

CORPORATION BOARD of UNITED COLLEGES GROUP
Minutes of Teaching, Learning and Skills Committee
Monday 08 June 2020, 9 am by Zoom

Members Present: Colin Smith (Chair), Angela Drisdale Gordon, Glenys Arthur, Stephen Hayes (staff governor) Nick Bell (CEO), Tony Johnston (Observer), Matthew Green.

In attendance: Zoë Lawrence, Stephen Davis, Grethe Woodward, James Wilson, Melanie Guymer, Claire Collins

A	Procedural
1	<p>Welcome and apologies for absence Apologies were received from Desmond Bishop, Sukhveer Singh, Rose Sareami and Mary Elliott.</p> <p>CS was chairing the meeting in ME's absence.</p> <p>Members acknowledged that this was Glenys Arthur's last TLS Committee meeting as she was standing down as a governor from the end of July 2020. Members thanked Glenys for her contribution over the many years as a governor of City of Westminster College and more recently at UCG.</p>
2	<p>Declarations of interests in agenda items No interests were declared.</p>
3	<p>i. Approve minutes of the Teaching, Learning and Skills Committee of 16 March 2020 <i>(The minutes were circulated in advance)</i> These were approved as an accurate record for signing.</p> <p>ii. Matters Arising The matters arising from the previous meeting had been completed or were covered elsewhere on the agenda except for the Business Development Paper which has been deferred to a future meeting of the committee. Due to the changes in priorities and workload as a result of coronavirus it had not been possible to bring a paper to this meeting.</p>

Strategic Matters	
4	<p>i. Covid 19 Update on digital delivery <i>(Paper provided in advance)</i> MG highlighted the main points in the paper describing the College's efforts to transfer to digital delivery as a result of lockdown in response to the coronavirus pandemic. This included extensive staff CPD and provision of laptops and dongles for staff and students to provide internet and Wi-Fi access for teaching and learning. The majority of delivery was conducted via Microsoft Teams for which there had been a significant increase in its utility. Student engagement was being monitored via a weekly progress tracker which assessed the degree to which students attended lessons on timetable, submitted work, and engaged with their tutor. Learner and staff surveys had been undertaken to gain feedback on the transition and student experience. Staff and student representative meetings were also taking place to gain feedback to address any issues and to inform future learning to shape components of delivery for the following academic year.</p>

CS noted that the student survey had a low response rate of 10%. He enquired if this cohort was a specific segment of the college students or a cross section. MG confirmed that it was a cross section. It was considered that the low response rate may have been due to the timing of the survey with many students still transitioning to the new platforms and a number still awaiting laptops and dongles at the beginning of lockdown. The student satisfaction with online learning showed improvement in the second survey from three to four stars.

ADG expressed concern with some of the figures in the report and that there were a number of students that were not engaging with the college. GW explained that action was being taken in respect of these students as each was being contacted on a caseload basis by a key worker to support their re-engagement. 400 students had already been supported in this way and were back on track. Where there was no response from students, they were referred to safeguarding. This number varied from week to week, and the students differed over time. It was noted that overall the level of engagement from students under remote learning arrangements was higher than when classes were being delivered physically in the buildings. This was considered to be in the region of 80%.

TJ thanked the executive for their comprehensive report and the huge amount of progress that had been made since March. He asked from the progress and learning to date what further measures needed to be in place for the start of the new academic year, when it was expected that social distancing measures would continue to be necessary. MG said that there was benefit in having some experience of remote delivery, but it would be important to ensure sufficient IT equipment was in place, and ongoing CPD for staff. There was likely to be a mixed model of learning with some online components and some face to face delivery for practical elements of courses. It was useful to have time to plan this before September. TJ asked to what extent the College was benefiting from wider learning and best practice in the sector. MG noted the recent best practice webinars which were available but also how some of the existing technology was not being utilised to the fullest extent, and that it would be possible to expand and explore more sophisticated methods for remote delivery. SD was of the view that UCG was at the vanguard of learning in this area, particularly in regard to the pace at which the college transferred to remote learning. He was keen to apply the experiences with more sophistication to a blended approach for 2020/21. He noted the students' preference for more autonomous learning, better reflecting the needs of the students rather than the institution, and for timetables to be a less dominating force.

MGr asked if engagement with students was entirely via MS Teams or if there were other methods. GW explained that the figures for MS Teams in the report were there as a proxy and though MS Teams was the main mode for vocational study programmes the college had also been using text, email and phone to communicate with students. Hard copy materials had also been mailed to ESOL learners. Overall, a range of methods had been used depending on the needs of the learner.

