

Standards Improvement Committee Minutes

Meeting held on Thursday 25th February 2021 at 5.30 pm via Zoom

- Governors:** Sam Beel (Staff Governor), Phil Cook (Chief Executive and Group Principal), Vanessa Housley, Dot Smith (Chair), Mark White and Gary Wright
- Apologies:** Katy Ludgate, Anne Vickers
- Officials:** Phil Blewitt (NETA MD), Jason Faulkner (College Principal RCC), Lesley Graham (College Principal SRC), Phil Hastie (Group Executive Director Planning and Infrastructure), Erika Marshall (Group Director of Marketing), Gary Potts (Group Vice Principal Business, Innovation and Partnerships), Ben Robinson (College Principal Bede), Sarah Thompson (Clerk to the Corporation), Peter Wood (Interim Group Director of Quality) and Sam Young (Governance Support Officer)
- In attendance:** For item 2 only: Abigail Clay (Interim Group Head of Student Services) and Helen Jenkinson (Safeguarding and Welfare Officer, Bede)
For item 3 only: Karl Johnson (Programme Area Lead, Higher Education)
For items 5 and 10 only: Tony Pattison (Group Assessment and Standards Development Manager) and Angela Stevenson (Group Teaching and Training Development Manager)

The Chair welcomed Peter Wood, the recently appointed Interim Group Director of Quality, to his first Standards Improvement Committee meeting. She also confirmed that Stacey Durham had reluctantly resigned as a co-opted member of the committee due to work and personal commitments; in her email, Stacey had thanked committee members for their warm welcome and the Chair commented on the positive input Stacey had made.

SIC21/1 Agenda Item 2 – Billingham Trailblazer

The College Principal Bede introduced the Safeguarding and Welfare Officer Bede to members and explained the key role she had taken in Trailblazer. The Interim Group Head of Student Services outlined the development of Trailblazer following a 2017 Government Green Paper on transforming children and young people's mental health; with the added challenges of COVID-19, mental health had become even more crucial as a Group priority. The Safeguarding and Welfare Officer Bede explained that only a limited number of referrals could be accommodated through Alliance's counselling and therapy one-to-one support but vulnerable students could be offered places on the six-week Trailblazer group sessions without referral. Currently held remotely, these small groups aimed to give learners the skills to cope with issues using WRAP (worries, rumination, avoidance, problem-solving) strategies as well as relapse techniques to develop resilience and lifelong tools, with a GAD7 (generalised anxiety disorder) score taken at the start and end of the programme to measure impact. Trailblazer training was being rolled out to Bede teaching staff and resources were available on the VLE (Virtual Learning Environment). The Safeguarding and Welfare Officer

Bede outlined the training process to enable staff to run the six-week programme and added that a session on sleep difficulties had been added to meet learners' needs. Content had also been adapted to suit different programme levels, including learners with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).

The Interim Group Head of Student Services confirmed that, as Trailblazer funding was Billingham-based, work was ongoing to adopt the equivalent Headstart initiative for the Redcar area. In response to a member's question about target age groups, the Interim Group Head of Student Services confirmed that Headstart was aimed at those aged up to 19 but that older learners would not be excluded; support for staff mental health and wellbeing remained within the HR team's responsibilities.

A member gave full support to this crucial work, adding that the use of a proactive approach based on early intervention and sustainability was important, and asked if there were plans to expand to peer to peer and parent / carer support. The Interim Group Head of Student Services confirmed that peer to peer support was included in the Action Plan and the College Principal Bede added that, given that students tended to relate best to each other, training and upskilling learners for peer support was important but had to be balanced against learners' other priorities, including examinations. The Safeguarding and Welfare Support Officer Bede added that Alliance also worked with two secondary and ten primary schools in Billingham, therefore embedding a culture through transition stages and supporting students before they enrolled at Bede.

Members **noted** the update and gave their full support to the Trailblazer and Headstart programmes.

