

Quality & Learners' Committee Minutes

**TUESDAY 10 FEBRUARY 2026 16.30
TO BE HELD ON TEAMS**

Members: **Christian Norman** (Chair), Sarah Atkinson (Vice Chair), Paddy Reilly, Helen Russell, Sheila Salmon, Naomi Hiskett (student member), Nadia Themis (staff member), CEO (Principal)

Attendees: Debbie Garroway (Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality), Alan Burgess, Phil Clark, Sarah Hamilton, Rebecca Leech

1.	MATTERS	ACTIONS
2.	Apologies for absence The Chair welcomed everyone and noted that Penny Petch had sent apologies. Naomi Hiskett did not attend. Nadia Themis joined the meeting at Item 6.	
3.	Declarations of Interest and to notify any confidential Items There were no declarations of interest or items of a confidential nature.	
4.	To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2025 AGREED: THE QUALITY AND LEARNERS' COMMITTEE AGREED THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 4 NOVEMBER 2025 WERE A TRUE AND ACCURATE RECORD.	
5.	Matters Arising All the items have been completed and where appropriate are included in papers on this agenda. The actions had been as follows: Item 5. Quality Improvement Plan 2025-26 - DG to ensure future meetings will cyclically have deep dives into these themes. Item 11. Analysis of complaints and compliments - RL to review the complaints tracker and add a column indicating an assessment of the appropriateness or relevance of each complaint. - RHB to add the risk around safeguarding and prevent to students from extremism to the February 2026 agenda.	

	TO DISCUSS AND APPROVE	
6.	Deputy Principal's report against key matters and quality KPIs Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality presented a paper which was the first of this type outlining the three overarching priorities on which the College is focusing to underpin achievement of the academic KPIs. 1. Attendance 2. Teaching learning and assessment 3. Apprenticeships Governors asked for more detail on an item on GCSE English resit results on page 2. There had been a number of resits in November for maths and English. Item 13 gives more detail on this but 35% achieved grade 4 in maths against the benchmark of 23.2% and for English it was 61% against a national rate of 37.5%. It was also noted that the apprenticeship data did not include those who are on longer courses and not due to complete until 2027 and 2028 and that retention for these learners is key. ACTION: DG to include data for apprentices on longer courses in future reports so that retention and predicted achievement can be seen for those finishing in 26/27, 27/28, 28/29 and beyond if appropriate. The Committee expressed concern about the risks represented by having 40% of staff at agency or unqualified, compounded by high rates of staff turnover. In addition to the potential effect on the quality of learning, the substantive staff trying to cover may be experiencing high levels of stress and this might lead to high sickness rates. Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality said that staffing is one of the key risks highlighted in the risk paper. She reminded governors that often the agency staff are highly qualified and experienced teachers. The vacancies and problems around 'difficult to recruit to' staff remains an ongoing issue. The College worked to address this issue and to make the College the FE college of choice by the following measures: • Updating the pay policy to ensure the College is competitive • Looking at the marketing to maximise the attraction to the College • Reviewing staff benefits Frustratingly, recently some candidates are successful at interview, and an offer is made but they are not taking up the role as they choose other institutions for lifestyle reasons or perks. There are also gaps in the	DG

