

## Standards Improvement Committee Minutes

Meeting held on Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> June 2023 at 5.30 pm, H202, Redcar & Cleveland College

**Governors:** Liz Dixon (Staff Governor), Grant Glendinning (Chief Executive and Group Principal), Vanessa Housley, Dot Smith (Chair), Gary Wright (Safeguarding Link Governor) and Bernice Wood (Higher Education student)

**Apologies:** Lorraine Preston (Staff Governor) and Anne Vickers

**Officials:** Jason Faulkner (Executive Principal Redcar and Cleveland College (RCC) & NETA), Lesley Graham (Executive Principal Stockton Riverside College (SRC) & Higher Education), Phil Hastie (Chief Operating Officer), Patrick Jordan (College Principal Bede), Sarah Thompson (Clerk to the Corporation), Peter Wood (Group Director of Quality) and Sam Young (Governance Support Officer)

For agenda item 2 only: Tracey Laycock (Alternative Provision Manager)

**In attendance:** Rachel Robson (External governance reviewer, Stone King)

*Patrick Jordan and Rachel Robson joined the meeting on Teams*

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### **SIC23/18 Agenda Item 1 – Welcome, apologies for absence, declarations of interest, notification of items of other business**

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting and a round of introductions took place.

Apologies for absence were received from Lorraine Preston and Anne Vickers and it was noted that Sean Johnston, NETA Managing Director, was unable to attend the meeting. Aimee Leyden, staff member and HE student, had planned to attend the meeting as an observer but was now unable to attend.

There were no declarations of interest in items on the agenda and no additional items of business were notified for consideration.

### **SIC23/19 Agenda Item 2 – Pre-16 Provision presentation**

The Alternative Provision Manager provided a presentation outlining the Etc.'s broad ranging 14-16 provision, which included full time and part time provision under the 'positive pathways' programme, as well as part time provision for electively home educated students and part time Level 1 provision. She highlighted the strategic aim of the provision, contribution to the skills agenda, and recruitment focus and rationale. It was noted that Skills Academy provision supported post 16 recruitment, with many students recruited at Year 10 retained in post 16 Level 2 and Level 3 courses. There had been a significant increase in recruitment of electively home educated 14-16 student numbers, [REDACTED] alongside increasing demand from schools.

The Alternative Provision Manager highlighted some examples of the exceptional 14-16 offer, including a 100% pass rate for Functional Skills English and students' involvement in painting an underpass, even dedicating their own time to this. She also outlined positive feedback on the impact of the Skills Academy from stakeholders, such as local schools and Middlesbrough Borough Council, as well as learners and parents, and cited an example of a Year 10 student that had joined the Skills Academy [REDACTED], moving on to Level 2 in Year 11, Level 3 at post 16 and had now been successful in gaining an apprenticeship at Etc.

Governors thanked the Alternative Provision Manager for her informative presentation and expressed their interest in visiting the Skills Academy. It was agreed that visits would be arranged for interested governors during the 2023-24 academic year.

A governor commented that they were very pleased to note the positive impact of the Skills Academy provision on reducing the number of permanent exclusions. Recognising the challenges faced by schools in avoiding permanent exclusions, with many relating to social, emotional and well-being issues, it was queried whether staff had received training in relation to this. The Alternative Provision Manager confirmed that there had been significant investment in appropriate staff training across Etc. and all Skills Academy staff had received training in respect of trauma informed teaching and Team Teach, specifically in relation to de-escalation techniques. A member of the Student Welfare Team was also based at Skills Academy to support particularly with safeguarding and Skills Academy staff worked closely with schools to identify appropriate general and specific training, for example, training in relation to autism and eating disorders. Staff were always open to access additional appropriate development opportunities.

In response to a governor's query regarding management of the transition back to school, the Alternative Provision Manager reported that this was managed through professional discussions and the Skills Academy sought to support young people wherever possible. She provided an example of a young person at risk of exclusion who had attended Skills Academy provision and now achieved a Level 1 qualification.

A member asked how Personal, Social and Health Education was delivered to learners. The Alternative Provision Manager highlighted that the Skills Academy benefitted from being part of the wider Education Training Collective and was able to access tutorial materials, such as Safeguarding, Prevent, resilience and suicide prevention, as well as support with safeguarding. The Skills Academy also worked closely with schools and had embedded and enhanced schools' PSHE curriculums. In addition, Skills Academy staff worked with young people and agencies to develop support plans.

