

## Standards Improvement Committee Minutes

Meeting held on Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020 at 5.30 pm via Zoom

- Governors:** Sam Beel, Phil Cook (Chief Executive and Group Principal), Vanessa Housley, Dot Smith and Mark White
- Apologies:** Gary Wright
- Officials:** Phil Blewitt (NETA MD), Liz Boynton (Group Director of Quality), Jason Faulkner (College Principal RCC), Lesley Graham (College Principal SRC), Phil Hastie (Group Executive Director Planning and Infrastructure), Mandy Morris (Group Vice Principal Curriculum and Development), Gary Potts (Group Vice Principal Business, Innovation and Partnerships), Ben Robinson (College Principal Bede), Sarah Thompson (Clerk to the Corporation), Alys Tregear (Deputy Group Head of Student Services) and Sam Young (Governance Support Officer)
- In attendance:** Anne Vickers (Independent Governor)
- For agenda item 2 only: Michael Duffey (Head of Department, Construction, Professional and Service Industries) and Jan Ingram (Programme Area Leader, Professional and Business Services)
- For agenda item 9 only: Stacey Durham (Higher Education student)
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### SIC20/34 Agenda Item 1 – Appointment of Chair and Vice-Chair

Members **agreed** to reappoint Dot Smith as Chair of the Standards Improvement Committee (SIC) for 2020-21. *Dot Smith joined the meeting.*

Gary Wright had given apologies due to an unavoidable work commitment but had agreed to stand as Vice-Chair. Members **agreed** to reappoint Gary Wright as Vice-Chair of SIC for 2020-21.

The Chair welcomed Anne Vickers to the meeting, attending as a potential new committee member, and added that Stacey Durham, a potential Higher Education (HE) student co-optee, would be joining the meeting for Agenda Item 9. She confirmed that James Ruddock had resigned as a staff governor, having left his employment with Etc., and that Ken Bowes-Dalton had tendered his resignation as co-opted HE student; she formally recorded thanks for their work on the committee.

**SIC20/35 Agenda Item 2 – Presentation – Impact of COVID-19 on Curriculum (Professional and Business Services)**

The Head of Department (HoD) Construction, Professional and Service Industries and the Programme Area Leader (PAL) Professional and Business Services gave a presentation on the impact of COVID-19 on the curriculum in Professional and Business Services and how the return to a full programme of study was being managed. They outlined the approaches taken to assessments for 2019-20 - Centre Assessed Grades (CAGs); Adapt (some assessments altered); and Delay (for competency-based qualifications). On lockdown, the use of Teams had ensured that learners could access and follow their timetables as closely as possible remotely and from mid-June learners returned to site in limited numbers, mostly for completion of practical assessments. Continued restrictions in the beauty sector meant that these learners had only recently been able to complete [redacted].

Induction survey results had indicated that the majority of learners were confident with online learning and many already had access to WiFi and a working laptop or PC; students identified had been issued with data dongles and were being provided with laptops. A high percentage of learners had indicated that they felt safe and progress coaches were following up learners who had responded that they felt less safe. Changes had been made in response to feedback from the staff survey, including rearranging workshops. In terms of safeguarding, guidance for remote learning, and in particular parental consent for one to ones, had been put in place. Each curriculum area had adapted course delivery in preparation for possible further restrictions.

A member asked how confident staff were in live streaming lessons. The PAL explained that staff had been working on adapting delivery methods, with specific training on retrieval practices and the HoD added that staff had been testing live streaming. In response to a member's question about 19+ achievement rates, the HoD explained that achievement rates in hair and beauty had been particularly affected by the delay in bringing learners back into college due to COVID-19 restrictions in the beauty sector, with many only able to return in September. In response to a member's question, the Group Director of Quality confirmed that this data was included in the tables in her report for Agenda Item 4; current overall achievement rates were above national rates (NR), with accountancy results expected the following day.