	leadership roles and the remaining SLT have to adopt the responsibilities of these missing middle leaders. The Committee asked why people are resigning. CEO reminded governors that there will be a full report from HR to the PSR Committee. The turnover is at 20% against a KPI of 18% and a national AoC benchmark of 15%. The College has looked at reasons for leaving and it seems that 50% move to other jobs and the remaining 50% have lifestyle reasons. There is an environment of active headhunting. Governors asked if agency staff are covering the long-term recruitment gaps and if so, was someone permanently employed to be cover staff. This is being progressed and a ‘cover teacher’ is being recruited to offer students continuity. The Board offered the congratulations to staff for the positive environment that governors had witnessed in the learning walks on 6 February 2026. Christian Norman also commended the work on the T levels data which had been reported as outperforming the national rate and was particularly worthy of note as it was a new qualification and an area where there had been a high level of staff turnover. <i>Nadia Themis joined the meeting at 16.40</i> Need to note that extra resource is being sought both on an interim and permanent basis to mitigate the risk of the MIS system. Power BI skills are hard to locate. The College has undertaken physical analyses for reports for retention in the interim.											
7.	Deep dive for ATTENDANCE <u>Current overall attendance January 2026</u> <table><tr><th><u>Week commencing</u></th><th><u>Overall attendance (%)</u></th></tr><tr><td>5 January 2026</td><td>70.69%</td></tr><tr><td>12 January 2026</td><td>70.69%</td></tr><tr><td>19 January 2026</td><td>70.85%</td></tr><tr><td>26 January 2026</td><td>70.79%</td></tr></table> Since the data was collated, more work has calculated that the attendance rate is nearer to 73%.	<u>Week commencing</u>	<u>Overall attendance (%)</u>	5 January 2026	70.69%	12 January 2026	70.69%	19 January 2026	70.85%	26 January 2026	70.79%	
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Governors commented that the attendance is way below target as unless 100% attendance is achieved for the rest of the year. They asked what actions were being taken and if the College was clear about the reasons and data behind the numbers.

Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality outlined the steps taken to improve attendance:

- Senior Leadership Team members have undertaken focused reviews of curriculum areas with the lowest attendance, strengthening accountability and ensuring that improvement actions are being driven with urgency.
- Middle Leaders have been supported to analyse patterns within their cohorts more effectively and to implement localised strategies.
- Middle and Senior Leaders have participated in a workshop focusing on solutions to improve attendance, including a recent attendance deep dive with SLT and Heads.
- MIS team have worked on cleansing the attendance data.
- Teachers have engaged in focus groups to give open and transparent feedback on their experience and to provide solutions.
- Teaching, Learning and Skills Coaches have supported targeted development sessions to reinforce consistent register-taking practices and good pedagogical practices
- Additional Learner Engagement Officers have been recruited with a clear role to follow-up with non-attenders who are in vulnerable individuals/groups.
- Student Support has focused on greater promotion of the Bursary (Free Money).
- **Learners** have been involved through attendance conversations, reinforced expectations and personalised support designed to remove barriers and promote regular participation.
- **Stakeholders** have supported the College by providing opportunities to link why attendance patterns need to be good.
- **HR** has focused on the recruitment of permanent staff.

Despite these actions, attendance remains a serious issue and risk.

Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality outlined the following actions that governors can do to assist:

- **Maintain strategic oversight** by keeping attendance as a standing agenda item and monitoring key risks and trends.
- **Provide constructive challenge** to leaders on the pace and effectiveness of improvement actions.
- **Support workforce stability** by endorsing plans to reduce agency reliance and strengthen permanent staffing.
- **Champion high-quality teaching and learning** as a driver of improved attendance.

- **Seek assurance for vulnerable learners** to ensure targeted support is in place and effective.
- **Promote a whole-college culture of high expectations** around attendance.
- **Advocate externally** for improved national support for FE attendance.

Attendance remains a red risk for the College with attendance for the month of January remaining at circa 70% against a KPI of 85%. The recent review of which demonstrates attendance at 73% is the same as the numbers in November 2025. There are issues with the MIS system which are thought to be a combination of human error and compliance and the system itself.

The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality said the pattern reflects expectations and there is difference from department to department where some are performing better but there are complex social reasons as learners are attending work rather than College. Learners have family issues which prevent them from attending and English and maths is still a challenge and lower than target. The dashboard needs to be developed to allow the SLT to target areas.

There have been workshops with leaders, teachers and learners to ascertain the reasons and the inconsistency of staffing is causing issues. DG held a meeting with the teams and asked middle leaders to work with agency staff in the same way as they would with substantive staff. The expectations on attendance have been made clear.

The College has forensically unpicked timetabling. The College is also looking at splitting out the pastoral role as teachers do not have time to chase.