A governor asked for more information in relation to destinations of Skills Academy learners and the rate for conversion to Level 2 qualifications. The Alternative Provision Manager clarified that [REDACTED] of Skills Academy learners moved to a positive destination in 2021-22. The Skills Academy provision had a pass rate of [REDACTED] and retention of [REDACTED] Full cost learners were retained at [REDACTED] and learners from schools at 100%. [REDACTED] of young people progressed from Level 1 to Level 2. This data was particularly positive in light of the fact that Skills Academy learners were one of the hardest to engage cohorts. She agreed to provide more detailed data after the meeting.

A governor asked how the FE Corporation could support the Skills Academy provision. The Alternative Provision Manager highlighted that Etc.'s 14-16 provision was well supported by the group, although additional funding and resources would always be beneficial.

Governors thanked the Alternative Provision Manager for her presentation, recognising the excellent relationships that the Skills Academy had with schools and the significant contribution it made to the local community.

*The Alternative Provision Manager left the meeting.*

### **SIC23/20 Agenda Item 3 – Minutes of Previous Meeting**

Minutes of the Standards Improvement Committee meeting held on 23 March 2023 had been circulated and were **approved** as an accurate record.

The action progress log had been circulated and was **noted**. A verbal update in relation to the Construction, Professional and Service Industries (CPSI) Department would be provided under Agenda Item 7, Areas for Improvement update.

### **SIC23/21 Agenda Item 4 – Level 3 Landscape – Update**

A report provided by the College Principal Bede outlining key issues impacting the Level 3 educational landscape had been circulated. This included: the impact of grade inflation due to centre assessed grades (CAGs) and teacher assessed grades (TAGs); and Level 3 Qualification Reform and Defunding.

The College Principal Bede reported that, anecdotally, students had fed back positively on the content of the 2023 GCSE and A Level examination papers. The adjustments to grade boundaries and use of centre and teacher assessed grades in recent years made it problematic to use 'Alps' data and value added to measure college performance, although these data sets were used to encourage student aspirations. Destinations of Bede students were very positive, with [REDACTED] of students moving on to University; this was a very high level compared to other colleges within the sixth form sector.

Governors discussed whether the upcoming general election could impact on plans to de-fund Level 3 qualifications, and the view within the sector that any change of government could be at too late a stage to allow any of the reforms to be rolled back. The Chief Operating Officer highlighted that the Level 3 landscape and de-funding had been discussed with representatives of the Education and Skills Funding Agency and the FE Commissioner's team at the recent Strategic Conversation and it had been acknowledged that de-funding was a concern throughout the sector, particularly the timeline for implementation and accessibility of new T Level programmes. The Chief Executive highlighted, by way of an example, that despite meeting entry criteria, [REDACTED] of the Health T Level cohort at Redcar and Cleveland College had transferred in year to a different Level 3 qualification as they were unable to meet the academic rigour required in the T Level course. Current implementation timelines would not provide sufficient opportunity for course content to be modified.

A governor asked how the group ensured students were matched with the right course and it was confirmed that this was a key priority across all Etc. provision with expectations clarified

as part of course inductions. In response to a further challenge relating to whether staff working within the Information, Advice and Guidance team were familiar with T Levels, the Executive Principals reported that there had been significant work undertaken to clarify the T Level offer, including specific T Level events, promotion in schools and detailed work with curriculum staff. Governors also asked how the Etc. ensured learners had the right values and behaviours for their future employment environments and the Executive Principal SRC and HE confirmed that the group recognised the importance of working closely with employers, citing, as an example, work by the group to develop a handbook in collaboration with North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust.

A governor asked about forward planning to mitigate the financial impact in the event of a decline in the number of 16-18 learners and the Chief Operating officer confirmed that discussions would be taking place with all departments from September 2023 as part of the performance review and business planning process. The Group Director Quality also highlighted plans for professional development for Heads of Departments. It was recognised that not every curriculum area would deliver T Levels.

Governors **noted** the update and it was suggested that this topic be considered further at the next meeting of this committee or at a future FE Corporation meeting.

#### **SIC23/22    Agenda Item 5 – Quality and performance update**

The Group Director Quality presented his circulated report outlining in year attendance, retention, expected apprenticeship achievement and outcomes of teaching and learning walkthroughs and developmental observations. [REDACTED] The Group Director Quality reassured governors that forecast achievement for 16-18 and 19+ learners remained above national rates.

A governor highlighted that attendance levels were a concern for all education institutions and acknowledged the improvements in attendance across most areas. Governors asked how Bede had managed to improve attendance for 16-18 students [REDACTED]. The College Principal Bede reported that Bede was continuing to use Personal Progression Coaches to support students to achieve good attendance and had also made efforts to bolster communications with parents.

