

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EDUCATION AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE HELD AT 4.30 PM ON 29 JUNE 2023

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

In attendance: Andy Bailey (Head of Compliance and Governance), Shelley Brown (Director of Curriculum and Performance), Jason Lancaster (Director of IoT and Employer Partnerships), Debbie Torjussen (Director of Finance and Corporate Services), Gavin Barker (Assistant Principal Teaching and Learning)

23.2.1 Election of Committee Chair

Andy advised that the role of Committee Chair is due for re-election. He has spoken to Lesley who has confirmed she is happy to continue for another term.

Lesley Rollason was proposed, seconded and in the absence of any further nominations was re-elected chair of the Education and Standards Committee for a two year term.

23.2.2 Summer 2023 Curriculum Planning Update

Shelley introduced her presentation which provided an update on the current position and the immediate priorities.

The current predicted achievement rates were considered. Shelley confirmed that there are areas where learners are still finishing off and we do expect a positive uplift on the numbers shown. This year's figures were compared to 2018/19 and 2021/22, with the overall figure currently standing at 88.8%. There are still a few additions to make so we expect this to nudge up slightly. Gavin advised that in 2018-19, BTEC students did not take formal exams and this year they do, therefore, this is a really pleasing comparison. Shelley added that there are a few areas, which members have previously discussed, which we are continuing to monitor. A further update will be provided at the next meeting.

In terms of A Levels, attendance and retention continue to be strong compared with the sector, with strong predicted achievements, although there are a number of challenging areas where we are working and making changes to address the issues identified.

Members considered the timeline of current and planned activities. Experience days have gone really well with high levels of attendance and really positive survey data. Craig added that we are 200 applicants up at each site, and experience days are always a good indicator of conversions to enrolment. We are feeling optimistic about September's enrolment position. The feedback from the post experience day surveys is broken down and shared with areas for any required action to be taken. All

departments have criteria for summer work to set for incoming students; this provides students the opportunity to try out activities and helps confirm that they are on the right course.

Curriculum planning days are taking place for all areas next week at Gradbach.

Shelley advised on the main areas of curriculum focus and referred to the Level 3 qualification reforms, previously discussed, where some flexibility is now being acknowledged by Government, although the agenda remains that T Levels will be the main qualification alongside apprenticeships and A Levels. However, the Government are now aware of the need to provide an alternative qualification to T Levels for those who are not suited to them. Gillian Keegan visited Stafford College and Craig took the opportunity to voice our arguments, some of which she did appear to take on board. We are now working towards a target of 347 T Level enrolments for September, which we acknowledge is challenging.

Shelley referred to the recent problem with the T Level Health online test where we received no appropriate support from NCFE; we are now bearing the brunt of the reputational damage to the T Level brand.

Adult provision remains a priority and we have worked hard to pull ideas together in order to boost this provision.

HTQs and the IoT continue to be a focus. Jason confirmed that we are developing a range of programmes across the college, some of which are for the IoT. There is a lot to do but we have a lot to offer. L4/5 progression is something that we are in a good place to provide as the majority of our provision is L3. We will start to promote the IoT with our students from September as these learners will be potential IoT clientele at the end of their 2 year initial programmes.

Shelley then referred to the plans underway for the next Ofsted Inspection, and advised of the approach we are taking. We are speaking to Exeter and Hereford colleges who achieved grade 1 and a strong 2 respectively under the new framework which will help inform our own activities. Members noted that we have pulled together a new management training programme in order to ensure everyone is as ready as they can possibly be. On 10 July we will launch the new curriculum documents with the curriculum areas. Work experience will be a focus, and the adult and HE strategies will be revisited over the summer.

Shelley took members through the planned training for the various teams using external expertise from former/current Ofsted inspectors to give our managers the information and support they need. She confirmed that we will speak to Ian Smith and Richard Dean about the training we need to offer for governors and SMT.

Craig advised that governor involvement has significantly ramped up with a greater expectation for governors to know a lot more and members noted that this will particularly concern the Education and Standards Committee. Francis advised that from experience inspectors have moved away from data and now focus more on curriculum, safeguarding and staff mental wellbeing along with what governors do to reduce staff workload.

Shelley confirmed that the October CPD day will be a wellbeing day for staff. The College is looking at strategies to help staff and we have made adjustments to assist with workload, implementing flexibility over working during the summer etc.

Craig advised that from others in the sector who have been inspected, it now appears that as the year has progressed data is seeping back in. Jason added that the most recent training for Inspectors is that data is to be used as a sense check. He advised that the strengths, weaknesses and what the organisation is doing to make improvements in granular detail is vital information that governors need to be aware of.

Shelley and Gavin were thanked for their informative presentation. Shelley confirmed that more work will be done with governors as we move into the next academic year. Governors will be invited in to the various curriculum and area events through the year, Learning Walks, Quality of Education Reviews etc to support them in gathering the information they will require. Dates will be shared as soon as they are finalised.

23.2.3 Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence.

23.2.4 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

23.2.5 Minutes of the meeting held on 15 March 2023

Approved as a true record of the meeting.

23.2.6 Matters arising

Alan asked about the attendance information contained in the learner data report, particularly the issue relating to student mental health and the pressure on the College's counselling service. He asked about any plans to enlarge the provision and Shelley advised that SMT have been looking at both student and staff counselling services. There is a wider approach to mental health currently being considered and Craig added that we are looking at buying in some external help to supplement what we offer.

In response to David's query it was noted that Lesley had delivered a presentation on Mental Health to the Governor event at Gradbach.

23.2.7 Learner Data Report

Shelley invited questions on the report which had been shared in advance of the meeting.