The Chair noted that this will be a focus from the Ofsted perspective. A recent report demonstrated this with one of the phrases being 'their attendance is viewed as persistently low'. At Chelmsford College attendance has been a concern for three years in a row. He asked Nadia Themis for her thoughts on attendance on a day-to-day basis for her groups. For students who attend for two days a week, they are disengaged from the learning experience. The learners take their responsibility to their work more seriously. She is able to see the attendance on a day-to-day basis on the [CEDAR](#) system. She outlined the process when a learner does not attend:

- In the first instance a call to the learner
- If no result talk to parents
- Then informal meeting with the student
- A letter is then sent home
- In the interim, the tutor informs the HoD and the Department Deputy
- Calls to the student continue

- if this doesn't work, after then she calls home then it becomes a safeguarding issue.

She believes the process and expectation is quite clear.

Governors noted that attendance has, nonetheless, dropped from just below 80% last year to 73% this year. All the actions outlined seem logical but the impact of them is not being seen. He asked all colleagues what support is required.

Alan Burgess, director of campus at Moulsham Street, said there are a couple of factors at play. Some of the issues are to do with catching up with system glitches at the beginning of the year and clarifying data. More broadly, the way in which information on attendance is received, there is no breakdown. A learner on a programme may have a plethora of courses such as LifeSkills, English and their main course. The College needs to be able to drill down on their attendance at each of the elements rather than using gut feeling so that the core reasons can be identified.

The Committee asked if there is a difference in attendance for classes delivered by core staff and the 24% of agency staff. Currently the system doesn't allow analyses of this. The MIS staff are working with [PowerBI](#) to allow this granularity of data to inform interrogation, support and intervention. The Chair suggested that the College urgently needs to put more resource behind the development of PowerBI. He empathised as his own organisation is experiencing a similar situation which is not easy to fix in a short timescale.

Rebecca Leech agreed that the process is clear and has been communicated throughout the organisation, but the consistency of implementation is critical. Her department has put in place video training on how to use CEDAR expectations from a safeguarding perspective and it is important that agency staff view these when they join the College. Governors suggested that other methods need to be found to ensure that new and agency staff understand.

Governors expressed serious concern about the reliability of the data and asked how the Board can be assured that registers are being accurately completed and maintained. They asked how they can be assured that the 73% attendance figure is correct if the data is not reliable. Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality explained that registers have been an issue. The chaos on timetabling, systems and issues at the beginning of the term led to staff working 13-hour days and the complexity of the system has been difficult to navigate. She had sent an email to academic staff to require them to work closely with MIS and both to take accountability. She reminded the Committee that registers are a legal issue with implications for safeguarding and therefore completing them is mandatory. She will be meeting with those