A governor also noted that, with the exception of the small 19+ cohort at [REDACTED], 19+ attendance had improved and asked whether this reflected a positive impact from the 2022-23 Group Improvement Plans. The Group Director Quality highlighted that the Maintaining Learning Group Improvement Plan had particularly impacted on attendance, with managers engaging well with the expectations around attendance reporting. He further highlighted the momentum achieved by Group Improvement Plans, noting, in particular, that lessons identified in the audit undertaken by the Poverty Proofing Taskforce, could mean that no Cost of Living Group Improvement Plan was required in 2023-24.

Forecast apprenticeship achievement was at [REDACTED], above the national rate of 57% but below the target set by the Department for Education for all providers to achieve 67% achievement by 2025. Apprenticeships had been a focus across the group and the group was confident that improvements were being achieved, with Heads of Departments now having a clear understanding of the position of individual learners and the action needed to ensure achievement.

The Group Director of Quality also highlighted that the three-year teaching and learning strategy would be ready to launch as part of August staff development sessions. A wide range of resources had been used to develop the Strategy, and consultation would now take place with curriculum managers and staff. The Strategy would embed an incremental coaching model to ensure effective use of lesson observations. In response to a query, it was confirmed that governors would be able to consider the Teaching and Learning Strategy alongside the Etc. Strategic Plan.

The report was **noted**.

### **SIC23/23 Agenda Item 6 – Group Improvement Plans 2022-23**

A report had been circulated providing a brief overview of progress against each of the 2022-23 Group Improvement Plans. The following were highlighted and discussed:

#### Apprenticeships

Improvements were still required but, overall, work to date had been encouraging. The Chair of Audit Committee had attended one meeting of the Apprenticeship Council. Governors were reminded that they were always welcome to attend future meetings.

#### Cost of Living Crisis

The Group Director Quality reported that actions taken included ensuring timely communications to parents around trips and visits in order to allow time for parents to request help or save up to cover the cost. Cost-effective transport to college was also being explored and the group was also considering ways to support students with access to resources, for example, via a student stationery shop. WiFi connectivity continued to be a significant issue for students.

Members noted that a poverty proofing audit had been undertaken at Bede Sixth Form College and queried why this had not been undertaken at other group sites. It was clarified that this had been a very thorough external audit undertaken by a charity utilising available funding. It was proposed that the findings of the Bede poverty proofing audit be reviewed in the first instance and outcomes mapped to other group sites to identify required actions. In the longer-term, it was possible that consideration could be given to undertaking poverty proofing audits at other group sites. The Group Director Quality would work with the Group Director Marketing to identify and action outcomes. Governors discussed the impact of cost of living on student choices at GCSE, with subjects requiring additional equipment becoming less popular. A staff governor confirmed that Etc. had minimised equipment requirements for students.

A governor asked whether the group had explored funding available from, for example, charities, to support students in areas of deprivation. The Executive Principal RCC and NETA reported that the group had access to 'grant finder' software and the availability of larger grants was monitored by the Projects Team. The group recognised its responsibility to provide statutory equipment for students and also provided students with additional support via bursary and learner support funds. Members suggested it could be helpful to remind students to provide clearer evidence of support needed during enrolment to ensure support was provided in a timely way.

### Maintaining Learning

The Executive Principal RCC and NETA reported that positive progress had been achieved and retention was above national rates. Performance of male and female learners had switched, with female learners now outperforming male learners. Rapid Improvement Plans (RIPs) were working well. During a recent Principal's focus group, students had provided very positive feedback on their experience of teaching and learning.

A governor expressed concern about the fall in retention of Children in Our Care across all campuses. It was noted that a Welfare Officer had recently been appointed to provide specific support to this group and it was reported that each College Principal met with the Safeguarding Team to discuss the position of each vulnerable learner. The Group Director Quality reported that retention for 16-18 Children in Our Care was in line with the general Further Education retention rate but the achievement gap was at [REDACTED]. The group recognised the importance of closing this gap.

A member queried whether the group offered access to Army Cadets, highlighting a positive case study relating to a young person in care. The Executive Principal RCC and NETA reported that there was no specific link between Army Cadets and the Etc. group but Army Cadet detachments were active in the locality. The colleges provided a comprehensive Public Services offer.

### Managing People

In response to a query, the Chief Executive confirmed that a pilot scheme for staff to work four days on site and a fifth day offsite was currently in progress.

### Level 3 Vocational Curriculum

Retention remained strong and this was expected to translate to a positive achievement position. Challenges at NETA in recruiting specialist staff were being addressed.

