

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CORPORATION HELD AT 5:00 PM ON MONDAY 25 MARCH 2024 IN THE BOARDROOM AT NEWCASTLE COLLEGE

Present: Sam Barber, Martin Earnshaw, Craig Hodgson, Simon Leech (Chair), Bernard Lovatt, Sharon Owusu, Jeremy Pert, Lesley Rollason, Jim Rowley, Francis Tunney

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

PART 1

Curriculum Changes at NSCG – Presentation by Shelley Brown, Director of Curriculum and Performance

Shelley referred to the discussion at the last meeting regarding the changes to our curriculum offer which we are now sharing with prospective students and their parents. She added that a covering sheet on acronyms is being prepared for circulation to Governors.

She reminded members that study programmes are undertaken by all students along with mandatory GCSE English and/or maths for those who did not achieve grade 4 at school. Study programmes also include an element of work experience, tutorials and college enrichment activities.

Shelley drew attention to the diagram showing L3/4/5 pathways in A Level, vocational or T Levels which will enable progression to university, apprenticeships or employment and she highlighted the student numbers against each area. In terms of career choices, these are very broad at A Level but T Levels are more for those who have a very specific goal in mind and consist of 350 hours in an occupational specialism along with classroom support. In apprenticeships, students spend one day per week in college and 4 days in their placement with very work specific qualification routes. Our adult L4 – 7 provision is where we provide a progression pathway through the IoT.

Martin referred to the previous issues experienced with universities not accepting T Levels as entry qualifications and Shelley advised that there have been some improvements in this area. Ian drew attention to the recent Next Steps Fair held at the College where we had checked on the latest position with universities in attendance and it was apparent that most say they will consider them on a case by case basis, or accept them alongside A Level Maths - an impossible combination for the student. Keele and one or two other universities appear to have a better understanding about T Levels and do include them in their entry criteria.

Members considered the information relating to the A Level and A+ programmes, particularly noting the rigour of these programmes and high level of commitment required from the students. Shelley confirmed that the Honours Programme is for high grade profile students aspiring to attend Oxbridge and provides additional access to HE talks, visits, project work etc. It also contains an additional 90 minutes per week for appropriate skills development, along with the opportunity to study an EPQ which equates to half an A Level.

The vast subject choice in BTEC Extended Diplomas was noted and Shelley advised that this is the area where the Government's defunding will have the greatest impact.

In T Levels, it was noted that assessments are very holistic and employer set. T Levels have higher entry criteria and contain additional internal assessment and exams along with a significant employer placement element. Members were pleased to learn that the 380 current T Level students are enjoying their course with strong attendance and retention.

In Apprenticeships Shelley advised that we have very strong provision with an extensive offer covering most sector areas, supported by a strong employer base providing us a broad range of placements.

Vocational pathways are made up of the Entry to L3 offer, covering foundation, progression and skills based pathways. Level 1 study prepares the students to progress to Level 2, and Level 2 students will be on a vocational pathway with the aim of progressing to Level 3.

Martin queried how students find employers for their T Level placements and Shelley advised that the majority are placed through our Placement Manager/Officer squad who have worked hard breaking down barriers and developing successful links with employers, with the most difficult area being electrical. There is also the block placement option where the students can usually make a very useful contribution to the organisations they are working in. Craig added that the local hospital is a useful example of how this has worked effectively. Shelley advised that there are financial incentives to ensure that employers are not out of pocket. Carl cautioned that if we have to scale this provision up to replace the BTEC qualifications at risk of being defunded, coupled with our apprenticeship programmes, the challenge to find employers will be significant.

Jim asked about the flexibility in terms of moving course for those students who decide that the path they have initially chosen is not suitable. Shelley advised that we strongly advocate any move is made within the 42 day window because after this it becomes very difficult to catch up on missed work.

Bernard asked about any payment to students for the work element of T Levels and Shelley advised that we have some students who are taken on for more than the 350 hours by employers and are paid for the additional work.

Shelley was thanked for her very useful update.

24.1.1 Membership

Simon referred to the recent discussion and proposal from the Audit Committee, for Jim Rowley to be moved to the Vice Chair post and Steve Jones to be appointed Chair. After consideration, this was agreed and members of the Corporation thanked Jim for his significant contributions to the College over his many years as Chair of the Committee. Bernard added that he felt that the Audit Committee's membership is now at the point that it definitely needs strengthening and Simon advised that this will be picked up via the work of the Search Committee.

24.1.2 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Alan Aston, Tracy Bullock, Gareth Jones, Steve Jones, Georgina Barnard, Jeff Dutton and Abbi Fryatt.

24.1.3 Declarations of Interest

Simon Leech, Craig Hodgson and Debbie Torjussen all declared an interest as non-remunerated Directors of Axia Solutions Ltd and Gradbach Ltd.

24.1.4 Minutes of the Meeting held on 14 December 2023 - Part 1

Approved as a true record of the meeting.

24.1.5 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

24.1.6 Minutes of the Committee Meetings

- Education & Standards – 11 March 2024

Lesley took members through the key elements covered at the meeting. The SAR in its new format was considered and Lesley confirmed that the College has taken advice in relation to the SAR and produced a document that clearly highlights the strengths of the organisation, providing rich examples but no data. Members had felt that it was a very interesting read that reinforced their knowledge of the strength of the College's operation. The areas identified for improvement will be in the QIP which is currently in preparation. The two documents will work hand in hand and the QIP and final SAR will come to the July meeting for approval.