David asked about retention and whether the current trajectory is normal and Gavin advised that this is normal and is actually more positive than is

being experienced across the sector. Retention for FT 19+ year olds in particular, is extremely pleasing and better than the younger cohort.

Alan referred to the issue/action/impact columns and asked if we could show the before and after data which will highlight the impact of the actions taken. This was agreed.

Regarding attendance, Alan confirmed that 90% attendance does sound good until you put it into a working week context. Craig added that as a measure against the sector it is really good, but we have our own target and inform students and their parents that we expect 100%, therefore, 90% is not satisfactory. We only authorise attendance when it is absolutely essential as we consider all absences to be missed learning.

Gavin added that 45% of our students attend college 95% plus of the time so this is really good and Shelley confirmed that we do show students what the impact of their lost time will have on their grades. Shelley advised on the steps we take to deal with poor attendance, with texts to parents, letters, verbal warnings and meetings with parents if it falls to unacceptable levels.

There are areas where attendance is lower than others and there is a strong correlation between attendance and retention. None of these have come as a surprise except for in Business where we have 2 Level 3 groups, one of which is made up of ex A Level students. This has not proven to be an effective group to keep together. Various strategies have been implemented and we hope to see positive results.

Francis asked how the introduction of the new Super Tutors has worked. Members were pleased to hear that they have made a huge difference and have had a very positive impact. Every area has found the new approach to be beneficial as it has removed pressure from curriculum staff, distinguished between what a tutor and a teacher is and helped provide clarity.

Francis asked how the changed timetable has been received and Shelley advised that for a student this has been a positive change. However, the staff survey undertaken returned mixed results with the main issue being the intensity of back to back lessons. We have since further adapted the timetable and produced a hybrid model which we hope will provide an effective compromise.

Lesley referred to the English and maths Quality of Education Review problems identified at Stafford and asked what changes have been made in response. Shelley summarised the concerns that arose during the review. We have now devolved the English and maths staff at Stafford back into the curriculum areas, based on the review results, student feedback and predicted grades. Each area will have a designated English and maths member of staff, reporting to the Curriculum Manager. The staff themselves had raised the issue of interaction with curriculum teams and we hope this new approach will help unify the teams. We are also continuing to focus where there are performance issues and Craig confirmed that we need to get the staff involved on board in order to make this successful and we will deal with any issues appropriately.

David asked about the introduction of Grofar and Gavin advised that we are not yet fully utilising the system but the company are providing very

good support. We have purchased an additional module to track work experience and enrichment activities to provide a whole picture of a student's exposure to work related activity/work experience.

David referred to the latest business barometer report and the comment that adult and lifelong learning are not working, and queried if we work with the Chamber of Commerce. Craig confirmed that we are a patron and work with them as necessary. They have a membership of around 400. The College works with around 850 employers each year. The issue we find is that employers do not seem to know what they want. We are looking ahead, trying to identify pipelines for emerging industries but it is difficult to get employers to think in the same way. However, we have worked with the Chamber to identify skills gaps in the various sectors with a view to building our curriculum to suit and aligning with local priorities.

Regarding work based provision, Lesley referred to the key strength statement about the well-designed curriculum that meets apprentices' and employers' needs and asked about evidence to support this claim. Jason confirmed that we have various types of evidence. We have a coherent well planned approach and members would be welcome to come in to sit in on some of the planning discussions to see how decisions are reached. We also have learner satisfaction and employer satisfaction surveys and could invite the apprenticeship team to a future meeting to go through with members what we do and why we do it, in order to provide confidence in and knowledge of the process.

Referring to HE, Lesley questioned the statement that attendance of 88.9% is high, and members noted that in terms of higher education this is actually the case. There is no national figure available to compare with but we think it falls around 10-15% less. Gavin added that this is still not as high as we would want it to be and we are looking at what can be done to make improvements.

In relation to the question about our confidence that the pathways we offer align with the IoT ambitions, Shelley advised that we are working with the teams involved to ensure that our curriculum development provides the right pathways, and she felt that the main challenge will be recruiting the numbers required. We will clearly identify the USP of the IoT in terms of staying on with NSCG, linking apprenticeships with the IoT and showing the various different pathways available. The biggest growth area in apprenticeships is in degree apprenticeships and we will look at incorporating this. We also want to provide a Masters top-up at L6/7 and hopefully work with Keele University who have proven to be really strong partners in the IoT project. We also expect that the strong employer involvement will help and provide a clear line of sight into a career through the IoT.

We will also look at re-engaging the adult market around the IoT provision and Jason advised that the proportion of adults in the north of the county with L3/4 qualifications is extremely low but the IoT provides a unique opportunity to re-engage them with learning.

Shelley advised that as an organisation we are used to providing data evidence to support our Self-Assessment Report but we have taken a lead from Ofsted in terms of phraseology and the statements we have made.

Lesley asked about employer links in Construction based provision and Shelley advised that the new facilities at Stafford are a real attraction but recruiting staff continues to be a challenge. Jason added that St Modwen have joined the IoT and are really excited to be involved. A local architect Wood, Goldstraw and Yorath, are also really keen to support our work as they have identified significant gaps in skills that need to be remedied.

Craig added that we are definitely seeing an improvement in employer engagement and we intend working with as many employer sectors as possible in order to gain specialist input into our provision.

23.2.8 Any Other Business

a. Mary Jones

Craig took the opportunity to thank Mary Jones, who is retiring at the end of term, for the brilliant job that she has done in college and as a governor.

He added that Mary is a great character who has played a significant part in college life. All members thanked Mary for her very valuable contributions to the work of the college and the Committee and wished her a very enjoyable retirement.

23.2.9 Date and Time of Next Meeting

To be confirmed as part of the calendar of meetings.