### Teaching and Learning

A new teaching and learning and coaching resource, *Walkthrus*, which provided advice and guidance for staff in relation to specific teaching issues had recently been purchased. A staff governor commented that she had been impressed during a demonstration of the resource. Dual observations had also recently been undertaken with FE Associates and FE Associates had viewed teaching and learning as strong to outstanding. Impact of this work had been seen by managers.

The updates were **noted**.

## **SIC23/24 Agenda Item 7 – Areas for improvement update**

As agreed at previous meetings, an update on progress in identified areas for improvement that were not included in the Group Improvement Plans had been circulated. The following were highlighted:

### Bede

In response to a governor's query in relation to the range of personal development activity and uptake by students, the College Principal Bede highlighted that a lot of work had been

undertaken to increase uptake and, in 2023-24, mandatory personal development activity would be introduced as part of 'Careers Pathways'. Although student survey outcomes indicated lower uptake, review of the 'Unifrog' system during the Ofsted inspection demonstrated student participation in a wide range of activity.

#### NETA

[REDACTED] In response to a governor's query, the Executive Principal confirmed that recent external quality assurance visits from awarding organisations EAL and BTEC had been successful.

#### Redcar and Cleveland College

The Executive Principal RCC and NETA highlighted exceptionally high student satisfaction from a range of students. The gender gap in retention had now switched, with more male students retained than female students. Good progress was also being made and predicted achievement was around [REDACTED] for 19+ students. Attendance would be a continuing focus for 2023-24. Governors noted the strong commitment from British Gas to T Level placements in 2023-24.

#### Stockton Riverside College

The Executive Principal SRC and HE highlighted positive progress within the Construction, Professional and Service Industries (CPSI) department in terms of overarching data [REDACTED].

Staff were looking closely at performance of borderline students to ascertain accuracy of forecasts. [REDACTED]

The cohort for 19+ Electrical was primarily students in full time employment attending college two evenings per week and the college was looking to pilot delivery with one night on site and one session online, with the aim of improving attendance and retention.

[REDACTED] it was suggested that the Programme Area Leader (PAL) for Construction, Engineering & Design be invited to present to the autumn term meeting of the Standards Improvement Committee.

The update was **noted**.

### **SIC22/25 Agenda Item 8 – Governor teaching and training walkthroughs**

A report had been circulated providing information about recent learning walkthroughs undertaken by governors and governor feedback. [REDACTED]. The Executive Principal SRC and HE agreed to share this feedback.

The update was **noted** and governors agreed to consider arranging learning walks and to remind all governors (the FE Corporation) of the value of learning walks and encourage governors to undertake these. Bernice Wood was keen to undertake a learning walkthrough and this would be arranged in the autumn term.

## **Agenda Item 9 – Updates**

### **SIC23/26 Agenda Item 9.1 – Subcontracting quality monitoring**

A report had been provided by the Executive Principal RCC and NETA outlining subcontracted provision across the group including rationale for delivery, quality performance and risk areas. Members noted that the report was very positive and it was pleasing to note that no actions or recommendations had been identified by auditors in the recent mandatory external review against the new Subcontracting Standard. The Executive Principal RCC and NETA confirmed that the final audit report was still outstanding due to a delay by the internal auditor. Members were also pleased to note an improved quality position within some providers [REDACTED].

The update was **noted**.

### **SIC23/27 Agenda Item 9.2 – Personal Development update**

A report from the Group Director of Quality had been circulated which presented an overview of tutorials and careers support, enrichment activities and Students' Union activity. It was confirmed that, following a presentation to the FE Corporation by the Bede Students' Union President in relation to student mental health, links had been established between the Health Education & Relationship Manager at Stockton on Tees Borough Council and the Etc. Student Services team, and a range of resources and networks shared. Members were also pleased to note ongoing work to further strengthen personal development following the grading of outstanding awarded by Ofsted in May 2022. Plans included increasing student engagement with enrichment and increasing student involvement in social action and volunteering.

Members **noted** the update.

### **SIC23/28 Agenda Item 9.3 – Higher Education update**

A report had been circulated from the Executive Principal SRC and Higher Education providing an overview of 2022-23 Higher Education student numbers, retention, attendance, 2023-24 recruitment, progress with Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQ), and student survey feedback (National Student Survey (NSS)).

In response to a query, the Executive Principal confirmed that [REDACTED] applications had been received for T Level courses and a further [REDACTED] students would progress to a second year, a total of [REDACTED] T Level students, exceeding the target of [REDACTED].

In response to a further query regarding progress by the Teesside University consultant, the Chief Executive reported that initial research had recognised a falling market and falling market share. The Executive Principal SRC and HE confirmed a willingness on the part of Teesside University to progress this. A Strategy was being developed and expected to be received in the near future. This would be shared with the Standards Improvement Committee.