Abi Clay and Helen Jenkinson left and Karl Johnson joined the meeting.

SIC21/2 Agenda Item 3 – Higher Education Self Evaluation Document

The College Principal Stockton Riverside College (SRC), also Strategic Lead for Higher Education (HE), explained that the HE Self Evaluation Document (SED) was produced annually for internal use, with a summary submitted to Teesside University. Due to deferred outcomes as a result of COVID-19, the final HE SED had been delayed from November 2020 and she invited the Programme Area Lead (PAL) HE to provide an overview of the previously circulated document and covering report.

The PAL HE highlighted key points including overall HE recruitment in 2019-20; attendance, achievement and retention rates; programmes causing concern; student voice; quality enhancement visits and destinations. Data showed a three-year upward trend in full-time student numbers due to the shift from part-time to full-time enrolments, particularly in 2019-20. Achievement rates had been affected by COVID-19 with the requirement for students to complete assessments impacted by competing work and family priorities; a number of students had taken up the option to defer. Five out of the six programmes causing concern in 2018-19 had showed significant improvement, [REDACTED]. Results from the National Student Survey (NSS) and student forums had been positive, [REDACTED]; feedback from the two external monitoring visits that took place during 2019-20 had been positive.

The HE improvement plan would focus on achievement, recruitment, clarity on destinations and improved continuation rates.

[REDACTED] Analysis indicated that students were mainly located within the Tees Valley and marketing activities would target school leavers wishing to study locally full-time plus an employer focus promoting part-time courses. [REDACTED] Consideration would also be given to highlighting the financial benefits to learners of studying Access programmes through a Further Education (FE) College.

A member asked if there were any implications from the FE Skills White Paper regarding the demarcation between higher-level skills provision through HE and FE providers. The College Principal SRC explained that Etc. offered both prescribed and non-prescribed level 4 provision and had the flexibility to offer progression to Teesside University or within Etc. for some programmes, for example CILEx. In response to a governor's question, the HE PAL confirmed that an action plan had been put in place and that progress had already been made on improving continuation rates.

Members requested an update on HE at the next meeting particularly in light of the Estates Strategy priorities at SRC.

Members **agreed** to recommend the 2019-20 Higher Education Self Evaluation Document and Development Plan to the FE Corporation for approval.

Karl Johnson left the meeting.

SIC21/3 Additional Verbal Update on Plans for 8th March 2021

The Group Executive Director Planning and Infrastructure gave a verbal update on arrangements for the return to site from Monday 8th March; the Reopening Group continued to meet regularly and a Group-wide approach for testing had been put in place, with three onsite tests for learners and staff, followed by twice weekly home testing. The COVID-19 risk assessment had been updated to include the increased use of face masks in classrooms.

A governor asked whether learners showed any disinclination to carry out testing and the Group Executive Director Planning and Infrastructure explained that, although learners could not be compelled to take part in testing or for non-testing to be a barrier to access, strong messaging was being used to encourage take-up and counter misinformation. It was hoped that testing learners in class groups would provide peer encouragement. The Chief Executive confirmed that staff governor input at Corporation had had a direct impact on messaging around fake news; this was confirmed by the staff governor who outlined the use of newsletters and posters to encourage participation, adding that there was further work to be done on counteracting misinformation on social media.

Members **noted** the verbal update.

SIC21/4 Agenda Item 1 – Minutes of Previous Meeting

Minutes of the Standards Improvement Committee meeting held on 19 November 2020 had been circulated and were **approved** as an accurate record.

Members considered the actions arising from previous meetings. The Group Executive Director Planning and Infrastructure reaffirmed the open invitation to Business Planning / Performance Review (BP/PR) meetings and confirmed that the staff governors had both attended sessions. The College Principal SRC gave a verbal update on Construction and Professional Services at SRC. The Clerk agreed to notify governors of the arrangements for Learner Forums which were due to take place shortly. Members **noted** that all other actions had been completed or were to be considered at this meeting.

