

## **MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EDUCATION & STANDARDS COMMITTEE HELD AT 4.30 PM ON 15 MARCH 2023 IN THE BOARDROOM AT STAFFORD COLLEGE**

Present: Lesley Rollason (Chair), Craig Hodgson, Francis Tunney, Mary Jones (via Zoom)  
In attendance: Shelley Brown (Director Curriculum and Performance), Lesley Morrey (Director of Student Engagement and Partnerships - via Zoom), Jason Lancaster (Director of IoT and Employer Partnerships), Debbie Torjussen (Director of Finance and Corporate Services), Gavin Barker (Assistant Principal), Andy Bailey (Head of Compliance and Governance), Joy Smith (Deputy Clerk)

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### **23.1.1 Level 3 Reform Update**

Shelley reminded members of the various updates previously given regarding the Level 3 reforms and drew members' attention to the latest position.

The DfE have released their updated guidance which identifies that some Advanced General Qualifications (AGQs) will be funded as Alternative Academic Qualifications (AAQs). Shelley advised on the qualifications whose funding will be removed from August 2025 and then 2026.

Going forward, there will be two main qualification routes: academic (A Levels, smaller certificates, large alternative qualifications to replace the BTECs) and these will primarily lead to university; and the Technical progression programmes (T Levels, apprenticeships etc) leading into HTQs, higher apprenticeships, skilled employment and HE.

Lesley R queried if there is the option to move into academic from a T Level or technical programme, and Shelley advised that we are currently proposing that students choose and keep to the one path, although it is acknowledged that this could possibly evolve in time.

Members noted the small and large academic qualifications which will be considered for funding approval and concern was expressed at the significant impact on NSCG students as some of the successful certificate programmes that we have offered for a number of years, eg Applied Criminology which is a successful programme both at NSCG and nationally, will be withdrawn with no A Level alternative. Shelley advised that these changes will impact around 40% of our learners.

The rationale is that the Government is trying to streamline qualifications, focussing on quality, however, across the sector it is felt that these decisions are politically led with a concerted push towards A Levels or T Levels.

Another significant concern is the effect that this will all have on students who are resitting English and Maths. A significant number on the current BTEC and Level 3 courses are undertaking resits and they will be unable to get onto T Level programmes instead. Due to the nature of the T Level qualifications, English and maths are a requirement at NSCG and this is mirrored by c98% of the sector.

A further change is that the qualifications which will receive funding that we currently offer as a one year programme, with a further 12 month sign up to take it to two years, will only be funded as two year programmes.

Members noted that we do have T Level equivalents for some of the provision that will be removed, but the issue is that the T Levels are a narrow qualification expecting a student to have a specific career path in mind at the age of 16.

It was confirmed that we are forming our future plans around these new rules, but we are expecting that there could be further changes due to the amount of lobbying currently taking place. Shelley advised that we have clearly articulated our argument at every opportunity through the various forums we are engaged with and to Michael Nicol (Deputy Director of the DfE) and our local MPs (which have led to discussions in the House of Commons). Most recently Staffordshire MPs met with and all Principals in the House of Commons and MPs have confirmed that they will take this forward on our behalf and speak to the Minister. We have communicated three main areas of concern: timeliness; the narrowness of the specialisms and the social mobility aspect. It was agreed to circulate to members the letter that has been sent to Aaron Bell MP which he had used in the recent debate in the House of Commons.

Members noted the additional issues relating to the employer requirement of T Levels and Shelley advised that we are currently working with the UHNM, which is a huge organisation, and battling for 35 placements. Shelley added that approximately one in six Health and Social Care students chooses a social care career, however, there is no T Level pathway for this element.

Shelley confirmed NSCG's commitment to T Levels with 472 applications received so far for next year. We have a really strong and committed team of staff and some amazing T Level students this year who are obviously really enjoying and benefitting massively from their course and from their employment experience.

Members noted that these changes highlight the importance of clear IAG both in College and in schools so that prospective students come along to our open events prepared and having given some thought to their career aspirations. Shelley advised that it is anticipated that some incentives will be offered for careers advice and also for employers to take on the placement aspect.

Lesley R reiterated her concern at the number of young people that this could potentially leave without a pathway.

Craig added that Government policy is all about getting people into work but these changes are strangling the pipeline straight away. He felt that there will have to be some backtracking about the current plans and timelines and

although T Levels are really good, strong qualifications they are only for those students who are suitable for them.

#### **23.1.2 Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from Alan Aston and David O'Neill.

#### **23.1.3 Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **23.1.4 Minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2022**

Approved as a true record of the meeting.

#### **23.1.5 Matters arising**

There were no matters arising.

#### **23.1.6 Learner Data Report**

Shelley drew members' attention to the latest Learner Data Report. Members expressed their appreciation for the new truncated format and analysis of the supporting data. Although it is now more accessible and easier to assimilate, it was agreed to provide access to the data if required. For example, the Maths and English QoER was unusual in terms of its outcomes and, therefore, access to the full report would have been useful. It was agreed that the full report would be circulated to members after the meeting and that future supporting data would be supplied if it was felt necessary or upon request.

Members had received the papers in advance and it was, therefore, agreed to pick up specific issues rather than go through the whole of the report.