	not completing registers after half term. Alan Burgess said there are meetings booked between HoDs, campus staff and MIS to look at each member of staff, where the missing registers are and to discuss whether it is human or system error. This is intended to bring non-compliance to zero. One governor commented they had witnessed that other students are disparaging about nonattendance so there is peer pressure. There also needs to be a culture of zero tolerance from all staff. Students have enrolled to the College through choice and need a sense of belonging. Work needs to be done to find when they start to be disengaged. Paddy Reilly said data and systems are one thing, but that focus should be on what is done and on what actions are being undertaken with learners to improve attendance. Staff must keep an eye on learners and patterns which are behind this non-attendance. Rebecca Leech confirmed that tutors immediately contact the students and parents from the day of absence and it only becomes a safeguarding issue at ten days. The Chair suggested that such a serious issue should warrant an external review and identify where the breakdowns are. This would possibly inform the College why the actions are not working. The average across the sector from the last AoC report is looking at 89% in 2021 which is outdated. Clearly action needs to be taken and many of the actions in place have not resulted in the hoped for impact regardless of the MIS system. There is an accepted correlation between attendance and achievement which is another concern. DW said the average is around 80% in colleges now and even if the systems error is a factor, the College is not achieving the attendance required. The actions in place seem to be the 'right ones.' The College has employed 'learner engagement' officers and two additional staff working on PowerBI. He considered the independent audit, or review, is the correct next step to get into the detail and inform future action. ACTION: ELT to commission an external review of the issues of college attendance, the actions currently in place, and propose any additional mitigations. Sheila Salmon supported the independent review of attendance and would also recommend such a review of the new MIS system to see if it is effective, if it requires more funding or replacing. There needs to be assurance that this system will be fit-for-purpose going forward or a decision made to find an alternative. ACTION: ELT to commission an independent review of the CEDAR system to inform a decision on how to proceed or replace it.	ELT ELT
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	Christian Norman thanked everyone for the detailed and frank discussion on this difficult and ongoing topic. It was pleasing to note that all attendees are focussed on student experience and outcomes.	
8.	Quality Improvement Plan I. Monitoring of Quality Improvement Plan 2025-26 Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality pointed out that it is mid-point through the year and most of the areas are not yet green. As noted, attendance has stark red and it is hoped that external advice may help move this forward. Teaching and learning - there are positive things such as the research which is part of innovation and risk taking and is underway. The College has built on the position last year and will have a symposium in July 2026. Apprenticeships – these are also not at target and are below national benchmarks. The parameters for the apprenticeships' accountability framework has shifted and focus needs to be on good quality timely reviews and that learners meet expected end dates. Christian Norman acknowledged the positive work that is taking place across the organisation to improve teaching and learning and thanked colleagues.	
9.	Safeguarding update (SI) Rebecca Leech confirmed that the accuracy of the records in the safeguarding team is good and response is swift and appropriate. Referrals are made with the relevant multi-agencies when required. Data is compiled manually when necessary. • The College has now received the transition information it needs from feeder schools from all but five. These are now being escalated through Education Essex. • There are quite a few issues around attendance related to safeguarding. The prevent update has not been a referral to channels although two learners were disciplined for potential antisemitic remarks and are being monitored. There have been no further issues and Rebecca Leech has spoken to the local safeguarding team who confirmed that no further action is required. An external agent had referred one learner last year, but this also requires no further action. Paddy Reilly, lead governor for Safeguarding, had met with Rebecca Leech in December 2025 and the key thing had been the transfer of records from schools. This places a huge amount of work on colleagues which is complex	

	and places a strain on the team. Human Resources is still chasing compliance for KCSIE training which was offered as a document or a podcast and just under 50% of staff to take the quiz but are being followed up.																					
10.	Student performance In-year retention Delayed access to systems and the lack of a stable and consistent timetable system at the start of term, have had a significant impact on understanding retention this academic year. Overall college retention currently stands at 94.4% from RO5 and is almost aligned with last year’s data. It is hard to compare to prior years due to changes in the offer. Retention remains strong against all cohorts. An extract from ProAchieve on 23 January 2026 was included in the report. Projected outcomes <u>16-19 Best Case Scenario</u> <table><tr><th>Department</th><th>Predicted Achievement Rate (16-18)</th></tr><tr><td>Digital and Creative</td><td>85%</td></tr><tr><td>Business</td><td>80% (inc In2) 85% (without)</td></tr><tr><td>Inspire (M)</td><td>60%</td></tr><tr><td>Inspire (E)</td><td>80%</td></tr><tr><td>Trades/Technical Construction</td><td>86%</td></tr><tr><td>Hairdressing</td><td>85%</td></tr><tr><td>Beauty Therapy</td><td>87%</td></tr><tr><td>Engineering</td><td>85%</td></tr><tr><td>Public Services</td><td>87%</td></tr></table> <u>Apprenticeships Best Case Scenario - 76.7% (all ages)</u> Apprenticeships Accountability Framework	Department	Predicted Achievement Rate (16-18)	Digital and Creative	85%	Business	80% (inc In2) 85% (without)	Inspire (M)	60%	Inspire (E)	80%	Trades/Technical Construction	86%	Hairdressing	85%	Beauty Therapy	87%	Engineering	85%	Public Services	87%	
Department	Predicted Achievement Rate (16-18)																					
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Inspire (E)	80%																					
Trades/Technical Construction	86%																					
Hairdressing	85%																					
Beauty Therapy	87%																					
Engineering	85%																					
Public Services	87%																					

Apprenticeship Accountability Framework

Showing data for R05 of 2025/26 (Updated: 27/01/2026)

Total number of apprentices: 486

Select title to view more information

Withdrawals 0.8% On Track	Achievement and retention rates (QAR) R14 provisional 2024/25 Achievement: 55.15% Needs Improvement Retention: 56.36% Needs Improvement
Past planned end date % of total apprentices past their planned end date and still training: 11.7% On Track	
Employer feedback 3.3 On Track	Apprentice feedback N/A Not Applicable

Governors asked if elements of retention data should be included in the independent review that is planned. This was agreed it would be prudent given the comments on the reliability of the data. They are working closely with MIS and positive progress is anticipated.