SIC21/5 Agenda Item 4 – Group Improvement Plans

The Group Executive Director Planning and Infrastructure confirmed that the Group Improvement Plans (GIPs) had been circulated with the meeting papers and also for the Governors' Strategic Conference and that, following consideration, members would be asked to consider recommending their approval to the FE Corporation.

SIC21/6 4.1 – Apprenticeships

The Group Vice Principal Business, Innovation and Partnerships outlined the impact of COVID-19 on apprenticeships, including breaks in learning, though overall achievement and retention rates had been positive. Progress on the action plan had been made since the start of the academic year, with Smart Assessor used as an effective compliance and review tool for the first time at PR. The Interim Group Director of Quality was working with the Group Head of Apprenticeships at regular departmental review meetings and an Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) model for the learner journey on Employer Led Standards was being implemented through the Best Practice Sharing Group.

A member sought clarification on the timely achievement target at RCC and the Group Vice Principal Business, Innovation and Partnerships confirmed that it was [REDACTED] given on the first page of the GIP. In response to a member's question, he also explained that the curriculum plan was essentially the scheme of work, with the delivery plan used as a marketing tool with employers. Following discussion, the Group Vice Principal Business, Innovation and Partnerships agreed that more detail could be included for the PR targets under section A:1.

The Group Executive Director Planning and Infrastructure added that the introduction of Smart Assessor had been instrumental in evidencing progress and improvements and the NETA MD agreed on the value of having direct and current access to NETA apprenticeship progress data. In response to a member's question, the Group Vice Principal Business, Innovation and Partnerships believed that his greatest worry was continuing to demonstrate sustained progress given the strength and transparency of Smart Assessor.

SIC21/7 4.2 – English and maths

The College Principal Redcar & Cleveland College (RCC) explained that reforms to functional skills in 2019-20 had led to a drop in both Group and national pass rates and that this had

also been reflected in Centre Assessed Grades (CAGs). The GIP aimed to improve pass rates and actions had already had a positive impact on achievement [REDACTED]. Improvements in teaching and training would be reviewed at PR6 the following day. Attendance had been hard to benchmark against previous years and Group-wide initiatives to improve attendance had been put in place, including appropriate timetabling. Government guidance on assessment arrangements for 2021 was being monitored by the Group; functional skills assessments continued to take place through exams, with Teacher Assessed Grades only appropriate if a learner was, for example, clinically extremely vulnerable.

A member asked what barriers there were to learner attendance in addition to COVID-19. The College Principal RCC outlined a range of factors; for example, a single Level 3 learner in a cohort might have to attend English or maths and could be reluctant to attend especially if these qualifications were felt unnecessary for their chosen career. Timetabling was often an issue; sandwiching English and maths between subject lessons was most effective but not always possible. Alternatively, a learner attending functional skills could be amongst a peer group taking GCSE English or maths courses. As there was little control over learners' own levels of motivation, the Group needed to concentrate on effective timetabling and high-quality teaching and training. A member also commented that given that some would have been reluctant learners through up to 11 previous years in education, the Group could be working with learners with numeracy and literacy skills equivalent to a seven-year old. Members asked for an update on assessment arrangements at the next meeting.

SIC21/8 4.3 – Student Support

The College Principal Bede explained that the Student Support GIP focussed on two main areas identified within the Group Self-Assessment Report (SAR) 2019-20 - mental health and the resulting achievement gap and support for vulnerable learners, specifically Looked After Children (LAC) and those with a social worker. He commented on the work of the Vulnerable Learners sub group in enabling staff to take swift action and the use of both an attendance target of 85% and the RAG-rating of learner engagement in identifying retention concerns. Good progress had been made in the restructuring of Student Services in order to provide a future-proofed and fit for purpose service to learners

SIC21/9 4.4 – Teaching and Training

The Interim Group Director of Quality outlined his positive first impressions of the Teaching and Training Review (TTR) process and its implementation and the staff governor added that, from a staff perspective, the TTR process felt more supportive and positive in terms of staff development than lesson observations.

