

# APPG on Further Education & Lifelong Learning

## AGM and the role of colleges in addressing health and social care workforce challenges

Meeting Minutes: Monday 12 June 2023, 5.00-6.00pm,  
Committee Room 13, House of Commons



Time	Item
5.00 – 5.05	AGM
5.05 – 5.10	Introductions & opening remarks from the Chair, Peter Aldous MP
5.10 – 5.18	Speaker 1 – Laurence Frewin - Principal & CEO, South Devon College
5.18 – 5.26	Speaker 2 - Sonia Stirling - Deputy Principal; Curriculum, Quality & Recruitment, Hugh Baird College
5.26 – 5.34	Speaker 3 – Lizzie Smith - London Regional Director for Workforce, Training and Education from NHS England
5.35– 6.00	Q&A with Parliamentarians, speakers and observers
6.00 – 6.05	Closing remarks from Chair

### Parliamentarians in attendance

Peter Aldous MP  
Baroness Garden  
Lord Aberdare  
Wendy Morton MP  
Mohammad Yasin MP  
Kevin Foster MP

### Annual General Meeting

The AGM was held and Peter noted that all existing officers of the group were happy to remain in position. Peter stated that he was happy to be re-elected as Chair and this was agreed.

The Chair confirmed the Vice Chairs of the group were Baroness Garden of Frognal and Stephen Farry MP, which was agreed.

The Chair confirmed the Officers of the group as Lord Blunkett and Emma Hardy MP, which was agreed. The Chair also confirmed that the APPG does not have to approve an income and expenditure statement as the secretariat function the Association of Colleges provides falls under the £12,500 reporting threshold.

### Introduction & Opening Remarks

Peter Aldous MP opened the meeting and introduced the speakers. He set the scene for the meeting, which was about the role of colleges in addressing health and social care workforce challenges. These challenges have been well documented, especially over the past 18 months to 2 years. He noted that colleges around the country and particularly in his own area play a very important role in addressing

these challenges, but that this isn't always well acknowledged. He said the purpose of this meeting was to seek to develop the relationship and explore the good practice and barriers to working together, with Peter noting that it was particularly timely with the Government's NHS workforce plan being hopefully released shortly.

## Speaker 1 – Laurence Frewin

The first speaker was Laurence Frewin, Principal and CEO at South Devon College. Laurence began by introducing himself and South Devon College which is a medium sized further education college serving Torbay and South Devon. The college is the third largest employer in the area after the local authority and NHS, educating 8,000 – 10,000 students per year. Health and social care courses are a large part of their provision and they have recently signed a memorandum of understanding with their local NHS trust. The college sees itself as a community anchor institution alongside the NHS trust and the NHS trust has selected the college as it's training provider of choice. The reason for this Laurence says is the flexibility of the college and their ability to be able to take learners from every level (adults, pre-16) through to the registered workforce even through to levels five, six and above.

He continued that the students who come to the college for training tend to go into the sector and stay in the sector, which is important and something that employers value. The college also works closely with the Devon integrated care board and has a focus on collaboration, including co-production and co-delivery. The health and social care sector is set to grow in Devon by 3% over the next 10 years and the area already has a high vacancy rate of 13%. South Devon College have foundation degree awarding powers and is the only FE college in the country that is an accredited education institute and registered with the Nursing and Midwifery Council. They are employer responsive and are the sole provider of training for hearing aid dispensers for Specsavers in the country.

Laurence finally referenced some handouts that he gave given out during the session that shows the career progression map that outlines all of the qualifications and entry/exit points that the college offers to give parliamentarians a full picture.

## Speaker 2 Sonia Stirling

Sonia introduced herself and Hugh Baird College. Hugh Baird College is a medium sized FE college, based in Bootle, Sefton which is in Liverpool city region about three miles from the centre. The college offers a typical offering including A Levels, technical vocational training, apprenticeships and foundation degrees through a university partner. She talked about the sheer breadth of what FE colleges do in the health and social care space and the constant dialogue between the college and NHS trusts to inform the programmes the college offers.

She spoke about what Hugh Baird College offer in this space including apprenticeships (from levels two to five) across a range of standards, and T Levels since September 2021. They also offer a range of bespoke programs following consultation with their local trust on skills and knowledge that the trust identified were lacking in their workforce, such as communication through British Sign Language and digital skills. The college is also developing projects such as a supported apprenticeship for people

with physical or learning disabilities, and a nursing associate apprenticeship in consultation with the Nursing and Midwifery Council.

