

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EDUCATION & STANDARDS COMMITTEE HELD AT 4.30 PM ON 5 DECEMBER 2022 IN THE BOARDROOM AT NEWCASTLE COLLEGE

Present: Lesley Rollason (Chair), Mary Jones, Francis Tunney, David O'Neill, Craig Hodgson

In attendance: Shelley Brown (Director of Curriculum and Performance), Jason Lancaster (Director of IoT and Employer Partnerships), Andy Bailey (Head of Compliance and Governance), Gavin Barker (Assistant Principal), Lesley Morrey (Director of Student Engagement and Partnerships), Joy Smith (Deputy Clerk)

22.4.1 Curriculum Updates at NSCG

Shelley updated members on the progress towards the latest developments and drew particular attention to the following points:

L3 Qualifications Reform – the latest guidance has been received and Engineering is no longer defunded. The College had submitted its bid to offer T Level Engineering instead because the defunding announcement was made only the day after the T Level bid deadline.

HTQs – Jason confirmed that we are currently offering HTQs in Digital. There is capital and revenue funding available, therefore, we have submitted a bid and hope to move other appropriate provision to under the HTQ banner. HTQs are important in terms of progression into the IoT. Craig confirmed that Staffs University are engaging with HTQs in a significant way and will be our greatest competitor in this area.

David joined the meeting at this point.

Shelley advised that the faculties are also working with parents and students about our HE offer. Craig commended the work of Paul Tanner who has done a sterling job getting the L4 Digital up and running.

Institute of Technology Updates – Jason confirmed that the capital agreement is ready to sign and the licensing and commercial agreements are being finalised. He was delighted to report that St Modwen have confirmed their commitment to join as they will be a really useful partner. Our longer-term ambition is to grow the partnership and we do intend to incorporate local colleges once they meet the criteria of being Ofsted grade 2 and above. Jason added that the curriculum offer will be planned out in conjunction with employer partners. Keele University are working with us on this. They are very enthusiastic about the benefits and are very committed to the IoT. Shelley added that Keele have been the most supportive of the universities in terms of T Levels too.

Adult offer updates – Shelley reminded members of the challenges across the sector in this area. We are planning to look at the internal market

along with the external pipeline and our marketing activity has been accelerated. The UHNM are keen to work with us on adult courses for their staff and we have a link with local authorities on some bespoke programmes.

T Level updates – Shelley advised on the pathways currently running and the ambitious target of 367 enrolments for next year. Different pathways will be introduced which we hope will be attractive to potential students. We are pushing T Levels through our marketing activities and open event interest is definitely increasing. We now have a Group T Level Co-ordinator with T Level leads sitting within the curriculum areas. This structure will now be built on with new work placement officers. We are engaging nationally on T Levels with colleagues across the sector and there will be a T Level insight day in early February which we have been asked to host on behalf of the AoC. We are also planning to resubmit our capital bid and adapt our original plan to accommodate our T Level growth. Francis asked about the success of T Levels generally and Shelley indicated that the approach by the Government has changed. It is recognised that they are a good qualification for those who know what they want to do, but equally there is a demand for BTECs too and the Government cutting back the scale of defunding BTECs has enabled us to provide the best offer for all students.

Craig advised that all political parties are supporting T Levels. Francis added that in schools they are finding it difficult to recruit onto T Level courses. Students are aware of the significant commitment required for a T Level. Gavin added that there is also a risk to the organisation as this is a 2 year course.

David queried the rate of engagement of employers with T Levels and Shelley confirmed that this has improved and is gaining momentum. We are tapping in to our long-standing relationships with employers with whom we have worked previously with BTECs. Employer involvement within the curriculum will be boosted over the coming months to ensure that the qualifications provide what employers need, matching up with the new Ofsted requirement in relation to the skills agenda. T Levels have been employer led from the outset and will be employer driven as time goes on.

Craig advised that the LSIPs are being driven by employers to consider the skills needs of their areas, compared to what is offered by colleges, in order to ensure that there is a match. Levels 4, 5 and numeracy are the key issues to improving productivity and this is being heavily driven by the LSIPs. This will be a change for employers who are not used to making a contribution in terms of offering work placements. Jason added that locally there is a significant gap in numbers who have Level 4 and 5 and numeracy is also a local challenge.

Shelley drew attention to the progress against the initiatives members had discussed in the summer. Those courses which are being monitored are not necessarily under-performing, but do have elements on which are working with the teams to address. The new CPD slots of one hour per week have commenced, with mixed feedback so far. We have now asked faculties to devise bespoke agendas for their CPD depending on their particular needs. The timetable change has been implemented with one hour blocks providing an experience akin to a school timetable. This is a

heavy teaching commitment for the staff, however, the student feedback is very positive.

We have held targeted open events and T Level events. Shelley advised on a conference she had attended where it was noted that the biggest cohort group affected by lower grades are those who are not in the UCAS system as they do not have a goal or focus. We will be implementing new initiatives to try to address this.

Gavin drew attention to the requirements of the exams in January where we will have c6,500 sittings in a 3 week period and 9,500 sittings in the Summer. Meetings have been held with the teams to go through rooming, logistics, IT requirements etc. New invigilators have been recruited and we will be training the new tutors. The number of sittings will have a significant pull on accommodation across both sites, particularly due to the constant increases in special considerations and requirements. Our CPD days will be timetabled on the busiest exam days so that normal classes are not running and we can ensure that the rooms and staff are available to help exams go as smoothly as possible.

Gavin went on to talk about the improvement in behaviour and attitude of students now we are in the second year post-Covid. We are seeing this across the whole Group and it is very pleasing. David asked about how this feeds into attendance numbers. Shelley reported that at 95% our attendance expectations are very high and we have seen an upturn, although English and maths are the current challenge which we are now working to address. This is a national issue and we are working hard to improve the situation, although it must be noted that our attendance in maths and English is better than many FE organisations.