Members had also considered the Learner Data Report and had particularly discussed the areas of concern highlighted which included attendance in some areas, some responses in the student survey and the challenges with some apprenticeships. Members had noted that staffing is key and we are struggling to recruit staff in some areas.

24.1.7 Principal's Report - Part 1

1.1 – 2024/25 Applications

Craig referred to the challenges the College is facing with strong growth this year and he drew attention to the two applications graphs which clearly identify the further significant anticipated growth for this September. It would not be possible to take these additional learners, along with our year one to year two progressing learners and we are, therefore, now having to put in place some measures to quell this demand. Currently at capacity are the skills programmes and we have already closed applications for September. We anticipate that, as we move into the summer, we will have to take some further decisions. Craig stressed that it is very difficult to turn learners away and this is something that we would not normally wish to do, but these volumes are exceptional and require swift action.

Martin asked about conversions from application to enrolment and Craig advised that we have used the average of 60% for our modelling purposes, along with the normal 42 day drop-out rates. This still leaves us with around 700 more students which cannot be physically accommodated. This is a truly exceptional situation which we need to carefully monitor.

Bernard queried whether the main issue was physical capacity or teaching staff numbers and Craig confirmed that both apply, compounded by the challenges we are facing with recruitment and retention of staff in some curriculum areas.

Jeremy asked if we have taken any action regarding possible reputational damage arising from this situation and Craig confirmed that our Schools Liaison Team has introduced this situation with the schools and are carefully managing the message to

the schools and careers teachers. Craig confirmed that he has also held discussions with the local authority on this matter.

1.2 – Next Steps Fayre

Members were pleased to note that this year's event went really well c49 universities and around 36 employer partners engaging with future students and employees. Very positive feedback has been received and thanks were extended to all the team involved across the College.

1.3 – Pizza and Prosecco Event

Craig confirmed that this event has taken place for a number of years, hosted by our WBL team, to raise funds for the Peter Pan Centre. This year we were delighted to raise a total of £6,238 for this much deserving charity.

Members also noted the Outstanding Contribution Awards presented to various employer partners throughout the evening.

1.4 – We are Staffordshire

Members noted that a very successful event had taken place on 5 February with representations from employers, learners and various organisations from across the county, where we took the opportunity to showcase our new facilities and promoted our offer at Stafford College.

1.5 – National Apprenticeship Week

Members noted the range of activities undertaken during National Apprenticeship Week.

2.1 – GCSE Results

Members were delighted to note the very pleasing GCSE resit results where over 300 learners successfully achieved grade 4 or above in English or maths, and asked for their congratulations to be extended to everyone involved.

2.2 – Taster Events

Members noted the various taster activities taking place this week.

2.3 – Careers in Construction

Members were interested to learn about the Careers in Construction event held at Newcastle where students listened to a variety of inspirational guest speakers about the opportunities and challenges in their chosen career path.

2.4 – Educational Visit

Members were pleased to note that the recent educational visit to Iceland had been a huge success with some amazing memories created for the students and staff involved.

2.5 – Visit to Staffs University

Members noted the visit by T Level Health students to Staffordshire University's Centre for Health Innovation.

2.6 – Photoshoot at Gradbach

Craig reported on the recent photoshoot undertaken by Level 3 and 4 Hair and Media Make Up students from across both sites where the buildings and grounds at Gradbach had provided a fantastic backdrop for the day.

2.7 – Stafford College Performing Arts

Members noted the journey through the ages of music event held in the Tenterbanks Theatre which had been a great success.

2.8 – Red Nose Day

Congratulations were extended to the Stafford College Foundation students who had raised over £90 undertaking a charity cycling challenge for Red Nose Day.

2.9 – Student Illness

Craig referred to the information in the papers regarding Harvey Linney and was very sad to report that Harvey had very sadly passed away over the weekend. Members were assured that the College would be doing everything possible to support Harvey's friends and the staff involved.

3.1 – Curriculum Update

Members had previously noted the comments arising from the Education and Standards Committee meeting, and Shelley confirmed that the final SAR and the QIP would be presented to the July meeting for approval.

3.2 – Key Performance Indicators

Shelley took members through the key performance indicators and particular note was made of the following:

- Retention is currently strong at 95% against 93.9% last year
- Attendance is the biggest concern at the moment and members noted the breakdown across the areas. Shelley advised that this appears to be a concern sector-wide and we have put in place a significant number of interventions to help to address the issue.
- In English and maths staffing remains a challenge and we are heavily supporting new staff, with further recruitment ongoing.
- T Level placement uptakes are generally pleasing.
- In English and maths resits, performance at Stafford was a little better than Newcastle in both subjects.
- QoERs are ongoing across the College and Shelley confirmed that each QoER is carried out like a mini inspection.
- UCAS application numbers from each site were noted.
- The Level 3 BTEC exam results breakdown were noted.

3.3 – Curriculum Planning Considerations

Shelley advised members of the key areas of focus as we move into the spring and summer terms.

3.4 – Curriculum Updates

Members noted the latest information which centred on courses which will no longer be offered due to defunding from 2025, the consideration of alternative options to L3 T Levels and the realignment of our L3/4/HE provision to match with the priorities of the IoT.

Members offered their congratulations and thanks to Lesley Morrey who has secured the role of Principal at the City of Stoke on Trent Sixth Form College and who will be very much missed by colleagues at NSCG.