Additionally, the college offers short direct into employment programs in collaboration with the local trust, where there is a short work placement with a guaranteed interview. This is offered widely but focused on the over-50 cohort who are economically inactive and the long-term unemployed. The success of this program is two-fold, where employers can try before they buy and participants can see what the roles and opportunities consist of. Sonia highlighted some positive feedback that they've received from employers and the impact they have on the region. In concluding, Sonia gave some examples of how central and regional government can support them to more of this work. This included incentivising apprenticeship uptake, specifically in the social care sector where lots of people move from into the health sector where conditions and pay are better. She also urged Government to rethink qualification reform, and called for action to address teacher recruitment and retention challenges in the sector.

### Speaker 3 Lizzie Smith

The third speaker was Lizzie Smith, London Regional Director for Workforce, Training and Education from NHS England. She said that a lot of what the previous speakers said resonated with her, adding that part of her role is driving this collaboration and engagement agenda.

Lizzie said that the relationships between NHS England and FE and HE are critical for the current and future workforce needed to provide health and care. She said that there the engagement with FE has grown and grown. She acknowledged that it is a tough landscape out there at the moment, but said she believed there is a way through it by being bold, innovative and inventive and that FE work is central to that.

She said NHS England are eagerly awaiting the publication of the NHS workforce plan. It will be a 15-year plan which will include supply and demand scenarios, actions and reforms needed to close supply shortfalls and integrated working between health and social care, which is a key difference to previous plans.

Lizzie gave some examples of how trusts, colleges and universities have worked together in London, with a key finding being that early engagement with FE students is needed through practical career advice and guidance pathways. She also spoke about the work they are undertaking with the Greater London Authority where they have established five health skills academies. These aim to sit between education, employment and communities and bridge some of those gaps for people who wish to enter the workforce for the first time or get back into work after some time away.

### Q&A Summary

Panellists and parliamentarians then had a discussion based on the points raised by the speakers. Some of the key points discussed included:

- Getting people back into the workforce - Laurence noted that flexibility with the adult education budget would be helpful as sometimes older people don't have the basic qualifications they need to get back into the workforce, especially if they have an already existing level 3 qualification as this course would cost people £3500 which is a barrier.

- Digital skills – Laurence noted there needs to be an upskilling of digital skills in the workforce, which includes remote care and diagnosis and also the upskilling of patients who are going to be able to access these services.
- Variety of social care providers as private employers – Laurence said that the variety of different providers in the social care sector sometimes made it difficult to engage. He suggested the introduction of a common care certificate as often each employer does their specific training which isn't valid when someone moves to their next employer in the region. All speakers also highlighted that the terms and conditions of the health sector and NHS tend to be better than those in the social care sector, with private sector employers not offering clear progression routes and clearer pay scales.
- Apprenticeship Levy – Sonia and Lynn noted that some trusts in the North West utilise their levy well but others do not. Lizzie said that some employers do struggle to use their levy which is a shame as the money goes back to Treasury. However, more flexibility in how employers could utilise it would be helpful, specifically on work placements as they require supervision support which is different to subjects like accountancy and business. She added that when trusts are looking at decreasing their staffing budget, they do look at apprenticeships, placements etc – which take time away from already qualified staff. Laurence agreed with this and also the need for increased awareness in the industry of the assistant practitioner apprenticeship.
- Staff recruitment and retention – Sonia noted that it is a question of investment and if you want the specialist staff you do have to pay for that knowledge. She asked if there was an opportunity for dual work within trusts and colleges to deliver that knowledge. She noted that their college have lost staff to other colleges and the health services which has a huge negative impact on the student experience. Laurence added they have something called co-delivery, where nurses at the later part of their career who are still practitioners come and impart their knowledge to students.
- T Levels and qualification reform – Sonia said that while they are not suitable for all learners, she likes T Levels, the work placement and how the knowledge is delivered. Laurence agreed that more time was needed to transition to ensure options were there for students who didn't suit T Levels.

## Closing Remarks from the Chair

The Chair thanked all of the speakers for their contributions and Parliamentarians for their questions during the meeting. He said that the group would write jointly to Skills Minister Robert Halfon and Health and Social Care Minister Helen Whatley, to highlight the issues and opportunities that were discussed during the session. The Chair also mentioned that the Group's Secretariat the Association of Colleges will follow up with the colleges that spoke for a joint op-ed article for the technical press.

Meeting closed 6:05pm