**CPF/20/02**

**Agenda Item: 5**

**Access NI: Collective approach to public information availability and application practices within Colleges and Ulster – January 2020 Update**

Colleagues,

You will recall that at the Collaborative Partnership Forum meeting held on 2nd October 2019, I was asked to undertake an exercise reviewing our collective approach to the issue of Access NI. Essentially this exercise is to assist us to understand what our current practices are and to determine whether we can adjust those practices to improve the clarity of available information. Additionally, it will allow us to consider our approaches to Access NI application with a view to making them more streamlined and equitable.

Prior to Christmas I drew up a list of those programmes for whom I understood AccessNI clearance to be relevant [4 programmes in total, some being subject networks] and looked at the Access NI information publicly available to prospective students via each College’s webpages, downloading the links and information. I then contacted each Course Director involved with two requests:

1. Could you confirm if the information I found on the College / Programme website was correct or not [I provided the link I used], and
2. Could you provide a brief outline of the process where students applied for AccessNI clearance.

I received responses from 12 colleagues and thank them for that. The following is a very brief summary of what has been reported:

**Publicly available information**

It is fair to say that we have something of a ‘mixed bag’ in terms of whether publicly available information is available or not. Where information is available then, for some colleges, it represents a shortened version of what is available in their prospectus and / or the entry requirements for programmes found at various places on the college website. For others the brief information is all that is available anywhere on the college website. Some colleges have information in printed literature but not on the website and some other colleges make no reference to the issue at all. Some colleagues note that they speak with prospective students about the matter should they attend for interview or are provided with a conditional offer. Lastly, some colleagues have responded to say that where an absence of Access NI information is noted on the website

then this is unintentional and steps are being taken to rectify the situation. Some colleagues note that for them there is no stipulation requiring students to

complete an Access NI check when applying or upon accepting a place. However, it is also noted that for this college they must be in receipt of the results of the check prior to students being permitted to undertake work placement.

**Application process for Access NI clearance**

Here again the picture is mixed and practices differ markedly. Some commence the process during the induction week after enrolment, whereas others wait until different points in the programme to get the ball rolling. Some colleagues complete the process at the end of Year 1 in preparation for work-based modules in Year 2 whereas some others leave it until Year 2 has commenced. In all cases the student is required to have successfully completed the process prior to commencing work-based learning elements where it is deemed necessary to have the check completed at all. It was noted by some that Access NI checks are only required if the placement provider requests it to be completed. Therefore, across a student cohort some would be required to have the checks and some not, depending upon the placement area. Some colleges report that a Safeguarding Officer oversees the process and for others it is HR who fulfill the role. Lastly, one college reports that whilst they currently have students complete the check having started the course, they are considering changing this to having it done prior to commencement.

**Next steps?**

I will consider all of the information provided by those colleagues who were contacted and will prepare a discussion paper that will outline some ‘best practice’ principles, availing of our practice here at Ulster. This will be circulated for consideration and we will agree a process whereby we can actively discuss the implications of any proposed changes. I am very aware of the impact that attending meetings has on us all and I will endeavor to keep any face-face meetings to a very minimum, if indeed we need them at all.

Jerome

Jerome Marley

Faculty Partnership Manager