A member asked if there were any particular areas of focus in preparation for an Ofsted inspection. The Interim Group Director of Quality felt that a particular area of focus should be the curriculum middle leadership team, concentrating on best practice and using their time to have the greatest impact on outcomes. The most effective improvements would be made through supporting colleagues to be better teachers both in terms of intent and implementation, for example, retrieval and metacognition.

SIC21/10 4.5 – Value Added

The College Principal Bede explained that the impact of COVID-19 and the changes associated in relation to teaching and learning, lost learning and examinations, would make any reliable judgements of progress, or value added, difficult to measure. As the biggest impact on learner progress was the quality of teaching and training and a robust system of performance management, these would be a key focus of the GIP; targeted professional development and the sharing of best practice would also be used to drive improvements.

Members **agreed** to recommend the five Group Improvement Plans 2020-21 (Apprenticeships, English and maths, Student Support, Teaching and Training and Value Added) to the FE Corporation for approval.

Tony Pattison and Angela Stevenson joined the meeting.

SIC21/11 Agenda Item 5 – Quality and Performance Update 2020-21

The Group Executive Director Planning and Infrastructure outlined current attendance on Group sites and added that attendance metrics for both 16-18 and 19+ were slightly lower than at the same time the previous year, which reflected the impact of the move to remote delivery and different methods of recording attendance when learning was taking place independently. Attendance would remain a focus on the return to site, as would retention in the transition back to face to face teaching. Student responses to the recent JISC survey in relation to the quality of online / digital learning had been mainly positive but had highlighted some areas of focus.

A governor asked for current areas of focus for supporting improvement. The Group Assessment and Standards Development Manager highlighted attendance and the impact on retention with a focus on weekly monitoring and, in particular, high needs learners. The Group Teaching and Training Development Manager was concentrating on scheduling TTRs with Heads of Department to ensure staff were receiving support and that the quality of teaching and training was consistent. In response to a member's question about shared understanding with principals, both members of the quality team confirmed that there were excellent working relationships across the Group and that work was going well at all levels, from principals to course leaders. The Group Teaching and Training Development Manager added that standardisation of reporting across the Group and at PRs was beneficial. A member asked about arrangements for 2021 qualifications and the Group Assessment and Standards Development Manager explained that there remained an expectation of high standards of standardisation and moderation across the Group and that members could be confident of the robustness and focus of the process even during lockdown.

At a member's request, it was agreed that the Interim Group Director of Quality and Group Assessment and Standards Manager would report on a sample of worst-performing courses from 2019-20 and 2020-21 along with improvements made and interventions put in place at the next meeting. The Chief Executive commented on the focus on successful teaching and any concerns presented at PRs by the Group Teaching and Training Development Manager which represented a real shift in focus to teaching and learning rather than systems and process.

Mark White and Gary Wright left the meeting.

Vanessa Housley reported on productive learning walkthroughs she had recently undertaken with the Group Teaching and Training Development Manager in which she had been able to triangulate the quality of teaching with the rigour and robustness of the appraisals provided. She indicated that she would be keen to follow this up with a wider range of walkthroughs, with follow-ups to see the impact of actions taken, which would be useful in evidencing the impact of leadership and management. The Group Teaching and Training Manager agreed to arrange these walkthroughs.

Members **noted** the update.

SIC21/12 Agenda Item 10 – Governor Teaching and Training Walkthroughs

The Group Teaching and Training Manager highlighted the value of walkthroughs for governors in evidencing practice, for example, the impact of the digital learning coaches. The Interim Group Director of Quality also emphasised the direct and immediate impact of walkthroughs on improving practice.

Members **noted** that they should arrange walkthroughs through the Clerk in the first instance and that these were available to all governors.

Tony Pattison and Angela Stevenson left the meeting.

