

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EDUCATION & STANDARDS COMMITTEE HELD AT 4.15 PM ON 25 OCTOBER 2023

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

In attendance: Gareth Jones, Andy Bailey (Head of Compliance and Governance), Shelley Brown (Director of Curriculum and Performance), Georgina Barnard (Director of IoT), Debbie Torjussen (Director of Finance and Corporate Services), Gavin Barker (Assistant Principal Teaching and Learning)

23.3.1 Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence.

23.3.2 Declarations of interest

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

23.3.3 2022-23 Performance and Results

Shelley referred to the latest data and advised that some further work showing a further breakdown will be shared through the detailed SAR. This will include ethnicity, gender, destinations etc and should be available in November/December.

She also referred to the references to the 2023 national averages which is a useful benchmark. However in some areas this is not available and we have, therefore, included the 2018/19 data (which is pre-Covid and no TAGs or CAGs) and also that available last year, but it is important to note that direct comparisons are not possible as the cohort we are working with this year received Teacher Assessed Grades and it is generally accepted that these were inflated.

Members considered the headline overall achievements by level which show the fantastic performance this year, particularly at L3 which is where our greatest proportion of provision lies. Shelley clarified that although Ofsted expect to see strong achievement data, progress and skills development is where they are focussing most. BTEC Level 3 summary information was discussed and members agreed that this is really strong, as is the performance on Extended Certificates.

At BTEC L2 results are also strong overall and Shelley confirmed that any areas of concern have been identified and plans are in place to address the issues.

Shelley drew attention to the A Level summary information and the 5 year comparison information available. It was noted that all expectations were that performance would revert to a level similar to 2018-19, however some colleges have seen a 15% drop in high grades. It was pleasing to note that performance at NSCG is actually 20% higher than the trend putting us in a really strong position.

Members were delighted to note this very positive suite of results.

Shelley went on to explain that GCSE Maths and English, however, is an area of challenge. 3 years' worth of results are available as a comparison and it should be noted that the sector as a whole has struggled with vast numbers of students resitting their exams. Our English results were just at the national average, however, in maths we were slightly lower than what was a poor benchmark, which was very disappointing. Following on from that, we have taken some decisive action in order to address the situation. All English and Maths staff have now been restructured into their respective faculties, with additional training and support, additional resources, mock inspections and quality reviews, in order to ensure that improvements are made to this provision. A meeting is taking place with the teams to clarify expectations and responsibilities moving forward.

Members were delighted to note that apprenticeships performance continues to be generally exceptionally strong against the national average, with a couple of areas of focus next year, for example in Construction.

Looking at value added and progress for vocational learners there is an issue with male underperformance against females and we have been putting in some positive interventions in order to address this and the in-year data we have currently is showing an improvement. Members noted the overall breakdown by site and Shelley advised that further detail will be shared in the self-assessment report.

Vocational progress by subject was noted, and Gavin advised that although the achievement rates are strong in most cases, the students are not achieving as well as they should be. Value added progress in A Levels is very good, reflecting the high grades this year, however, Shelley advised that Stafford are under-performing against Newcastle in terms of high grades, and there are some issues with male v female performance which are being investigated.

By subject, Shelley outlined the areas where we are seeing positive value added performance and advised that we are looking particularly at Chemistry and Maths in order to bring about required improvements here. Francis remarked that the number of low grades is where the Chemistry achievements were let down, and Gavin added that there were 4 fails which had a significant impact on the value added score. He added that these students who do Chemistry and Maths are traditionally the brightest students and we need to focus our efforts on the top end of this cohort.

In Maths and English we are showing negative progress, a drop against the 2018 position, with the issue being students failing to make progress beyond their starting points.

Members noted that as far as Ofsted are concerned, the importance of progress, skills development and personal development cannot be overstressed. Shelley confirmed that work has already begun with intensive care meetings, targeted mini inspections, allocation of teaching and learning coaches, a new approach to professional development with a new programme in place, review of assessment methods and assessment points, progress focus meetings with staff teams. It is vital that we instil ambition into our students; exposing them to careers options, different employers etc in order to increase their motivation and aspirations to achieve the highest grades possible. Further refinement of the personal development curriculum will also take place.

Gavin added that statistics show that those students who have a targeted career path are those who show the best progress. We have produced a grade calculator report so that students can forensically track how they are performing and how far they are off the next grade boundary. Our teams will be working with them, providing them with the data they need in order that they achieve the best grade possible and access the best universities and career paths.

Gareth asked if the walk-throughs that are undertaken actually back up what these statistics are telling us and Gavin advised that learners will talk about their department and what they are achieving but this does not necessarily mean that they are showing progress. Francis asked if the difficulty of the subject is taken into account and Gavin confirmed that this is the case.

Alan queried the situation if a student has not done a particular subject at GCSE, eg Law and Gavin indicated that the progress measure would be based on the overall GCSE score they join us with, therefore, this does present a challenge.

David referred to the strong apprenticeships data and asked what we do to ensure such high performance. Carl reported that the staff team hold a key role in this which applies to all areas of our provision; stability, how well they are trained and supported, and strong and effective management. However, apprenticeships is a uniquely challenging area and consideration has to be given to issues such as apprentice caseloads, relationships with employers etc.

Francis asked about the future of degree apprenticeships and Craig confirmed that this level will have a pivotal role as part of the IoT suite of qualifications. He confirmed that these are becoming more and more popular against university options. Georgina added that the key is creating pathways for the students who are at college with the opportunities for students and apprentices to move into the higher level apprenticeships.

Craig confirmed that we expect to see university progression drop and higher apprenticeships grow and Georgina advised that the IoT is about working with students who would normally not go the HE/academic route but would stop at level 3. It will be about encouraging employers to invest in their workforce and realise the worth of these employees to their organisations.

Alan informed members that there will be a careers presentation at the Corporation meeting in December which will touch on how we can get better quality careers guidance in curriculum areas which will fit in with the need to inspire and increase students' motivation.

23.3.4 Any Other Business

There were no items of other business.

23.3.5 Date and Time of Next Meeting

7 December 2023 at 4.30 pm at Newcastle College