

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CORPORATION HELD AT 5.15 PM ON WEDNESDAY 25 OCTOBER 2023 AT NEWCASTLE COLLEGE

Present: Alan Aston, Sam Barber, Tracy Bullock, Jeff Dutton, Martin Earnshaw, Abigail Fryatt, Craig Hodgson, Gareth Jones, Steve Jones, Simon Leech, Bernard Lovatt, Sharon Owusu, Jeremy Pert, Lesley Rollason, Jim Rowley (Chair), Francis Tunney

In attendance: Andy Bailey (Head of Compliance and Governance), Georgina Barnard (Director of IoT), Shelley Brown (Director of Curriculum and Performance), Ian Hookway (Director of HR and Communications), Lesley Morrey (Director of Student Engagement and Partnerships), Carl Riding (Director of Employer Engagement and Estates), Debbie Torjussen (Director of Finance and Corporate Services), Joy Smith (Deputy Clerk)

As Simon Leech and Gareth Jones needed to leave the meeting early, it was agreed that Jim Rowley should chair. It was also noted that Bernard Lovatt would need to leave early.

PART 1

23.4.1 Corporation Ofsted Inspection Briefing

Members received a presentation on the new inspection approach, in particular the focus on the way in which colleges meet the skills needs of the wider and local economy.

Inspectors will look at the development of skills and improvements in learners' own personal independence helping them move towards employment – eg confidence, resilience and communication and it was stressed that it is imperative that the curriculum includes these.

Two additional inspectors will look at the skills element of the review and will spend two days discussing these issues with external stakeholders, curriculum managers and during a separate skills meeting with Governors. They will consider the LEPs and LSIPs and use our Accountability Statement in order to triangulate the information we provide, looking at the extent to which we are meeting skills gaps etc, seeking demonstrable impact as a result of our offer.

Craig asked what the expectation would be in terms of a good response from, for example, an employer when being interviewed and it was confirmed that outlining their involvement in designing the curriculum in order to ensure that our offer meets the skills needs of the locality would be really useful. It was also noted that Governors and managers need to ensure that the College is working with stakeholders in the design of the curriculum so that learners develop the skills that employers say they want and useful opportunities are provided for the students.

It was agreed that having a lead Governor with a skills focus would be useful.

A survey will be sent out to the various stakeholders, with a series of questions from which the inspectors will glean some useful initial information. Governors need to be aware of what they would expect the stakeholders will say.

Craig indicated that the LSIPs have been developed and a number of key priorities have been identified. For us tactically we will identify key employers in all of those priority areas – for example the work we do with the University Hospital of the North Midlands. Tracy added that she would be happy to provide very positive support for the College in the discussions with Inspectors.

Members noted that inspectors will be looking at how well Governors hold senior leaders to account. They will be looking for push back and challenge from the Board about examples provided.

Bernard advised that the Board as a whole relies on the Sub Committees to provide expert opinions and he queried if the Education and Standards Committee would be the main focus. It was confirmed that Inspectors will seek a representative sample from all Governors, however, the College will have the opportunity to put individuals forward. Craig confirmed that we will pick the squad and ensure that they are fully briefed and well prepared by progressively working with them and building the knowledge they will need.

In addition to the skills element, the team will also be looking at how well Governors know the organisation and understand its strengths and weaknesses. This is not simply about data, but students' progress from starting points, meeting skills needs, developing wider skills and moving on to next steps.

Craig asked how many Governors in total would be needed for the meetings and it was confirmed that this should be two/three for the skills meetings and three/four for the general sessions. This will provide a good level of opportunity for Governors to speak positively and showcase their knowledge.

It was agreed that this evening's slides would be shared with members and that it would be useful to have practice sessions/conversations once the team of Governors has been identified. Craig confirmed that this is only the start of our process and we will be building on this and seeking views from members about what knowledge gaps they feel need filling.

Members queried the level of detail they would be expected to have and it was noted that examples of the College being proactive in its operation rather than reactive would be powerful.

Craig referred to the collaborative work with other local providers in order to ensure that there is sufficient high quality provision and resource at all levels available, rather than everyone offering the same thing. It is important to have a clear rationale that any gap is being well met by other stakeholders in the region.

In response to the query about the inspection process/cycle, the approach now is that every College needs to be inspected within a 5 year cycle. The framework has not changed since our last inspection with the enhanced skills element being supplemental. It was noted that where we have identified areas requiring improvement, Governors need to be aware of actions being taken to target these issues.

Craig queried inspectors' use of data under the current regime and members noted that what they are now seeking is adding value and showing progress rather than getting high achieving students through with high outcomes. Outcomes will always be important as will high achievement rates but equally progress and the wider employability skills that students develop will be vital.

Discussion took place about the skills and experience of the potential inspection team and Craig confirmed that we would be able to seek background knowledge about those assigned for us.

Simon Leech also left the meeting at this point.

23.4.2 Membership

Members considered and approved the re-appointment of Tim Collier as a co-opted member of the Audit Committee, and the appointments of Sam Barber, the new Staff Governor, and Sharon Owusu and Abigail Fryatt, the two new Student Governors. Sam, Sharon and Abigail were welcomed to the meeting.

23.4.3 Apologies for Absence

No apologies for absence were received.

23.4.4 Declarations of Interest

Gareth Jones, Craig Hodgson and Debbie Torjussen all declared an interest as non-remunerated Directors of Axia Solutions Ltd and Gradbach Ltd. Gareth Jones and Jeremy Pert declared an interest as members of Stafford Borough Council.

23.4.5 Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 July 2023: Part 1

Agreed as a true record of the meeting.

23.4.6 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

23.4.7 Principal's Report - Part 1

1.1 – Army Challenge

Craig was pleased to report on the activities of our Public Services students who had taken part in the Army Midlands Challenge and achieved a very creditable second place. He confirmed that he will rotate examples of such activities from all curriculum areas to give members a broad overview of some of the amazing opportunities our students are offered.

1.2 – Sam Eggington

Members congratulated Sam Eggington on securing a place on a prestigious training programme in London with a view to launching his career as a make up artist.

1.3 Vinny Lee Brennan

Congratulations were also extended to Vinny Lee Brennan who has been chosen as North West Regional Finalist in the National Apprenticeship Awards. Craig added that we all wish Vinny, who is a really charismatic young man with a passion to develop his own skills and set up his own business, the very best of luck.

1.4 Students of the Month

Craig reported that this year's Student and Apprentice of the Month presentations have now commenced with guest presenters invited to each event. This is a really useful way of getting employers/civic leaders etc to see first-hand the amazing work of some of our students. We have also been really pleased that employers from apprenticeship placements have asked to come along too.

1.5 Lois Francis

Members were saddened to learn about Lois Francis who passed away a few weeks ago. Craig advised that this was an unexpected tragedy which had quite an impact on both students and staff with whom our team have worked hard to support as much as possible.

2.1 – Ofsted Planning

Members noted that everyone is working hard to position ourselves ready for Inspection and Craig drew members' attention to the need to have an external assurance of governance every 3 years. This is now being arranged with the AoC undertaking the review on our behalf. They will meet with Craig, Simon and Andy and a questionnaire will be sent out for all members to complete. This will be totally confidential. The AoC would like to send this out on 26 October and members all gave their permission for the College to share their email addresses with the AoC for this purpose. It was agreed to ask the AoC to flag the purpose of the email in the subject line for easy identification.

Bernard Lovatt left the meeting at this stage.

2.2 Open Events

Members were very pleased to note how busy the recent open events have been which is a positive sign in terms of next year's recruitment numbers.

2.3 External Events at NSCG

Craig was pleased to advise that the SFCA held a successful training event at Newcastle and they were very impressed with our facilities. He added that the Tertiary Colleges Group would be holding their Autumn Conference at Newcastle in early November and we will again work hard to give them a great experience and showcase our fabulous College.