which he considered to be excellent examples, written by managers who had a very good grasp of their areas, were appropriately reflective, and demonstrated a capacity to improve. He suggested that these should be held up as models of good practice.

The Deputy Principal noted that the production of the SAR, together with CRD, planning for the following years course guide, and other work, created a significant workload for staff during the current term. The Chair once again acknowledged the work that had gone into the SAR, and believed that the grades had been given appropriate consideration. The Principal stressed that action had already been taken to address the weaker areas where grade 4s were reported, noting that notwithstanding excellence in other areas, such grades would prevent the College from being judged Outstanding, which was something she certainly believed the College to be capable of.

The Principal confirmed that the final version of the SAR, following further revision, would be presented to the December Governing Body meeting for approval.

Action:- Final version of the College Self-Assessment Report 2010-11 to be presented to the December meeting of the Governing Body for approval.

6. Curriculum Review & Development ('CRD') (CB)

The Deputy Principal provided a report on the arrangements for CRD for 2012-13. The Chair advised that he had met with the Deputy Principal and the Staff Governor, and believed the process to be comprehensive and improved on that of the prior year. The Staff Governor,

commenting from her experience of the process as Curriculum Area Manager for Art and Design, reaffirmed this view, though she also noted that the questions that were asked of the CAMs as part of the process were very challenging and took some time to properly address. The Deputy Principal stressed that curriculum development was an ongoing process, and a regular feature of one to one discussions between herself and CAMs. It was suggested, though that it might be worth initiating the formal CRD process earlier during the year, before the summer recess, in order to give greater time for consideration and planning. The Principal noted the variations across departments in the way in which the process had been approached, and that factors involved included differing resource levels. It was evident that the more successful reviews had been those where CAMs had fully engaged the staff in their teams, rather than working on their own, and that future years should seek to engage more staff in the process. Notwithstanding these observations, the Chair commended the overall approach to the reviews being undertaken.

7. Governance at Morley College – Review of Committee Structure (Quality & Standards) (JS)

The Chair explained the background to this matter. At the Governing Body meeting on 4 November, a decision had been made to put in place new governance arrangements that would involve fewer committees but more meetings of the full Governing Body. At the meeting, Governors had voiced concerns that the absence of a Quality & Standards Committee might lead to a risk of inadequate Governor oversight of curriculum and quality matters. The Chair was therefore asked to give further consideration to this aspect, in conjunction with members of the Committee, and to make further recommendations to the Board.

Following the 4 November Governing Body meeting, the Chair had discussed with a number of members the possibility of replacing the Q&S Committee with a smaller group with a very focused approach. He therefore now proposed that a Quality & Standards Scrutiny Panel should be established, to include the Deputy Principal, a Staff Governor and Governors with experience in the management of quality within an educational context. The role of the Group would be to advise the Governing Body on the management of curriculum, quality and standards of educational provision at the College. In particular, the Group would meet annually at this time of the year to provide strategic scrutiny of the annual Self-Assessment Report, and to produce an overview for the Governing Body with recommendations and observations in relation to the matters covered in the SAR. He considered that this would provide a suitable mechanism for sustaining rigorous oversight.

The Deputy Principal advised that she had reviewed further the draft Governing Body business cycle submitted to the 4 November Governing Body, and considered that changes could be made to the timing and outline meeting agendas, that would make for more effective reporting to the Governing Body on quality and standards matters. She considered that the pattern of meetings could allow for a meeting of the Quality & Standards Committee or successor to review the draft SAR annually in December, then reporting to a Governing Body meeting in January. Whilst that would mean that the SAR would not go forward to the SFA until January, she did not believe that would be an issue.

The need for careful selection of membership of a Q&S Scrutiny Panel was highlighted, to ensure that members had the knowledge and skills necessary for appropriate scrutiny and challenge. Additionally, it was agreed that the Principal should be a member of the panel.

The Principal raised an issue with regard to Support Area SARS. Under the current Governing Body Committee structure, these had been scrutinised by the Finance & Resources Committee. One of the key areas of focus of management had been to focus Support Areas on helping to raise the quality. With that committee to be discontinued, it remained important to ensure that there was a mechanism for Governor scrutiny of the Support Area SARS and she suggested that the Q&S Scrutiny Panel could fulfil this need. The Chair acknowledged that this could be done, very much with a focus on the impact of these areas on quality of provision.

The Student Governor present also suggested that it would be appropriate for the Q&S Scrutiny Panel to include one of the Student Governors, and the Committee acknowledged the value of the inclusion of a student voice and perspective.

Taking into consideration the views expressed, the Chair agreed to put forward a proposal for discussion at the December meeting of the Governing Body. He emphasised that whatever arrangements are put in place, these must provide an effective means of ensuring sufficient Governor oversight of the quality of provision at the college on an annual basis, and very importantly to demonstrate that this is the case to any interested outside parties.

Action:- Chair to refine proposals for a Quality & Standards Scrutiny Panel and to put these forward to the December meeting of the Governing Body for consideration.

8. Equality & Diversity Steering Group Report

The Principal's report on the recent activities of the E&D Steering Group was received.

9. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

10. Date of Next Meeting

Subject to the Governing Body agreeing the Committee's recommendation to discontinue the Committee but to put in place, as part of the College's new governance framework, a Quality & Standards Scrutiny Panel, this would be the last meeting formal meeting of this Committee.

Graham Cooper
Clerk to the Governing Body

Signed.....
John Stephens, Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Stephens', is written over a dotted line. The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized.