

## **MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EDUCATION & STANDARDS COMMITTEE HELD AT 4.30 PM ON 11 MARCH 2024 IN THE BOARDROOM AT NEWCASTLE COLLEGE**

Present: Lesley Rollason (Chair), Francis Tunney, Alan Aston, Sam Barber, Craig Hodgson

In attendance: Shelley Brown (Director of Curriculum and Performance), Georgina Barnard (Director of IoT), Carl Riding (Director of Employer Partnerships and Estates), Simon Leech (Corporation Chair), Andy Bailey (Head of Compliance and Governance), Debbie Torjussen – via Zoom (Director of Finance and Corporate Services), Joy Smith (Deputy Clerk), Rachel Nichol - via Zoom (External Reviewer), Gavin Barker (Assistant Principal Teaching and Learning)

### **24.1.1 Apologies For Absence**

Apologies were received from David O'Neill and Lesley Morrey.

### **24.1.2 Declarations of interest**

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

### **24.1.3 Minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2023**

Approved as a true record of the meeting.

### **24.1.4 Matters arising**

There were no matters arising.

### **24.1.5 2022-23 NSCG Self-Assessment Report: New Format**

Shelley set the scene for the College SAR which is presented in the format that we will follow for Ofsted following advice received from the two consultants. It is a very positive report throughout. Although it does identify areas where work is underway, on the whole it highlights the amazing work undertaken at the College. Craig will add a paragraph on the context at the start of the document after which a final check for spelling and grammar will be undertaken.

Members commented on the very different approach from previous SARs, with this new format containing very “flowery” language and the repetition of certain words in order to reinforce the very positive message we are conveying.

Shelley advised that we will triangulate all our information to ensure that we are confident in what is stated. She went on to indicate that an Outstanding judgement does not mean that everything is perfect but that we have recognised any issues and are addressing them.

Craig confirmed that the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) will sit alongside the SAR and will include the areas where we are working to drive improvements. This will provide critical headline information and it will be RAG rated.

Craig advised that we have investigated the amount of data and information shared by colleges who have already undergone inspection in order to formulate our own approach. Members noted that the amount of rich examples of good practice across the whole college have been provided in place of data; these examples originate from the faculties and we are confident in their accuracy.

Members noted that we have taken on board a lot of the advice provided by the two consultants, however, we have gone against advice not to allocate grades. We do feel that this is important and, therefore, have taken the decision to include our self-assessed grades.

Alan asked about including information about the College's successes over the two sites, identifying the distinct differences and also the areas in common and Craig advised that this will be picked up in his introduction. He added that this is the first year that Ofsted are recognising multi-site colleges and commenting on the differences between campuses.

Craig thanked members for the feedback about the language used which we will take on board, and he asked if there is anything included that members would not recognise of the organisation, or if they felt anything was missing.

Members noted that the SAR document is the College's best and strongest vehicle for self-promotion and that the QIP will be an important accompaniment. Shelley added that each area will have a detailed breakdown of their own work; this will not be shared with inspectors but will inform discussions with them. Lesley asked if the QIP could be shared with the Committee once complete and this was agreed. It was also felt that once the SAR is completed it should be shared with staff as such a positive document will be a real boost for them.

Francis asked about the current notice period for an inspection and Craig explained the logistics involved which generally provides just over a week's notice. The team would usually consist of around 20, 6 to 8 of whom would be HMIs undertaking the inspection from Monday to Friday, similar to the previous approach. However, members noted that more notice is now given because of the new skills element. Carl Riding will be the Skills Nominee and Shelley will be the Curriculum Nominee.

Gavin Barker joined the meeting at this stage.

Shelley added that we will receive a copy of the Lead Inspector's team briefing note in advance which will be useful. We have looked at a number of presentations given by Principals of colleges who have been inspected, and can see no real commonality in terms of themes, but the strong advice from the consultants is to avoid including data.

Shelley was thanked for all the work she has done on this Report and it was agreed that a further review will be undertaken to change some of the

language used where appropriate, whilst retaining the strength of the positive message.

#### **24.1.6 Learner Data Report**

Shelley referred members to the Learner Data Report and drew particular attention to the summary of areas of strength and requiring improvement.

Members noted that attendance is the greatest challenge currently and this does appear to be mirrored across the sector. We are working constantly with the teams involved, looking at the detail and drilling down for reasons etc. Shelley advised that one of the most noticeable areas is Foundation Studies where we have seen a significant increase in numbers of students and there were some staff capacity issues at the start of the year leading to some challenges with these learners. The number of those with EHCPs has doubled which brings additional support challenges. However, we do know that in some cases their attendance at school was very low, in the 30% bracket, and we are able to provide examples of where we have made a significant difference to these particular students in terms of attendance. Getting them in to college for 60-70% represents a huge improvement for this cohort in terms of distance travelled.

Discussion took place about attendance and Alan referred to a poll he had recently read about the disappointing lack of parental interest in attendance which underpins the battle the College is facing. Craig added that this is an issue in some cases but he felt it crucial that the College is the driving force for students' ambition and if we can show progress then that is a positive outcome. Attendance is not where we would wish it to be but we do recognise the challenges we face.

Lesley questioned the HE attendance data and it was noted that this is again below our own expectations but from a sector point of view it is high. Gavin advised that the balance of timetabling to maximise attendance yet providing chunks of time to undertake part time work has to be considered. Carl added that there are a lot of factors that need to be borne in mind - working part time, unreliable public transport etc – and in that context, HE attendance is strong. Shelley noted that these learners have to be treated as mature adults and we do not use the same approach employed with the 16-18 age group, eg no text messages are sent to parents for non-attendance etc.

It was noted that Shelley and Georgina are conducting a detailed review of HE and will come back to a future meeting with further information.

Francis referred to the low progress in A Level Chemistry and A Level Maths and asked if there has been any improvement this year and if any account is taken for the level of difficulty in these subjects? Gavin advised that this is taken into account nationally when setting target grades and is reflected in the awarding bodies' grade boundaries, with our focus being on progress from individual starting points.

Craig reported that the strength of the staff is key and we are trying to boost the teams involved, however, recruitment of high calibre staff in these areas continues to be a challenge. He added that in Biology we have recruited a new lead who will join us in a few weeks and who we expect will be a real asset to the team.

Regarding the English and Maths QoER, Shelley confirmed that indications are showing a slight improvement, however, we are still not where we want to be. Lesley and Alan had both been involved in QoERs and highly recommended the experience to members. Shelley indicated that the Government are directing us to increase Maths delivery hours which will be a significant challenge on top of those we already face but we will continue our efforts to drive improvements in this area. Currently this is not mandatory for 2024/25, but is highly recommended. She added that the resits results were pleasing and strong compared to the sector at 29.14%. Mock attendance was disappointing and we have very structured plans in place to make across the board improvements, in particular in Maths. Alan advised members about TeachFirst which is used in schools for recruitment and Shelley commented that we have an arrangement to assist our recruitment with Keele University. Craig added that he had attended an event last week where it was apparent that there is a significant number of colleges with high numbers of vacancies for maths teachers in particular.

Craig summarised that maths and English remains our greatest challenge from all angles. Members considered the difference in primary attainment and secondary attainment as something seems to go wrong at secondary level, switching students off from their enjoyment of the subject. It was noted that this is different for each school, however, Francis reported that the higher paper in maths at secondary level is very abstract and too difficult. Secondary schools have the same problem in terms of recruitment which often results in non-maths specialists teaching some elements of maths in high schools, which is certainly not ideal.

Craig drew attention to a slide which identified that Stoke on Trent has the lowest attainment for maths and English in the country and, therefore, it is inevitable that at College we will pick up this problem, but we need to do everything possible to show improvements with these students.

Lesley assured members that no stone is left unturned in trying to grapple with this issue with many instances of staff going above and beyond trying to get the best results possible.

Regarding the Student Survey, Lesley queried the data in the *mostly agree* and *completely disagree* columns in one of the appendices as these contain the same figures, and it was agreed to correct this and recirculate the information. Shelley added that the information from Foundation Studies reflects the issue discussed previously about the turbulent start to the term and she confirmed that a lot of work is being undertaken with these learners and we have completely changed the L1 curriculum. Issues in maths and English at Level 1 were identified and it is apparent that staff are struggling with some of the particular needs of these learners.

Shelley confirmed that the questions in the survey have been amended for next year and also the timing has been tweaked with some questions. Lesley asked if it was possible to include mental health and wellbeing and how this can be accessed and Shelley and Gavin both confirmed that this has been included. Craig advised that the use of the Endsleigh app has recently been discussed at the Student Board meetings and the take up has increased although we want to see further improvements. Learners who

do access it are doing so at times when our services would have been unavailable so it is definitely worthwhile.

Craig referred to this year's growth and advised that next year's applications are already pushing us capacity-wise and we expect that decisions may be required around implementing waiting lists in areas where we are full, particularly in some skills-based areas. This is the first time this has happened for many years but will be something we will need to implement in order to be able to continue to operate effectively as the strain is not only on teaching but also on accommodation usage generally. He added that the growth we have seen this year has definitely been noticeable and we need to take positive action now so that it is not too late for the learners applying for next year to seek an alternative.

Carl then took members through the Apprenticeships information and advised that the narrative is quite self-critical. Achievement is very strong at 70% against the national average of 56%; we have a significant focus currently on progress reviews and we need to tighten up evidencing teaching in the workplace, progress against starting points etc. Apprenticeships is a long term investment and we do struggle with recruiting and retaining good staff. He felt that there is still work to do but we are confident in the current team and will continue to work to strengthen this. Craig added that Engineering and Construction apprenticeships are 2 challenging areas but a lot of these learners were furloughed during Covid and we continue to grapple with the after effects of that period. Delays in End Point Assessments are also an issue. Carl added that we have joined the Expert Apprenticeship Provider Group to work with the DfE around the challenges associated with apprenticeships, one of which is the EPA process. He advised that these are independently undertaken on our behalf. There is a real challenge for awarding bodies to complete them in a timely manner but we see some students waiting as long as 6 months for a date. It also feels disproportionate that the awarding bodies then receive 20% of the funding for putting on the EPAs and we are now discussing a possible risk-based approach which could enable us to do our own. It appears that the DfE are definitely trying to listen to the challenges and understand them.

Lesley thanked everyone for the very informative reports presented to the meeting this evening.

#### **24.1.7 Any Other Business**

##### **a. Lesley Morrey**

Craig advised that Lesley Morrey has been appointed to the post of Principal at the Sixth Form College. We are truly delighted for her but this will leave a big gap for us to fill. Lesley will leave NSCG at the end of May and we are now exploring the best arrangements to cover Lesley's responsibilities.

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

8 July 2024 at 4.30 pm in the Boardroom at Stafford College.