



CURRICULUM AND QUALITY STANDARDS COMMITTEE – MAIN MINUTES
THURSDAY 13 FEBRUARY 2025 4PM TO 6PM – Gateshead College

Governors	Type	Initials	Attendance	Apologies
Peter Francis	Chair / Independent	PF	X	
David Alexander	Principal / CEO	DA	X	
Michael Williams	Independent	MWi	X	
Aneela Ali	Independent	AA		X
Carol Davenport	Independent	CD	X	
Richard Wensley	Staff Governor	RW	X	
Dan Green	Student Governor	DG	X	
Milly Wall	Student Governor	MWa	X^	
Clerk				
Nicola Taylor	Director of Governance & Compliance	NT	X	
Presenters				
Chris Toon	Deputy Principal: Curriculum & Quality	CT	X	
Deni Chambers	Director of Curriculum & Skills	DC	X	
Ivan Jepson	Director of Business Development and Innovation	IJ	X	
Jeremy Cook	Deputy Principal Finance & Resources	JC	X	
Nadine Hudspeth	Director of Brand and Learner Experience	NH	X	
Richard Ward	Assistant Principal	RW	X	
Tom Bradley	Assistant Principal	TB	X	
John Deary	Assistant Principal	JD	X	
Suzanne Cunningham	Head of Quality Improvement	SC	X	
Melissa Gardiner	Head of Quality Assurance	MG	X	
Darren Heathcote	Head of Student Services and Customer Experience	DH	X	

*Attended via Teams / ^Attended for part of the meeting

1. Initial Governance

CQ/240 1.1 Chair's Welcome / Apologies / Conflicts of Interest

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed the attendees.

Apologies were received from AA and MWa (for the first part of the meeting). The Committee **agreed** that the meeting was quorate.

There were no conflicts of interest declared. Members were reminded to declare any conflicts that arose during the meeting.

The Chair noted that a revised agenda structure had been implemented for the meeting, linking with the areas of the Committee's remit. Plans were in place to facilitate a 50-minute discussion per meeting on strategy / strategic priorities.

CQ/241 1.2 Minutes of the last meetings

A. The Committee **reviewed** the main minutes from the meeting on 3 October 2024 and **agreed** that they were a true and accurate reflection of the meeting.

B. The Committee **reviewed** the main minutes from the meeting on 21 November 2024 and **agreed** that they were a true and accurate reflection of the meeting.

The minutes were approved.

CQ/242 1.3 Matters Arising / Action Log

NT presented the action log and provided updates relating to ongoing actions. **The Chair requested** for action timescales to be added.

Action: NT to add action timescales to action log.

The action log was noted.

CQ/243 1.4 Terms of Reference and Work Plan 2024/2025

The Chair presented the report, setting out a reminder of the Committee's remit and the workplan agreed for the year.

Learner experience was a key part of the Committee's remit and there was a discussion regarding learner voice included within the agenda to explore this in greater detail.

The report was noted.

Item 2.2 followed this item.

2. Strategy

CQ/244 2.1 Accountability Agreement Update

This item was covered after Item 3.2.

CT presented the report and highlighted this provided a final update of the accountability agreement priorities for 2023/2024, with the last update to the Board on this being in May 2024 ahead of the year-end. Some actions from 2023/2024 rolled over into the priorities for 2024/2025 where further work was required. The report also provided a mid-year update on the priorities for 2024/2025 with good progress being made. Increasing attendance rates had been a challenge. The College was also exploring ways to add more rigour around the tracking and embedding of industry placements for learners.

Accountability Agreement guidance for 2025/2026 had recently been published by the DfE and the College had sought an extension for the submission deadline to enable approval at the July 2025 Board meeting. This has been granted by the DfE.

DA noted that for 2023/2024 there was no requirement to report on progress however the College had opted to take this approach and provide such an update to the DfE. The updated guidance for 2025/26 set out a more robust process with the priorities due to be covered at the annual strategic conversation with the DfE which was scheduled to take place in May.

The report was noted.

