



Education & Skills
Funding Agency

Education and Skills Funding Agency
Agora
Cumberland Place
Nottingham
NG1 6HJ

www.gov.uk/esfa

28 July 2020

Mr Jeremy Cartwright
Chair of Governors
Stoke on Trent College
Stoke Road
Shelton
Stoke on Trent
ST4 2DG

Sent via email – jeremy.sotc@gmail.com

Dear Jeremy,

Notice to Improve (NTI)

In October 2014, the Skills Funding Agency (the SFA) issued a Notice of Concern for Financial Health to Stoke on Trent College. Issue of the Notice placed Stoke on Trent College in Formal Intervention. An update to the Notice was issued on 16th February 2015.

This letter and schedule constitute a Notice to Improve (NTI) and replace the Notice of Concern listed above. The NTI is in line with the intervention policy, [College Oversight: Support and Intervention, April 2019](#) and the Funding Agreements between the Secretary of State for Education (DfE), acting through the Crown.

The conditions set out in Schedule 1 of this NTI are in addition to the conditions of funding set out in the Funding Agreements. The ESFA will monitor progress made towards meeting the additional conditions at regular case conference meetings.

The removal of the additional conditions will occur when Stoke on Trent College receives a letter from the ESFA stating that the NTI and additional conditions set out in Schedule 1 have been met. If Stoke on Trent College does not comply with the additional conditions within the specified time period, the ESFA will pursue one or more options outlined in the Funding Agreements to protect the interests of learners and the public purse.

If you have any queries please contact, Lisa Hawes, Head of Area, FE Directorate Territorial Team (Stoke on Trent/Staffordshire and Derby/Derbyshire) at lisa.hawes@education.gov.uk in the first instance.

If you consider that the ESFA has acted unreasonably or not followed a proper procedure in issuing the additional conditions, you can make a complaint under the procedure for dealing with complaints about the ESFA.

Please acknowledge receipt of this NTI letter and Schedule 1 by writing to me within five working days of the date of this letter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Riley'.

Karen Riley
Deputy Director
FE Directorate Territorial Team – Midlands and East

Copy to:

Denise Brown, Principal and CEO Stoke on Trent College
Jos Parsons, Ofsted,
Richard Atkins, Further Education Commissioner

Schedule 1. Additional Conditions of Funding:

1. Stoke on Trent College should demonstrate a financial health grade which is at least 'Requires Improvement' for two consecutive financial years. This will require confirmation from auditors following the submission of annual financial statements.
2. The college is required to supply ESFA with monthly management accounts for review by 25th of each month. This information must include an up to date twelve month rolling cash flow projection.
3. The college must attend regular case conference meetings with ESFA. Attendees should include, as a minimum, the Principal, Chief Financial Officer and Chair of Governors or other appropriate governor to represent your Corporation. The meetings will focus on the college's progress against the additional conditions of funding in this NTI. We will, expect the college to provide information to demonstrate proper oversight and timely implementation of these.
4. Stoke on Trent College must be assessed as making at least reasonable progress towards meeting the recommendations set out in the FE Commissioner (FEC) intervention assessment report (March 2020), listed below, by the next stocktake visit. Once this assessment has been undertaken by the FEC, we reserve the right to vary the terms of the NTI, to reflect any new recommendations. These recommendations would be included in an additional schedule to this NTI.
 - a. The CEO/principal and her senior team should embed and continue to improve the level, quality and frequency of communication and heightened engagement with staff across college, to further improve staff morale.
 - b. MIS across college has improved significantly and rapidly, with two recent new management appointments. However there is a need to ensure that there is appropriate training, roll out and engagement with staff so that they are provided with the data they require and are able to use it with effect.
 - c. There is an urgent need for a senior curriculum and quality leader (Deputy or Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality) to be appointed. The CEO/principal's own active leadership of quality work, alongside her other CEO responsibilities, is unsustainable.
 - d. The number and regularity of Board Committee and other meetings should be reviewed and reduced. The current level of management engagement in preparing for and attending the number of meetings will be at a cost to the pace of recovery.

- e. The current capacity of the Finance Team needs to be resolved by filling vacant posts with high quality candidates so that the CFO has the capacity to embrace the full sweep of her role. The merit of retaining any further turnaround support should be reviewed.
- f. The Executive Team should have dedicated support from an external expert to establish and strengthen the newly forming team. This support should be put in place at the earliest opportunity to build Executive Team members' respective strengths and optimal operating practices.
- g. The property strategy needs updating when the condition survey is completed, and accurate room utilisation reports are available.
- h. There needs to be an affordable three-year replacement and improvement plan to upgrade IT hardware and infrastructure.