

**14-19 YEARS EDUCATION PROVISION WORKING GROUP**  
**WEDNESDAY 16 DECEMBER 2009 (Visit to Garth Hill College)**  
**(11:00 am to 12:15 pm)**

Present: Councillors Kensall and Osborne (as a substitute for Mrs McCracken)

In Attendance: Keith Grainger, Principal, Garth Hill College  
Andrew Stevens, Assistant Principal and Curriculum & Timetable Manager, Garth Hill College  
Victoria Bale, Support Officer (Overview and Scrutiny), Chief Executive's Office

1. **Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mrs McCracken.

2. **Meeting with the Principal and Assistant Principal & Curriculum & Timetable Manager, Garth Hill College**

The following points emerged in discussion with Mr Grainger and Mr Stevens:

- a) The hospitality course was to be offered by both Bracknell and Wokingham College and Garth Hill College, with an agreement that the former offered Level 1 at Key Stage 4, and the latter provided Level 2 for Key Stage 5.
- b) The viability of IT courses depended on how many pupils wish to take them up. There may not be enough students to make Level 1 provision viable. This would need to be balanced with the importance of promoting the Diplomas; it may be possible to run the course regardless of low numbers for the first year.
- c) The rigidity of the course structures was highlighted, a point which had not previously been brought to the Working Group's attention. **Once a pupil had commenced a Level 1 course, they were restricted to this level until they had completed it, meaning that there was no scope to progress to Level 2 even if the pupil was capable of achieving higher than originally anticipated.** For those Level 1 pupils actually capable of Level 2, it was only once they had finished the course that they could pursue the Level 2 course. This would not act in favour of the pupil, preventing those students who showed promise and improvement from being able to progress and achieve higher than originally foreseen.
- d) This rigidity went against the College's aim to push young people to reach their potential and maximise their outcomes and placed pressure on ensuring that pupils were commencing Diplomas at the relevant level to them. This differed from the current courses available, where there was the scope of a successful pupil to progress throughout the course and achieve a higher grade than previously thought.

- e) The College was currently awaiting information on how the functional skills qualifications were changing and it was unknown where the benchmark would be.
- f) Options evenings, presentations and taster mornings at Bracknell and Wokingham College would give an early indication of Diploma uptake numbers.
- g) In terms of partnerships, the College was working through the Education Business Partnership to secure individual employers for its potential lead on the Creative and Media Diploma, and it also received support from Waitrose.
- h) The College had not engaged directly with Bracknell Forest Council as an employer partnership.
- i) Garth Hill was working well with the Council on the provision of Diplomas and both Keith Grainger and Andrew Stevens praised the support and work of Martin Surrell and Sarah Henderson.
- j) College staff had visited Slough to explore how Diplomas worked there, and had received visitors from Abingdon for the same purpose. It had been highly useful to hear from others and to learn from errors made.
- k) The links between schools were better within the town than the remainder of the Borough.
- l) The provision of Diplomas would produce additional challenges in planning timetables and managing staff to areas of demand.
- m) Although there was sufficient funding available to cover the cost of accommodation and equipment associated with Diploma delivery, this was not the case where teachers were concerned.
- n) Potentially, the College could require new teachers for September 2010, and would therefore ideally need to advertise in January. However, whether they would be needed will not be known until after January.
- o) Neither Keith Grainger or Andrew Stevens had concerns around the issues of uniform or lack of a form room to accommodate Diploma students. The only concern they highlighted was that pupils attending from elsewhere must respect and adhere to the dress code. They did not feel that pupils attending the College from elsewhere would have any difficulty in fitting in with College students or be unfavourably targeted by them.
- p) The Principal and Assistant Principal raised the financial issue of sending pupils elsewhere for courses but not taking any external students themselves. This would be viable over a short period, but if it continued for many years it would be difficult. The suggestion was therefore made that this situation should be monitored.
- q) It was important that all schools provided quality information in respect of courses available throughout the Borough so that pupils were adequately informed and could consider all options, including taking courses at other

schools. It was only fair that all schools / colleges make pupils aware of the option for them to complete courses elsewhere.

- r) Both Mr Grainger and Mr Stevens agreed that Diplomas added to and enriched the courses currently available but did not necessarily provide for NEETs. Whilst Diplomas may attract a few potential NEETs, the courses were not sufficiently specific to individual needs to engage and appeal to all. There was disappointment that Diplomas would make a transformational difference for a very small number of young people.
- s) It was suggested that foundation learning, not Diplomas, could meet the needs of NEETs, who required a greater connection between their course and their future life and work.
- t) The College was conscious of the dangers of over-marketing Diplomas and detracting from the current courses which suited the majority of students. It was important to protect GCSEs and A-Levels. Diplomas were an expansion, not a replacement of current educational provision.

### 3. **Meeting with Year 9 Pupils**

The Working Group then met with four Year 9 pupils, and the following emerged from the discussion:

- u) All pupils were aware of Diplomas, but only two pupils of the group would consider taking a Diploma.
- v) The pupils were not concerned about attending another school to pursue a course, but felt that others attending Garth Hill College may experience initial difficulties settling in.
- w) They did not feel that travelling between different educational providers would be a problem.

Councillor Kensall thanked the pupils, Keith Grainger and Andrew Stevens for the informative visit.