CQ/245 2.2 Curriculum and Future Skills

DC delivered a presentation which set out the following:

- The College's current make-up of learners in terms of 16-18, adults, higher education and apprentices.
- The gender of learners in terms of 16-18, adults, higher education and apprentices.
- The locality of learners in terms of 16-18, adults and apprentices.
- Gateshead College's income compared against the 8 colleges within the North East region.

The Committee **noted** they would be interested to understand how this compared with the other colleges across the region in terms of number of staff and learners.

- The skills agenda and the national / local skills needs.

The Committee was asked to reflect on what skills areas they felt the College should focus on now and in the future. The Committee considered skills needs in smaller groups and fed back. DC then provided an update on the skills suggested as part of the College's robust curriculum planning process and presented the College's skills plan for 2024/2025, 2025/2026 and 2026/2027.

The Committee **challenged** the newness of the emerging skills areas and the need for future ambition to be maintained. The College was cognisant that some of the skills areas had been around for a number of years however DC reiterated that the College was responding to employer demand and the skills needs within the region as this was now emerging. It was recognised that delivering in relation to these skills areas was a response to meeting employer skills needs and aligned with the College's employment edge ethos, which sought to support future ambition and need as this emerged. The discussion considered ambition, possibility and need.

The Committee **discussed** the following:

- The progression of skills development and the College offering a "one-stop shop" of levels of linked qualifications.
- The demand of skills needs.
- The importance of transferability of skills and knowledge.
- The framework of regional / national skills, and consideration of what would be offered alongside partners.
- The needs and wants of Generation X, and an appropriate structure and framework for this.

DC noted that considerations would also need to take place of what the College should no longer do and noted that conversations around this were taking place as part of business planning across the College.

The Committee **reflected** on the discussion structure and noted the need for this to be useful to College staff. It was **suggested** that additional context, such as a supporting

paper, be available in advance to support such discussion going forward. The Chair **agreed** for this to be considered as part of future agenda planning.

Action: PF / CT to consider prior context ahead of future discussion items, including a supporting paper.

The presentation was noted.

Item 3.1 followed this item.

CQ/246 2.3 Strategic Risk Register

This item was covered after item 3.1.

JC presented the report and highlighted the following:

- The Audit Committee were due to be presented with the Risk Management Policy and proposed amends to risk appetite at the March 2025 meeting.

The risk appetite for curriculum was proposed as “willing” and the risk appetite for Safeguarding was proposed as “averse”. The Committee **supported** the proposed risk appetites.

- The Audit Committee would soon be considering the next 3-year internal audit plan, and JC was seeking the Committee’s views on any areas for inclusion.

The Committee **recommended** for Safeguarding to be considered within the next plan.

Action: JC to include Safeguarding Internal Audit on the next internal audit plan for Audit Committee consideration.

The Committee discussed and queried the following:

- The consideration of potential competition and / or local collaboration being factored into the risk register or horizon scan.
- Links between the accountability agreement priorities (and future priorities) and the risk register / horizon scan.

Action: JC to raise the inclusion of competition and / or local collaboration, and risks relating to accountability agreement priorities being factored into the risk register or horizon scan at the next Executive Team review of the Risk Register.

The Committee **challenged** the future lens of the horizon scan, suggesting that some areas included were already being faced by the College, rather than a broader horizon review further into the future. The Committee **requested** for this to be reviewed and a greater consideration of potential future risks in the longer term, and a wider scope than the North East region.

Action: JC to facilitate a conversation at the next Executive Team review around the horizon scanning element of the risk register, with a challenge for a greater focus on potential risks in the longer term and a wider scope than the North East region.

The Committee **questioned** the maintenance of current controls being included within the future action column of the risk register, suggesting that this should be more specific in terms of future actions to be carried out. JC advised there was only 1 risk to be treated, and all other risks were to be tolerated given the current College risk appetite, which meant that the mitigating controls would be maintained.

Action: JC to clarify that the maintenance of current controls is due to risks being tolerated.

The report was noted.

3. Policy, Procedure and Regulation

CQ/247 3.1 Safeguarding Update – Term 1

This item was covered after Item 2.2

DH presented the report and highlighted this provided an update of Safeguarding and wellbeing referrals for Term 1.