Francis added that this Summer's GCSE maths paper was particularly hard and our achievement at 11% was disappointing. We have made changes and are including additional contextualised maths and English in core subjects and are implemented lots of different approaches to try to address this.

Gavin reminded colleagues of the introduction of the new Super Tutor model in September which is generally proving to be successful.

QoERs have been revised with a new process and more streamlined reporting mechanism. We have a smaller observation team undertaking deep dives within each department, honing in on the key challenges, replicating the approach that Ofsted would take. Staff feedback is positive and the feeling is that it is less intrusive and provides a true reflection of the lesson. Managers are fully involved in the process. The key areas for development arising from the reviews undertaken so far were all issues that we were aware of.

David asked about work placements and the low uptake. He referred to a report released by the BBC referring to students from deprived areas being more reluctant to take up work placement opportunities. Shelley referred to a student who had come to report to the Senior Management Team meeting, Emma Gallimore, who had spoken about the struggles students have actually getting to work placements due to financial constraints and logistics. Age restrictions also apply creating problems for 16 year olds

who want to look into an area where 18 is the minimum age. This is why we are working hard with employers to break down barriers.

Craig advised that we are currently looking at what financial help we can provide to our students for travel to stop any disadvantage in relation to accessing placements because of financial restrictions. Shelley added that we have lots of students who are not A Level/T Level calibre and it is also vital that we place them with the right employers.

Francis advised that the changing approach and format of the reviews has been a really positive move and refreshing this every 2-3 years would be really good. He added that the next step could be empowering staff to undertake their own review with a managerial oversight/quality assurance overview, however, this is a big step.

Shelley referred to the key areas of focus going forward into the Spring 2023 term with A Level/GCSE English and maths mocks, keeping warm activities to engage applicants and cement their relationship with us and working on progression with students who have not submitted an application to university/those between levels.

We are planning a training programme for middle managers, offered as an in-house programme delivered with external support, to run over 12-18 months which will include Ofsted updates. Shelley advised that the Ofsted approach has moved to more knowledge/skills/behaviours and away from being data driven.

Curriculum planning will involve employers looking at how we can shape the curriculum, what additional elements we can include, using the 40 hours to work on students' skills. Hereford and Ludlow College were recently inspected and we hope to invite them in to talk to managers about their experiences. Shelley added that all providers will be inspected by 2025 according to the latest Government information. We are not in a risk category and, therefore, expect to be inspected towards the end of the cycle, but we will not rely on this.

Shelley referred to the policy changes coming up and the expectation that the population will peak in 2028; after that things will get tougher. There are lots of challenges in the sector relating to pay/energy/strikes but no help forthcoming for colleges. Maths remains high on the agenda and we are looking to provide extra numeracy support for most programmes.

David asked about funding for adult education and Shelley advised that we are going to focus on how we approach this and what we can offer to increase the uptake in this area.

Shelley and Gavin were thanked for their interesting update.

22.4.2 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Alan Aston.

22.4.3 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest in any items on the agenda.

22.4.4 Minutes of the meeting held on 18 October 2022

Approved as a true record of the meeting.

22.4.5 Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

22.4.6 Learner Data Report

Shelley introduced the latest Learner Data Report and Lesley expressed her sincere thanks for the new approach which provides information in a far easier to distil format, with additional information provided as appendices for anyone who wishes to investigate further.

Francis added that reports like this can be overwhelming because there is so much information to go through. He wondered if there was the scope for any further refinements in terms of timely issues being those contained in the main report. Shelley advised that there are elements that could come and go and be included as appendices as the focus moves through the academic year.

Craig felt that the key areas for improvement are the main part of the report for members to focus on along with the associated actions which provide the points for challenge.

David asked about the number of course monitoring meetings and Shelley advised that we are looking at performance against very high benchmarks with meetings being held to make sure we keep on top of the situation. This is the first year of real data following CAGs and TAGs and Craig confirmed that we are only worried about 3 courses, with the initiative being more about monitoring and support.

Lesley referred to an anomaly relating to the Hair and Beauty students. In the student survey there is a point about them not enjoying their course, we have issues with attendance and yet a good QoER outcome. Gavin advised that the QoER relies on speaking to students who are present, with those who are not attending not being part of the process, and Lesley wondered if there was a mechanism to pick this up. Craig confirmed that what was tested in the QoER was good and we are also aware of an issue with a member of staff which is skewing the data, and also that attendance is a problem. Gavin advised that these issues are picked up in the narrative and it was agreed that any such issues would be included in the top line of the report so that members could see the full picture.

GB

Members all thanked Shelley and Gavin for the new format of the report which is very welcome and provides real clarity. Craig added that the team have done a really good job in relaunching the report in its new format yet maintaining the important elements.

22.4.7 Any Other Business

a. Schedule of events and activities

It was agreed that Gavin will put together a schedule of activities and events for members to join if they wish.

GB

b. Carol Services

Craig advised that we will be holding our two end of year Carol Services next week and reminded members that they are very welcome to attend.

c. Link Governor Events

David advised that he had attended an event arranged by the CEC to celebrate careers, however, there was very little quantitative data available. He had gone to the last link governor meeting where only 2 had attended. A survey had been circulated and out of 17 surveyed only 7 had responded. They are pushing the use of Compass which is not suited to colleges and he felt that the whole experience was not very satisfactory. Lesley Morrey added that she and Liz Wyman are also stressing the message about Compass.

22.4.8 Date and Time of Next Meeting

15 March 2023 at Stafford College