The Committee asked if withdrawals from last year are impacting this year and if this was the case on two-year courses.

Nadia Themis left the meeting at 17.35

Governors asked how this year's predictions compare to last year's outcomes and if the College is on track. Alan Burgess explained that this depends on each case as there is complexity depending on the programme. Where there is a new course, for example the whole new suite of T level courses, there may not be national data, and it is therefore hard to map progress. For more established courses, data is more available but there are still variables such as the cohort, teacher and syllabus changes. CEO said that this time last year the College was predicting 85% for 16–18-year-olds and landed at 83.8 %, for 19+ 78% predicted with outcomes at 76% and apprenticeships were predicted at 51% and outcomes were at 55% so the prediction had been fairly accurate. There can never be an accurate prediction but historically they have been within 1-2% of the outcome. Predictions on longer apprenticeships over several years are much harder to make.

PC/AB

Governors asked what the risks are to the College around the fact that for apprenticeships the accountability metrics have changed. CEO acknowledged that this is a good question and the 11.7% does factor in 14 apprentices in early years that have completed but due to a cyber-attack on one of the awarding bodies before Christmas there has been a delay on issuing certificates and allow the College to take them off the system. Once these learners are removed, it will be 8% which is still too high.

	Action: PC and AB to highlight the number of learners, the percentage and the national benchmark rates in future reports	
11.	Teaching and training Update on term 1 • 40% of teaching staff are agency (24%) or not yet qualified (16%). This impacts on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment • The Teaching, Learning and Skills Academy (TLSA) has been working with reduced capacity due to staff changes and sickness absence. • Each Teaching, Learning and Skills Coach is linked to a particular department for support. This continues to be a positive move. • Learning Walk data for term 1 is positive in comparison to this point last year. Of 51 learning Walks, 90% are 'secure' or 'mastery' compared to 89% at this point last year. This does not include agency staff or those in initial teacher education. • The professional development day in January provided all staff with a range of bookable and 'directed' sessions. • Scholarly activity is underway in partnership with Anglia Ruskin University. Writing workshops have taken place with the next session booked for March. So far, the topics identified for further investigation are: 1. Use of AI to reduce teacher workload 2. Enhancing employability skills in T-Level learners using digital technology to make them more competitive in the job market (this project has secured funding from the ETF) 3. Investigating how well learners with SEND (particularly deaf learners) are supported in preparing for their next steps and the world of employment • Project number 2 attracts funding which will support the acquirement of keynote speakers in July. • In addition, Supported Experiment proposals are due for approval by the end of January with the outcomes shared in the Symposium in July. Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality welcomed the feedback given by the Board members on the learning walks at the Board Development Day on 6 February 2026. Action: DG to ensure that middle leaders and directors are arranging classroom visits to agency staff in the first weeks back after February half term. Mastery is not for teachers to have yet another observation but to share their	DG

	expertise with others. Agency staff do not have learning walks but do have classroom visits. Governors commented that the figure of 90% mastery does not include agency staff , it only represents the performance of 60% of staff. They asked how the College measures quality in ITT (initial teacher training) and agency staff. ITT staff have six observations throughout their study and have classroom visits at no notice. Agency staff also have classroom visits which are reported. ACTION: DG to report on the agency staff and ITT staff classroom visit outcomes. A governor commented that in the appendix table there is no data on construction, building services or business development. ACTION: DG to send the missing data on construction, building services or business development to RHB to share the data with the Committee. Governors asked for feedback from the staff from the 5 January 2026 CPD activities. This will be reported to the next meeting. ACTION: DG to gather feedback from the staff from the 5 January 2026 CPD activities and report back to the next meeting. There was a lot of positivity on the 5 January 2026, and staff were all on one campus. The back to the floor day is on the 26 March 2026 where staff go to industry or do social action. On 27 March there will be a digital AI conference for the whole college. There will then be a whole week of CPD in the summer. Christian Norman commented that FE week had highlighted that other colleges lose touch with the world of work and it is heartening to hear that Chelmsford College is ensuring that this does not happen to their staff.	DG DG DG
12.	Curriculum planning 2026-27 Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality outlined the timeline for curriculum planning for 2026-7 It is recognised that elements of the 2026–27 curriculum will operate as a deliberate transitional and risk-mitigating measure, reflecting uncertainty around the timing and final requirements of the Curriculum and Assessment Review reforms. In these areas, provision has been planned to maintain continuity, protect learner progression and achievement, and avoid premature structural change that could expose the College to delivery, quality or compliance risk. It is therefore anticipated that further	