ADG suggested that further in-depth surveys of students be undertaken to inform delivery from September. MG acknowledged this but also reminded the meeting that this would be influenced by the practical elements of some study programmes. Members noted the paper.

ii. KPI Dashboard

(Paper and spreadsheet provided in advance)

JW explained that the KPIs had been updated within the context of remote learning in response to the coronavirus. The Committee noted each aspect of the report. On attendance SD highlighted that those students completing tasks were not necessarily those attending lessons online, so overall engagement was higher than the 66% indicated in the KPIs. It was thought to be higher than physical attendance when the buildings were open.

JW explained that some of the second window lesson observations had taken place prior to lockdown, though around 80 remained to be completed. It had been considered unfair to conduct them remotely at the current time. 58% of these lesson observations had exceeded standards against the 85% target. ADG asked if consideration was being given to remote lesson observations for the following year. GW confirmed this. SD said that the lesson observation figure of 58% in the KPIs was an accumulative figure covering the first and second lesson observations windows, and should this be used to extrapolate an estimated level had they all been completed, this was likely to be in the region of 65% remembering that the second window was to re-assess teachers performing at a lower level. This showed an improvement in this area from 46% the previous year.

On student achievement (which was also covered in a later paper) JW said that the ESOL figures were up to and including term 2. The improvements to English and maths grades were noted and that these may be moderated by the exam boards.

CS asked if the KPIs were generated automatically or manually. JW confirmed that it was currently done manually, but progress was being made on developing a business intelligence system which was key to monitoring performance going forward.

TJ asked how reliable were the predictions? JW said that these reflected actual achievement at assessment points. Additionally, the data supported the journey narrative that the organisation was experiencing. Members noted the paper.

iii. Enrolment/ Marketing Update

(Paper provided in advance)

CC said that this paper had been prepared by the Marketing Director, Adrian Quester. Marketing for the Summer campaign needed to be taken forward in the context of online enrolment and also the impact of coronavirus and social distancing. The paper set out the campaign to attract new students and the challenges involved, including travelling across London to the college. Marketing efforts would divert from widely printed media to direct and virtual mailing within the local boroughs where students could travel to the college sites more easily. There was a slight reduction in the marketing spend from this approach. CC said that she would welcome feedback on this approach as it was difficult to judge.

ADG said that there was no reference in the campaign to BAME communities which were more effected by coronavirus, and may need additional assurance. NB confirmed that this was a very important issue, but the marketing piece was really looking at straplines for marketing at this point. Wider communications for support for students would be available so students would feel safe.

MGr noted that the withdrawal of free travel for under 18s may also impact on college choices, and was supportive of prioritising the local boroughs. CC said that the marketing would be direct with leaflets through doors, and also contact with parents who would want assurance that their children would be safe in college.

TJ said that he had misgivings about the report and that he thought there were serious gaps. Specifically, he thought that there was no understanding of the college's key audiences and how the messages needed to be different for different segments, for example adults looking to retrain and school leavers needing to remain in education. There was also no evidence from previous campaigns of effectiveness of the marketing investment which he didn't consider difficult to do in a digital environment. He thought that it should be possible to link application numbers with marketing effort and spend and use this information to best affect.

GA said that she thought the strategy was positive and that the online course booklet was useful.

JW provided a verbal overview of enrolment which would be online as far as possible. Work was still in progress in this area and it was hoped would be firmer in the next couple of weeks. There were two aspects of the enrolment process, fee assessment and IAG that were more difficult to do online though solutions were being considered. There was confidence that re-enrolment of continuers and progressers could be done easily online. SD reported that the GLA were considering changing the funding of level 1 to 3 courses that would mean that they would be fully funded which would remove the fee assessment element of the enrolment process. Members noted the marketing paper.

iv. Academic risk register

(Risk register provided in advance)

SD explained that the risk register was largely the same as the previous version in March except for the addition of a new risk in response to coronavirus and the related uncertainty on student enrolment levels for September. Many of the risks had reduced following the work taking forward the Ofsted Action Plan.

ADG asked what contingencies were being considered in the event that student enrolments were low, and if cuts and redundancies were being considered. SD explained that there was lag funding on 16-19 provision so the level of funding for this element for 2020/21 was known. The problem would be if there was a significant increase in student numbers how the provision would be resourced. NB explained that the 16-19 demographic had increased for this year's cohort that was coming through, and the pressures on the labour market following coronavirus was likely to push more people into education who were unable to gain employment. These factors would also act as mitigants.

TJ asked if consideration should be given to including a risk on failure to deliver blended learning noting the number of students who were currently not engaged in the process. SD was of the view that progress in this area was positive in the current situation but would reflect on the feedback. Members noted the risk register.

v. Student Engagement Policy

(Policy circulated in advance)

Earlier drafts of this policy had been presented at previous meetings of this committee. It was noted that the draft policy had been sent to members in advance and would have read it before the meeting. No further comments were raised on the draft policy. Members agreed for the draft policy to be recommended to the Corporation for approval at its meeting in July.