There had been a notable increase (146%) in Safeguarding referrals, and this was attributed to increased learner numbers and an improved referrals system with staff being more aware and cognisant of potential signs of concern.

Behaviour and harassment was the category with the most referrals and this related to incidents on and off the College site. The College was reviewing documents such as the learner code of conduct, student handbook and induction materials to do some further educational work around the area of behaviour and harassment with the hope to reduce the number of concerns raised.

The increased number of both safeguarding and welfare referrals was having an impact on staff resource, however there was an established team across each of the College's sites, with the team also attending open and welcome evenings to advise prospective learners of the support available at the College. The College continued to work with relevant external agencies to support learners, and this included external counselling provision.

It was recognised that the complexity of concerns could have an impact on staff emotional welfare, and the Committee were assured staff were being appropriately supervised and supported.

Increases in specific departmental areas were being explored but there were no concerns to report. There had been 3 referrals received for Apprenticeships.

The Learner Engagement Manager continued to work closely with learners, and there were positive satisfaction levels of learners feeling safe at college in the recent learner induction survey. Anecdotal feedback from learners was also positive.

The College had achieved the Rainbow Flag Award, a national accreditation, which highlighted ongoing commitment to a whole college approach to LGBTQI+ inclusion.

The Safeguarding and Mental Health Link Governor (MWi) provided reassurance of the work of the Safeguarding Steering Group, and the College's proactive approach to safeguarding and support of all learners. It was **noted** that the College would continue to keep resource around safeguarding and welfare under review due to the increase in referrals.

Action: Executive Team to continue to keep the level of safeguarding and welfare resource under review due to increase in referrals.

The Committee **noted** the increase and complexity of referrals received.

The Committee **referred** to some research recently published around learners feeling comfortable with digital safeguarding support and with this an apprehension to seek face to face support. It was **suggested** that this form of online support could be something for the College to consider. The Committee **asked** the College to reflect if the Safeguarding and Welfare support offer was diverse enough to support all groups of learners.

Action: NH and DH to consider barriers to accessing face to face safeguarding / welfare support and any required alternative delivery options.

The Committee **requested** for gender and other relevant EDI data to be included within future reporting to understand if there was a difference in the number of referrals between

males and females, to try and understand if there was any further work to be done around supporting girls and young women.

Action: DH to explore what EDI categories could be reported on and include gender in future reporting if possible.

The Committee also **noted** the percentage of referrals from those of a small minority ethnic background.

Action: DH to explore any trends amongst EDI characteristics.

The Committee **thanked the team** for their work and continued support.

The report was noted.

Item 2.3 followed this item.

CQ/248 3.2 Careers Advice and Guidance Annual Report 2023/24 and Cross College Careers Programme 2025/2026

DH presented the report and highlighted the following

- The report included an update on compliance against the Gatsby Benchmarks.

The benchmarks were due to be refreshed however only minor amends were expected. The College would continue to self-assess on a termly basis.

There was one continued challenge with achieving 100% compliance relating to one of the benchmarks “*Integrates records of a learner’s participation in careers programmes at previous stages of the learner’s education (including their secondary school) where these are made available*”, and this was due to there being a lack of transfer of information from previous institutions. The College were exploring digital solutions for the easier transfer of information.

The Committee **suggested** that digital solutions were explored in greater detail.

Action: DH to follow up in more detail with potential solutions with digital providers as part of the exploration of options.

- Minor amendments had been made to the proposed careers plan for 2025/2026 which was presented for approval.
- The College had been reaccredited with the Matrix Standard for quality in the provision of information and guidance, receiving a strong report in June 2024.

The Committee **approved** the careers programme for 2025/2026.

The report was approved.

Item 2.3 followed this item.

4. Quality and Performance

CQ/249 4.1 Performance Report

CT presented the report and highlighted that attendance was at a similar level to the same point within the previous year and staff were working hard to maintain and improve this. The College maintained attendance at levels above national rates.