In response to a further query relating to progress with sign off of Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs), the Executive Principal SRC and HE reported that the Early Years qualification had been signed off and Teesside University was currently going through Engineering mapping. A writing day had taken place at Teesside University with representatives



from Darlington and Hartlepool Colleges, as well as Engineering staff from Redcar and Cleveland College. Submissions had now been completed and outcomes were awaited.

The update was **noted**.

#### **SIC23/29 Agenda Item 9.4 – Skills Competition update**

The Executive Principal SRC and HE presented her circulated report outlining involvement of Etc. students in Regional Skills and World Skills competitions.

The Executive Principal reported that [REDACTED] Etc. students had achieved places in regional finals and were currently going through heats. She also reported that Etc. had been asked to become a Centre of Excellence for World Skills, funded by the Department for Education. Participation in skills competitions benefitted both students, in terms of embedding skills, and staff, by providing excellent continuous professional development, and there had been good levels of engagement in skills competitions across the group.

A member queried whether the group was still making funding available for innovation projects. The Executive Principal reported that the Innovation Fund had resulted in some good projects, for example, the Gender Innovation (GENIE) project, but a number of submissions had primarily related to support for resources and consumables. A decision had therefore been taken to cease the Innovation Fund and use this funding to support participation in World Skills competitions. Members suggested that ways of fostering innovation could be discussed as part of the review of Etc.'s strategic priorities.

Governors commended the benefits of participation in skills competitions to students and staff and **noted** the update.

#### **SIC23/30 Agenda Item 9.5 – SAR and Master Targets Schedule 2023-24**

The Group Director Quality presented his circulated report outlining proposed timelines for development of the Etc. Self Assessment Report and Master Target schedule and asked members to note an amendment to the report, specifically that Programme Area Improvement Plans would be developed. This was intended to ensure that Programme Area Leaders, the managers closest to the curriculum areas, had ownership of improvement plans.

The Standards Improvement Committee Chair encouraged governors to attend Self Assessment Report validation meetings where possible and governors requested notice of dates as soon as possible.

The update was **noted** and it was **agreed** that dates for Self Assessment Report validation meetings would be circulated as soon as these became available.

#### **SIC23/31 Agenda Item 10 – Any Other Business**

There were no additional items of business for consideration.

#### **SIC23/32 Agenda Item 11 - Approval of Documents for Public Inspection**

It was **agreed** that the agenda and supporting documents for the current meeting be made available for public inspection with the exception of reports to Items 5, Quality and Performance Update, 6, Group Improvement Plans, 7, Areas for Improvement Update, 9.1 Subcontracting Quality Monitoring, and 9.3 HE Update, which included commercially sensitive information.

### **SIC23/33 Agenda Item 12 – Dates, times and venues of future meetings**

Meetings during the 2023-24 academic year would take place as follows:

- Thursday 5 October 2023, 5.30 pm, Stockton Riverside College, Room 301 (Boardroom)
- Thursday 16 November 2023, 5.30 pm, Teams
- Thursday 14 March 2024, 5.30 pm, Bede Sixth Form
- Thursday 13 June 2024, 5.30 pm, Redcar and Cleveland College H202 (Boardroom)

### **SIC23/34 Agenda Item 13 – Meeting Effectiveness and Key Themes**

The effectiveness of the meeting was reviewed:

- It was commented that governors demonstrated a phenomenal ability to absorb a huge quantity of information and ask detailed questions
- Full agenda but managed very impressively
- Powerful presentation on pre-16 provision
- Very helpful meeting and good to see additional support
- Meeting was well-prepared by Governance Team and reports well-prepared by senior managers
- There was discussion in relation to a previous action from governors for managers to flag key risks. It was suggested that it could be helpful for managers to reference risks back to the corporate risk register. It was noted that the group was introducing new risk management software which could support this.

The following key themes were identified:

- Presentation to governors on Pre 16 provision evidenced group's work to meet needs of local communities
- Discussion around Level 3 curriculum reform – governors recognised the impact could be hugely significant; the group was monitoring and planning for change but the position was still continuing to evolve
- Good progress achieved against all Group Improvement Plans
- Generally good quality position across the group but attendance and retention at NETA would be monitored and the committee would continue to monitor performance of the Construction, Professional and Service Industries department (Stockton Riverside College) to ensure improvements were maintained.
- Significant work undertaken in relation to apprenticeships and this was beginning to impact; expected achievement was above national rate but further work needed to achieve government target by 2025
- Ongoing work at all sites to support student inclusion against the backdrop of cost of living crisis

**Approved at a meeting held on 5 October 2023**