curriculum adjustments will be required from 2027, once national reforms are confirmed, enabling the College to implement changes in a controlled, planned and sustainable way. This does not impact in all curriculum areas across the College but is evident in areas such as Health and Care.

Following clarity on the above policy measures, it is intended that the Curriculum Intent Strategy for 2027-28 will be presented to Board in June 2026.

Christian Norman quoted the advice note presented to the SGR Committee on 27 January 2026 from a conversation with a Deputy FEC:

A new version of the curriculum plan should be drafted asap and must include an impact assessment for curriculum reform.

Colleges must map curriculum qualifications against the new qualifications for

- 2026
- 2027
- 2028

Then identify those at risk from:

- Being deleted
- Progression from Level 1 to Level 2 being hampered

In order to model financial and outcomes impact.

It is appreciated that not enough is known about the curriculum reform currently, but Boards should ensure that this activity is undertaken when more is known.

The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality commented that there is not enough information at this point in a constant environment of change and this will be undertaken when more is known. In some areas qualification taps are being turned off and the College may have to move to new qualifications for periods as short as one year. There are some areas of the College where qualifications are at risk and there may be an AQ for one year before V levels come in, The system says that many of courses at L3 in Health and care, IT and creative and business enterprise will potentially not be funded so the College needs to consider a plan B. Baroness Smith said at the VIth form conference it is likely that the BTECs or their equivalents will not be turned off. Sarah Atkinson said that from UAL it is not possible to delete these as there is no equivalency. The CEO provided reassurance that the curriculum intent strategy contained all of these caveats and stands as a strategy with different models. Detail will be revised when more is known to give the Board oversight of year plan, probably in September 2026. Prior to this the accountability statement will come to the Board post LSIP in June 2026 in response to the curriculum reforms.

	Two years ago, when the BTEC defunding work started the College did model the impact on the funding and the risk around it was reported to the PSR Committee. This might be updated. Christian Norman thanked colleagues for the reminder and noted that the requirements had been noted.	
13.	English and maths update Governors noted that there was a massive growth in learner numbers for English and maths. PC said that it is a result of learners coming through with lower qualifications and there was a dip in 2024-5 nationally in school leaver outcomes. CN said that the key issue is that of attendance and is part of the independent review task. There is usually a 10% difference between English and maths attendance and that of the vocational course and noted work continues to clarify this.	
14.	Analysis of complaints and compliments (Term1) Colleagues asked if the report could indicate if the complaints had been considered vexatious, frivolous, substantive or unfounded, so this report now does this. 74 were recorded and 45 were substantive. The main areas of focus are: • Staffing in media T level • Learners reporting unfair treatment in Health and social care • External complaints on e-scooters and litter. Paddy Reilly thanked Rebecca Leech for the additional information which allowed a better understanding of the data.	
15.	Risks (SI) The risks had been discussed in earlier items. It was noted that staffing is a key concern through most of the papers.	
16.	Governance matters Chair of Committee – The Director of Governance reminded the meeting that Christian Norman will come to the end of his terms of office in July 2026. A new Chair is being sought from the current members.	
17.	Any other items notified the Director of Governance in advance of the meeting The Chair recognised the significant challenges that the Executive and Senior team are facing and thanked them for their efforts. The Board will continue to	

	support them and would welcome any requests. The meeting closed at 18.00	
18.	Date of next meeting • Tuesday 19 May 2026 at 16.30	

Chair approved