A member asked how governors could be assured of the quality of teaching and learning and the HoD explained that the department had a Teaching and Training walkthrough process based on a risk matrix and worked with the Quality team on a

review programme to ensure every staff member was observed over the year; PALs had all received trained in undertaking walkthroughs. The PAL outlined the use of RQF (Regulated Qualification Framework) and IQA (Internal Quality Assurance) to standardise and moderate provision, particularly for exam-based and externally assessed units. The HoD added that, as programmes had become more exams based, departmental CPD had been delivered by staff from Bede. In response to a member's question, he confirmed that online provision was also observed in walkthroughs.

Members **noted** the presentation.

*Michael Duffey and Jan Ingram left the meeting.*

### **SIC20/36 Agenda Item 3 – Minutes of Previous Meeting**

Minutes of the Standards Improvement Committee meeting held on 14 May 2020 had been circulated and were **approved** as an accurate record.

Members considered the actions arising from previous meetings and **noted** that all actions had been completed, deferred or were to be considered at this meeting. The Group Director of Quality confirmed that she was currently working with college principals on the methodology for learner forums due to be held in early November; dates would be circulated to governors. The Group Executive Director Planning and Infrastructure encouraged members to contact him if they wished to attend Self Assessment Report (SAR) validation meetings.

### **SIC20/37 Agenda Item 4 – 2019-20 Performance Data / Examinations and Qualifications Update**

The Group Director of Quality had reported on 2019-20 attendance, retention and performance data in her previously circulated report. She added that, with no national rates (NRs) for 2019-20, the Group would track results internally; she thanked the college principals for their work on navigating the complex systems for awarding qualifications. At headline level, achievement rates were positive, though there were a number of learners, particularly apprentices, who had not yet had final results.

A member asked about the [redacted] achievement rate [redacted] for 19+ at Bede and the Group Director of Quality confirmed that many 19+ learners were not able to sit Law exams until November and would therefore miss the deadline for final data submission for 2019-20. Members discussed curriculum areas with currently low achievement rates, particularly those that had underperformed the previous year, and the Group Director of Quality added that, once remaining results had been confirmed within the next couple of weeks, the position would be clearer.

A member enquired about the significant percentage of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) learners among those 19+ deemed at risk of a lack of engagement. The Group Director of Quality explained that engagement from ESOL learners had been low during lockdown and remained a particular area of focus, along with other groups of learners who had also been identified as engaging best with face to face teaching. Currently, levels of remote delivery were low in order to build relationships and ensure that learners had the correct IT equipment and skills. The College Principal Bede added that a full week of remote delivery was planned at Bede on which learner feedback would be considered. The Group Director of Quality added that all curriculum areas were delivering some remote teaching to prepare learners for any future lockdowns.

Members **noted** the update.

### **SIC20/38 Agenda Item 5 – Quality Update**

The Group Director of Quality highlighted that, as at the start of every academic year, there had been a focus on attendance to ensure accurate marking of registers whilst timetable changes were taking place. As yet, COVID-19 did not appear to be a significant factor in learner absence; some early concerns about 19+ attendance had been reported to HoDs and college principals. There had been a greater emphasis on verbal feedback from learners this year which had enabled college principals to respond quickly to concerns raised, for example, the introduction of face coverings.

A member asked what impact there might be on learners should the tighter restrictions in Middlesbrough and Hartlepool be extended to Stockton and Redcar or if there was a two-week 'circuit breaker'. The Group Director of Quality explained that, unlike the sudden lockdown, the Group was better prepared for such eventualities with Teams sites set up for each course, laptops supplied to students as necessary and digital skills support in place for staff, particularly those less confident with technology. Two applications had been made to the College Collaboration Fund (CCF) focused on strengthening digital capacity in both staff and students. A member asked whether the robust approach to COVID-19 risk management had been highlighted on the website in order to give reassurance, especially to students' families. The Group Executive Director Planning and Infrastructure explained that messaging had been consistent with the Group's tone of voice and that learners had been kept informed of site-specific guidance and processes through direct communication channels.