SIC21/13 Agenda Item 6 – Subcontracting Quality Monitoring

The Group Vice Principal Business, Innovation and Partnerships outlined progress on subcontracting quality monitoring and confirmed that all initial subcontractor visits had now taken place, with a summary of outcomes provided at appendix 1; a number of areas now receiving support from the subcontracting team had been highlighted in the accompanying report. The use of consultancy time was being considered for deep dives.

The Chief Executive commented on the reputational strength of the Group's subcontracting provision and the strategic importance of this within the Tees Valley.

Members **noted** progress on subcontracting quality monitoring.

SIC21/14 Agenda Item 7 – Pastoral Update

The College Principal Bede explained that this report focused on the review of the enrichment programme, which had looked at best practice across the sector and the requirement to deliver effectively during periods of remote working. Core elements had been developed with the option for customisation by curriculum teams, with schemes of work to support all levels of learning. An online delivery platform was currently being trialled at Bede and the College Principal Bede commented on the positive feedback on the mental health module received from a student governor at the recent Governors' Strategic Conference. The enrichment team were working closely with curriculum and other areas of the Group, including the Careers team.

Members **noted** the update.

SIC21/15 Agenda Item 8 – Careers

The Chief Executive updated members on the Tees Valley Combined Authority's (TVCA's) current work on updating the regional careers strategy, adding that he was a member of TVCA's Careers Strategy Group. He added that, in line with the Group Director of Marketing's re-focusing of advice and guidance, responsibility for careers had moved from student services to the marketing team. The Group Director of Marketing confirmed the advantages of linking careers with marketing and schools' liaison at each site and that a new Careers Team leader had recently been appointed.

In response to a member's question about the role of the Group in providing careers guidance and events for Key Stage 3 and 4 pupils in the area, the Chief Executive commented that, although it was important to engage children from KS2 onwards, it was crucial that resources were targeted at careers advice for those approaching GCSEs. The Group Director of Marketing outlined Etc.'s current work with Year 9 upwards, raising aspirations and outlining careers choices, and its importance in promoting relationships with and supporting schools. The College Principal RCC explained that plans were under development in the Redcar area to bring primary school age children into college to address local priorities. It was noted that current Year 10 and 11 pupils would not have had the opportunity to take part in work experience.

Members **noted** the update and the Group Director of Marketing **agreed** to provide a further update at the next meeting.

SIC21/16 Agenda Item 9 – Ofsted Update

The Chief Executive gave a verbal update on the current position of Ofsted inspections and the Clerk **agreed** to arrange an Ofsted Group meeting before Easter at which an updated position statement on governor impact would be considered.

Members **noted** the update.

SIC21/17 Agenda Item 11 – Any Other Business

There were no items of other business.

SIC21/18 Agenda Item 12 - Approval of Documents for Public Inspection

It was **agreed** that the agenda and supporting documents of the current meeting be made available for public inspection with the exception of the reports for Agenda Items 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 which were considered commercial in confidence. Minutes would be made available following approval and consideration at the next meeting.

SIC21/19 Agenda Item 13 - Date and time of next meeting

Thursday 20th May 2021, 5.30 pm, to be held in SRC301 or remotely

SIC21/20 Agenda Item 14 – Key Themes

The following key themes were identified:

- Update on the embedding of the Trailblazer (mental health support in schools and colleges) programme at Bede and proposal to access the Headstart programme for Redcar & Cleveland College students supported
- Consideration of the Higher Education Self Evaluation Document and recommendation of agreement to the FE Corporation
- Verbal update on arrangements for the wider re-opening of Group sites from 8 March 2021
- Discussion of and recommendation for approval to the FE Corporation of the five Group Improvement Plans 2020-21 (Apprenticeships, English & maths, Teaching & Training, Student Support, Value Added)
- Update on quality and performance 2020-21, including governor teaching and training walkthroughs
- Updates on subcontracting quality monitoring, the enrichment and tutorial programme and careers

(The meeting ended at 7.55 pm)

Approved at a remote meeting held on 20 May 2021