With regard to attendance, Shelley confirmed that we do expect student attendance to be 100% but our internal target is 95%. Lesley R queried the fact that we are well below that and we are now referring to 90% as being satisfactory. Shelley indicated that across the sector 90% is seen as good, with some schools seeing the upper 80% range as good. We do have pockets of low attendance and we are drilling down to the courses to find out where this stems from. For example in Hair and Beauty at Newcastle attendance is around 85%, however, further investigation has uncovered a significant amount of mental health concerns amongst those students with interventions and support now being put in place. Craig added that we are concerned about this, however, it is in line with the sector. Lesley M advised on her analysis in relation to EHCP/Looked After Learners whose attendance and retention has been of concern. She gave an overview of some of the types of difficulties and challenges that these students are coping with, requiring significant support from our team and also external agencies. Lesley M confirmed that she will be running a session focussing on mental health with Governors at the forthcoming training event as this is impacting on all parts of our provision. She advised that the counselling waiting list has always been 1-2 weeks, however, it is now is 5-6 weeks yet many of these students need immediate support. Mary added she is now booking people for May. Members noted that many

of the same problems are being experienced across the sector and in schools too.

Gavin advised that we are moving to using the GroFar software for recording our work experience information, currently transitioning from the old system. This is expected to become a really useful resource as it will capture all of our external employer information in one place going forward.

With reference to the Maths and English results, members noted that additional sessions were offered after college and in holidays and it was pleasing to see a significant number of students able to take the resit in November. Shelley confirmed that we are aware of the issues in English and maths and we are going through lots of interventions with the staff but the issues do mainly relate to attendance and engagement. We were disappointed in some of the November results, and work is now underway to unpick the data. The teaching is not as good as we want it to be and we need to find out exactly where we need to focus our attention. As part of the QoER, Ian Smith, a very experienced inspector, helped us and corroborated the grades having shadowed the team, which gives us confidence that we are undertaking our reviews properly.

Gavin went on to advise that there was a difference in the review outcomes at both sites. At Newcastle it was “good” and at Stafford it was “requires improvement”. Gavin took members through the strengths identified which on the whole read very positively. The areas for improvement were then noted and Gavin confirmed that teaching, learning and assessment at Stafford requires improvement across most areas. He advised that underpinning all that is the student behaviour and attitude to learning in the English and maths sessions with acceptance of poor behaviour by some staff. Craig advised that we will direct our focus where necessary and there will need to be some bold actions taken to address this. He added, however, there was some positive practice at Stafford and we need to be clear about our feedback and we will work with the team to drive this forward.

Members noted the comments and appreciated the fact that the College is able to be honest about its internal reviews, recognising the issues, sharing the information and then working to make the required improvements.

Lesley R picked out in particular the QoER for 6<sup>th</sup> Form where the Personal Development is graded Good against Outstanding for all other measures. Gavin explained that this generally relates to work experience opportunities and actions are already being taken to engage with stakeholders and provide meaningful work experience for students. Lesley M also advised that there is still a need to teach and ensure awareness of Fundamental British Values, although, there is some thought being given to updating the terminology used.

Referring to the Key Areas for Improvement which are drawn out of the reports Francis questioned the process for reviewing and monitoring actions. Shelley confirmed that we constantly undertake monitoring meetings where we have very transparent and honest conversations with the staff teams in order to drive forwards the actions required.

Relating to HE, Lesley R asked about the declining enrolment numbers and Shelley reported on some of the initiatives we are trying to build this provision. Jason advised that the IoT will provide a push for us to move forward in particular areas. It was noted that the main challenge comes from local universities lowering their entry criteria (Staffordshire University 64 UCAS points). We are confident that we have a higher quality programme and will promote our provision on that basis. We have a strong curriculum although numbers are low and Shelley advised that generally on our HE courses retention is strong, programmes are well set up, destinations are very positive and we provide a great experience for the students.

Craig added that we will make huge efforts to halt the decline with the next 2-3 years being crucial in terms of the feed into the IoT.

Members thanked Shelley and Gavin for the update and again voiced their appreciation of the new approach and format of the report.

### **23.1.7 Student Disciplinary Procedure – Update**

It was noted that a final version has been forwarded to members today with a request for comments by next week in order for any amendments to be made in time for the next Corporation meeting.

Francis asked about what regulations apply to our disciplinary processes as ours is very different from that operating in schools, particularly in relation to Governor involvement at the appeal level.

Craig confirmed that there are no separate regulations and, in reality, we have very few appeals to the Principal. Efforts are made to ensure that matters are dealt with as sensibly and logically as possible at faculty level. Members noted that where we have more challenging situations, eg with Looked After Learners, we follow the Virtual School model which includes the exploration of many other options and generally, by the time all avenues have been explored, all involved are able to agree that college is not the right place for that learner.

Francis also queried that we do not allow legal representation as this is allowed in schools and Craig confirmed that the practice we follow is the norm across the FE sector.

**After consideration, it was agreed to recommend the Procedure to the Corporation, subject to receipt of any further comments by 22 March.**

### **23.1.8 Any Other Business**

There were no items of other business.

### **23.1.9 Date and Time of Next Meeting**

29 June 2022 at 4.30 pm in the Boardroom at NULC