The modelling of apprenticeship achievement rates had been updated. The College was currently forecasting to be slightly below the government target however above national rates.

Achievement gaps between different groups of learners had closed significantly. There was future EDI data collection to be done, and this linked with the EDI report which was being presented at the People Committee in February 2025.

The Committee **requested** clarity of the top three actions to take forward based on the information provided and asked for the actions to map against the challenges faced.

Action: CT to include top 3 actions to improve performance in reporting going forward.

The report was noted.

CQ/250 4.2 Quality Improvement Plan Update

RWa presented the report and highlighted good progress had been made on the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). Two areas had been highlighted as amber progress with mitigating actions being included for reassurance.

There had been an increase of 50% additional learners undertaking maths and English and this was attributed to having an impact on attendance figures. This was being explored in greater detail internally.

The report was noted.

CQ/251 4.3 Learner Recruitment 2025/2026

CT presented the report and highlighted that based on current recruitment data, the College was expecting an increase in 16-18 full-time learner numbers for 2025/2026. This would be a challenge to accommodate in terms of space, resource and funding. A further discussion would be needed in relation to this.

The Chair of the Board **suggested** that this be added as a Board agenda item to consider the impact of potential growth, funding, and the recent announcement regarding the shortening of apprenticeships. It was **agreed** that this would need to be kept under review at Board level.

Action: NT to add recruitment update, the impact of associated potential growth, funding and recent government announcements regarding apprenticeship provision at the April 2025 Board meeting.

DA advised that previous DfE guidance around in-year growth funding had been expected in February 2025 however the DfE had now advised it would be towards the end of March 2025 before this would be available and would also include an outcome of whether increased national insurance contributions would be funded. Costs relating to the growth in 16-18 full-time learner numbers, above which the College had planned, had been absorbed by the College thus far for 2024/25. Different scenarios of in-year growth funding had been modelled by the College, with a previous report to Board on the impact of no funding being received in-year and the consequences of this. Further work had been undertaken to consider alternative scenarios, and this was due to be shared with the Finance & General Purposes Committee in February 2025 alongside the December 2024 management accounts.

The Committee **queried** worst case scenario planning and DA confirmed this had been modelled. The Committee **requested** further modelling of 2025/2026 learner growth as part of the budget preparations for 2025/2026 to allow considerations to take place.

Action: JC to model increased learner growth and associated scenarios of funding for 2025/2026 as part of budget preparations.

DA confirmed that the pay award for 2025 had not yet been agreed by trade unions and was still to be finalised.

The Committee **took assurance** that the College was appropriate modelling different scenarios of funding for future planning.

The report was noted.

CQ/252 4.4 Bootcamp Update

IJ presented the report and highlighted that this was a challenging provision however it aligned to skills needs of the region and was providing a continuing source of revenue for the College. There was an opportunity for further bootcamp funding going forward, and this would need to align to the College's educational rationale.

The Committee **noted** that the quality of this provision was under the remit of Ofsted, and RWa confirmed that there was robust quality assurance of this provision in place.

The Committee **noted** the usefulness of the report, setting out the benefits and key challenges of this provision. The Committee noted the financial aspects of this provision and **requested further information** relating to previous contracts relating to the contract value versus the funding secured, based on completion of the 3 milestones to allow the Committee to understand the outcomes and risks associated with this provision.

The Committee **queried** the timelines of decision making around future funding opportunities and IJ suggested this would be within the next 3-4 weeks and that a meeting with the North East Combined Authority had been planned to discuss the associated funding challenges.

Action: IJ to report back on Bootcamps, setting out the contract value against the funding secured following completion of the 3 milestones so as to assess the value add of the provision in terms of overall strategic priorities.

Note: This may be more appropriate to be picked up by the Finance & General Purposes Committee

The report was noted.

5. Student Experience

CQ/253 5.1 Learner Induction Survey Results 2024/2025

RWa presented the report and highlighted the positive survey results. The College had accommodated growth in learner numbers and were cognisant that this could have had a detrimental impact on learner experience during the start of the new term however this had not been reflected in the results, which was positive. Strong views remained around the positive culture, feeling of inclusion, and quality of teaching and learning.