Teaching, Learning and Skills	
5	<p>i. Report of SLWG – Ofsted Action Plan <i>(Paper circulated in advance)</i></p> <p>GW set out the process taken to date in reaching the Ofsted Action Plan and the outcomes of the Short Life Working Groups. The emphasis was to achieve sustainable change. Approximately 80 staff from across all disciplines had been involved in the SLWGs which had resulted in the detailed report that had been provided to the Committee. It was noted that this would provide a significant overhaul to delivery and the way UCG worked. The SLWG report covered a number of areas which had already been discussed elsewhere on the agenda. The alignment of digital systems and use of property was noted. The curriculum would also be developed into career clusters which would emulate the work environment and link with work related pathways. SD pointed out that this was a holistic piece of work which had been developed in line with the overarching UCG strategy, with improvements to the aspects inspected by Ofsted being embedded within it.</p> <p>ADG suggested that the EDI aspects of it were insufficiently explicit, and sought that learner groups be referenced more. TJ acknowledged the huge amount of work, and welcomed the holistic and comprehensive approach taken. He sought guidance on the level of scrutiny needed to support its implementation and timelines on the actions in the plan. SD said that various aspects of the plan would disaggregate into other aspects of the agenda. NB said that it may be necessary to alter the governance structure for a specific committee to monitor the action plan.</p> <p>Matthew Green left the meeting at 11 am.</p> <p>ii. Curriculum Planning <i>(Paper circulated in advance)</i></p> <p>JW reported that this paper provided the conclusions of the Portfolio Review Process which had been reported at previous meetings of this committee. The decision to withdraw science A levels and teach out science A2 was noted. This was due to poor performance in this area and difficulty in recruiting and retaining good science teachers. Members noted the over-reliance on HPLs in some areas and the level and cost of remission hours.</p> <p>TJ sought clarity on the decisions to discontinue certain programmes and the process for this. JW explained that this had be detailed in the portfolio review process papers of the previous meeting. Programmes needed to fulfil criteria including sustainability, efficiency and demand.</p> <p>GA expressed concern that the AEB funding streams were currently set to exceed allocations by 112%. SD said that this was based on assumptions from the previous year and was a current estimate and open to variation. It was also the intention to reduce the level of remission hours which would provide some slack in the budget position.</p> <p>iii. Predicted Achievement 2019/20 <i>(Paper circulated in advance)</i></p> <p>It was noted that the predicted grades had already been discussed in part under the KPI item earlier in the agenda. JW said that there was a degree of confidence in the predictions as these had been taken from actual assessments, however, given the changes to the exam process this year due to coronavirus it was uncertain how the awarding body would moderate the results. Some qualifications had a practical element to them which were also difficult to predict. The focus had been on providing accurate predictions though it was</p>

	<p>thought that Science, Engineering and Construction may have taken a more cautious approach given the changes to the assessment process this year.</p> <p>TJ asked if outsourced provision was included in these figures. JW confirmed that it was. Currently UCG's performance was 1.9% below that of last year. It may be possible that with the addition of ESOL continuers from term 2 that this may increase by 2.1 % to take the final achievement levels slightly above last year's level overall.</p> <p>iv. National Achievement Rates <i>(Paper provided in advance)</i></p> <p>The National Achievement Rates (NARs) had recently been published. This paper benchmarked last year's performance against the NARs for 2018/19. As the NARs had increased this resulted in a greater gap in UCG's performance against national benchmarks. Where UCG's performance previously exceeded the NARs it was now level or reduced. Overall UCG's position had declined against the national rates. ADG said that she would be interested to know the outcomes for different learner groups. JW explained that this had been assessed as part of the results analysis earlier in the year and there were no significant differences. Members noted the report.</p> <p>v. HE QSR Report and Action Plan <i>(Paper provided in advance)</i></p> <p>GW presented this paper to the committee. She explained that it was for information only as it had been reviewed in detail at the HE Oversight Committee in May which included governor representation. The QSR had looked at four areas for inspection. Two had been met and two not met. An action plan had been put in place to address the respective aspects which was anticipated to be implemented promptly. TJ asked if it was known yet what happens post inspection as this was to be followed up after the HE Oversight Committee. SD said that he was still awaiting a response from the OfS.</p>
6	<p>AOB</p> <p>i. Safeguarding <i>(Paper circulated in advance)</i></p> <p>GW described her long and detailed paper which set out the actions taken to review all aspects of safeguarding in response to the coronavirus pandemic and the transfer of processes online. Members noted that the college provided a safe environment for some students away from the safeguarding risks they may experience in their own homes, and some of the complex issues they often faced. It was noted how attendance and engagement in remote learning had linked with safeguarding, and the role of key workers in this regard. Members acknowledged the amount of work that had gone into protecting UCG's students within the changing circumstances and noted the report.</p>
7	<p>Date of next meeting TBC</p>

Minutes taken by Zoë Lawrence 08/06/2020

SIGNED: **Date:**
Colin Smith
TLS Chair (temporary)