A member asked how governors could be assured of the quality of teaching and training and the level of HoDs' and PALs' engagement with quality assurance. The

Group Director of Quality explained that there were variations in practice across the Group and that managers should be focusing on more observations of delivery in curriculum areas. It was agreed that the Group Director of Quality would update members on the levels of quality assurance in curriculum areas at the next meeting.

Members **noted** the update.

### **SIC20/39 Agenda Item 6 – Pastoral Care Update**

The Group Vice Principal Curriculum and Development had outlined actions taken by Student Services during lockdown, throughout the summer and in preparation for students' return in September in her previously circulated report. She added that she had worked with the Group Director of Quality at the start of lockdown to review the Pastoral Group Improvement Plan (GIP) to ensure that the focus was on ensuring learners were safe. Relations with Stockton and Redcar local authorities remained strong and she highlighted the county lines resources shared by a governor, through his work with the Crime Stoppers Trust, which had now been embedded in the tutorial programme.

The Chief Executive commented that the high level of engagement with our local authorities was [redacted] a credit to the Group Vice Principal's team and our local authority partners.

A member asked if participation in live tutorials was tracked and the Deputy Group Head of Student Services explained that not all activity could be tracked and that response rates to Forms evaluations were lower than for paper-based ones. Other colleges faced the same challenge and this had been highlighted in national forums.

A member asked if vulnerable learners' retention and withdrawals were being tracked and the Group Director of Quality confirmed that attendance was being closely tracked, including daily attendance lists for high needs learners; no concerns had been highlighted as yet, though the Group High Needs Manager was already working with some families. The Deputy Group Head of Student Services added that Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council had supplied a full list of vulnerable learners and that Stockton Borough Council were currently updating a similar list; these would allow for daily tracking.

A member stressed the importance of pastoral care and evaluation of the impact of activity not just in terms of participation rates but also student voice, especially for those facing family bereavement, redundancies, and hardship concerns. Members agreed that an update on this at the next meeting would be useful. The Deputy Group Head of Student Services agreed that learner voice would be key in assessing the impact on these groups of students and added that the Group had been asked

to contribute case studies, including on bereavement support, for wider network and partnership work.

The Corporation Chair noted that this was the Deputy Group Head of Student Services final governors' meeting at Etc. before leaving to take up the role of Group Head at Kirklees College; on behalf of the Board, he thanked her for her work as both a staff governor and as an officer of the Board.

Members **noted** the update.

*Members **agreed** to bring agenda item 9 forward. Stacey Durham joined the meeting.*

#### **SIC20/40 Agenda Item 9 – Higher Education Update**

The College Principal Stockton Riverside College (SRC), and Strategic Lead for Higher Education (HE), presented key points from her previously circulated report. [Redacted] Results from the 2020 National Student Survey (NSS) were mainly above benchmark, with satisfaction rates for the whole sector falling by about 1%. A number of courses had gone through periodic review or been newly developed in 2019-20. Delivery of HE courses was currently at a minimum of 50% face to face, high in comparison to other HE providers.

A member asked about the low satisfaction rate to the NSS question on accessing course-specific resources and the College Principal SRC explained that, having been able to pick up the detail of concerns through students' comments, this related to the perennial issue of the lack of an HE specific area at SRC. The HE student also commented on the lack of access to computers for HE students in the Learning Resources Centre (LRC) and issues with FE students using the HE zone during break times. The College Principal SRC outlined potential solutions currently being explored. In response to a governor's question about her experience as an HE student at SRC, Stacey Durham outlined her previous and current studies and commented on the excellent support from her course tutors and the strength of their subject knowledge and added that she had missed the face to face interaction over lockdown.

Members **noted** the update.