The Committee **noted** the lower scores around induction whilst knowing all learners participated in an induction. RWa explained that further work was being undertaken relating to the wording of the questions to ensure they were explicit and fully understood amongst learners.

MWi left the meeting.

The Committee **noted** the positive results, specifically considering the unplanned increase in learner numbers and the associated challenges at the start of term regarding the resourcing of this.

The Committee **queried** how feedback was given to learners regarding the value of their responses and the work that is undertaken to improve based on their views.

Action: CT to report back on the ways in which feedback is given to learners following their completion of surveys.

The report was noted.

CQ/254 5.2 Learner Voice at Committee Level

The Committee **discussed** ways in which they could fulfil their remit of “*Have strategic oversight of the standard, and raising of standards, of the student experience through engagement with, and feedback from, learners to inform future strategies for further improvement*” through learner voice at committee level. The following was discussed:

- Utilisation of the College’s learner voice system of having Course Representatives at each Course Level, Departmental Panels and the Student Leadership Group.
- Sharing discussions and action plans from Departmental Panels and the Student Leadership Group for the Committee’s information.
- The utilisation of AA as the Link Governor for Learner Voice.
- Opportunities to meet with learners inside and outside of the boardroom.
- Triangulating what the Committee learn from learner voice survey reporting, and assurance that reports reflect real College practice.
- Committee attendance at the College’s annual Community Conversation and this being a great opportunity to hear directly from learners about their thoughts and views on the College’s future priorities and areas for action.
- The importance of two-way communication, and ensuring learners hear about decisions and debate at Board level which impacts their learner experience / learner journey. The Student Governor noted that learners attending governor meetings may not be accessible for all learners and instead alternative ways of collecting learner voice and feeding back may be more beneficial.

CD left the meeting.

The Committee **challenged** the College having Curriculum and Quality Strategies, however not having a Learner Strategy. It was confirmed that the Curriculum and Quality Strategies did contain objectives relating to learner voice and the College did have an internal learner voice plan based around the Course Representatives approach, and the work of the Learner Engagement Manager.

The Committee **noted** the potential barriers for learners to attend governor meetings, however **noted the importance** of ensuring a continued conversation with learners, rather than transactional conversation to ensure continued engagement. The Committee **questioned** the opportunity they had to from hear from different groups of learners and using views from all learners to make decisions. It was agreed the Executive Team would consider this further with the Committee Chair and report back.

Action: Executive Team to consider with PF learner voice at Committee level, ensuring committee members are able to hear from a diverse group of learners and to ensure learner voice is at the heart of decision making.

RWa noted that Learner Journey Reviews were a core part of quality improvement activity.

The report was noted.

6. Relationships and External Engagement

CQ/255 6.1 Gateshead International Stadium

CT provided a verbal update, noting that Gateshead Council had appointed an operator for Gateshead International Stadium, GLL.

The verbal update was noted.

7. End of Meeting Governance

CQ/256 7.1 Actions Agreed

It was agreed that NT would circulate the agreed actions post-meeting.

Action: NT to circulate agreed meeting actions post-meeting.

CQ/257 7.2 Any Other Business and Meeting Evaluation

Apprenticeship Week

The Committee were able to watch a short clip of the College's Apprenticeship Edge awards which had been awarded to students during Apprenticeship Week. This had been a great opportunity to celebrate apprentices along with their employers for their hard work and efforts.

The Executive Team also covered PlanBEE rail being an award finalist and DA attending Westminster at a celebratory event, and media coverage across the College relating to addressing skills needs.

Further information on the College's celebration of Apprenticeship Week would be circulated post-meeting.

Action: NT to circulate additional information regarding the College's celebration of Apprenticeship Week post-meeting.

Meeting Evaluation

The Committee noted that they found the revised structure helpful.

The Committee **noted their thanks** to DC and the team for the work undertaken which allowed the Committee to offer critical and appreciative challenge, considering the "so what" and next steps.

CQ/258 7.3 Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Thursday 12 June 2025 at 4.00pm.