*Stacey Durham left the meeting.*

#### **SIC20/41 Agenda Item 7 – Campus and Delivery Unit Updates**

The Chair outlined the value of an update to coincide with the start of the academic year and the college principals, NETA Managing Director and Group Vice Principal Business, Innovation and Partnerships each gave a presentation on their college or

delivery unit focussing on 2020-21 numbers, key developments and concerns. The possible effects of COVID-19 on staff resilience was highlighted as a common theme.

In response to a member's question, the College Principal RCC explained that the Policing programme had been launched to tie in with the police recruitment drive and had been a positive addition to the public services programme. In terms of quality assurance, the College Principal Bede confirmed that managers had been dropping into lessons both this term and during lockdown; external consultants were currently in college and he was confident of the quality assurance programme and the progress made in online provision. The Chair asked for further information on Personal Progression Co-ordinators to be presented at a future meeting. The College Principal SRC confirmed that, due to a spiky profile, there remained some areas of focus in terms of quality.

*Anne Vickers left the meeting.*

The NETA MD highlighted that the Teaching and Training Manager had given positive feedback on quality at NETA and that learning walkthroughs would commence the following week; attendance rates were also positive. The Group Vice Principal Business, Innovation and Partnerships commented on the value of SmartAssessor in tracking progress and ensuring timely feedback on assessments.

Members **noted** the update and requested that further feedback on quality assurance, including feedback on observations, be given at the next meeting.

#### **SIC20/42 Agenda Item 8- Technology Innovation Group Update**

Due to time constraints, members **agreed** to defer this agenda item to a future meeting. Following the meeting, the Clerk and Group Director of Quality agreed to include this update on the agenda for the FE Corporation meeting to be held later in October.

#### **SIC20/43 Agenda Item 10 – Governor Teaching and Training Walkthroughs**

The Group Director of Quality highlighted the importance of governor involvement in teaching and training walkthroughs; Dot Smith had already expressed interest and Vanessa Housley also registered her interest. The Group Director of Quality agreed to arrange suitable dates.

Members **noted** the update.

#### **SIC20/44 Agenda Item 11 – Committee membership and terms of reference**

The Clerk highlighted that the only significant change to the committee's terms of reference reflected a new role for the committee in undertaking detailed review of

the college group's Self Assessment Report, the Higher Education Self Evaluation Document and the Group Improvement Plans; the committee would now consider these and recommend to the Corporation for approval.

Members **noted** the recruitment activity for an HE student representative as a co-opted member and Anne Vicker's potential interest in joining the committee and **agreed** that no other changes were required. Members **noted** the committee's performance against its terms of reference and **agreed** to recommend the amended terms of reference to the FE Corporation.

**SIC20/45 Agenda Item 12 – Any Other Business**

There were no items of other business.

**SIC20/46 Agenda Item 13 - 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 4, 5, 6 and 9 and the presentations for Agenda Items 2 and 7 which were considered commercial in confidence. Minutes would be made available following approval and consideration at the next meeting.

**SIC20/47 Agenda Item 14 - Dates and time of next meeting**

Thursday 19 November 2020, 5.30 pm, currently planned to be held via Zoom.

In response to the recommendation from the Search and Governance Committee to review timings of meetings, members **agreed** that the start time of meetings should remain at 5.30 pm.

**SIC20/48 Agenda Item 15 – Key Themes**

The following key themes were identified:

- Presentation from Head of Department and Programme Area Leader (Professional and Business Services) on the impact of COVID-19 and how the return to a full programme of study is being managed
- Review of 2019-20 performance data, including attendance, retention and achievement rates
- Update on pastoral care, particularly support for vulnerable learners and links with local authorities
- Presentations from college principals, NETA Managing Director and Group Vice Principal Business, Innovation and Partnerships focusing on 2020-21 numbers, key developments and concerns, and governors' consideration of



quality assurance of curriculum delivery (face-to-face, remote and employer assessment evidence)

- Invitation extended to all governors to participate in learning walkthroughs
- Review of committee membership and performance; amendments to terms of reference recommended to the FE Corporation

*(The meeting ended at 7.40 pm)*

**Approved at a remote meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2020**