

Agenda No: 1



CURRICULUM AND QUALITY STANDARDS COMMITTEE – MINUTES

TUESDAY 30 SEPTEMBER 2025 4PM TO 6PM – Gateshead College (Academy for Sport)

Governors	Type	Initials	Attendance	Apologies
Peter Francis	Chair / Independent	PF	X	
David Alexander	Principal / CEO	DA	X	
Michael Williams	Independent	MW	X	
Aneela Ali	Independent	AA	X	
Carol Davenport	Independent	CD	X	
Ryan Gibson	Independent	RG	X	
Katy Malia	Staff Governor	KM	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	
Nadine Hudspeth	Director of Brand & Learner Experience	NH	X	
Sarah Judson	Deputy Principal Finance & Resources	TF	X	
Richard Ward	Assistant Principal	RW	X	
Tracy Foreman	Assistant Principal	TF	X	
Tom Bradley	Assistant Principal	TB	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/277 1.1 Chair's Welcome / Apologies / Conflicts of Interest

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed the attendees. The Chair made a specific welcome to RG as this was his first Committee meeting. Introductions took place.

No apologies were received. 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.

CQ/278 1.2 Minutes of the last meeting

A. The Committee **reviewed the main minutes from the meeting on 12 June 2025 and **agreed** that they were a true and accurate reflection of the meeting.**

The minutes were approved.

CQ/279 1.3 Matters Arising / Action Log

NT presented the action log. Two actions were ongoing, and an update was provided. All other actions had been closed, completed or not yet due as reported.

The action log was noted.

CQ/280 1.4. Terms of Reference and Work Plan 2025/26

The Chair presented the report, setting out a reminder of the Committee's remit and the workplan agreed for the year. The Terms of Reference reflected the Committee's discussion at the last meeting and had since been Board approved. An additional Committee meeting had been planned for April 2026 to discuss the intent of the Accountability Agreement ahead of seeking approval. Strategic items would remain under consideration as the year progressed.

The Chair **noted** the papers for this meeting had improved with greater clarity and positive challenge however remained lengthy. The Chair **reiterated** the ask for shorter papers.

Action: Report Authors to consider paper length when providing reports.

The report was noted.

2. Strategy

CQ/281 2.1 Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) - Strategic Discussion

TF presented the report, highlighting the following:

- The paper set out an overview of the College's SEND provision, alongside the national and regional context.
- The College experienced continued significant growth in full time 16-18 students during 2024/25 (with a continued trajectory of growth into 2025/2026). The number of learners with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) rose by 13%. Among 16–18 learners, 66% disclosed a Special Educational Need or Disability (SEND), representing a 6.5% increase. Apprentices disclosing SEND increased by 32%, while adult SEND numbers declined. Demand for exam access arrangements rose by 26%, outpacing overall learner growth and indicating both improved identification and increasing need.

- Retention among learners with EHCPs remained strong, however achievement rates remained static at 78.3%, reflecting a decline in pass rates. Level 2 and Level 3 learners continued to perform well, with achievement rates exceeding 90%, and Entry Level remained stable at 81.6%. The most significant challenge was at Level 1, where achievement had dropped 4.6% to 58.6%, primarily due to poor outcomes in English and maths. In response, bridging courses in functional skills would be introduced in 2025/26. Departmental analysis highlighted strong performance in Sport, Construction, and Engineering, with weaker outcomes in core English and maths provision.
- The continued growth in the number of learners with SEND was having a notable impact on teaching, learning, and wider college operations. Staff had responded by adopting more adaptive teaching strategies and increasing the use of assistive technology. However, rising demand for specialist support, wellbeing services, and exam arrangements was placing pressure on resources. Financial sustainability, staff capacity, and the ability to maintain consistently high-quality support remained as strategic concerns.

The Committee **discussed** and **queried** the following:

- Progression into employment for SEND learners, noticing that this wasn't as high as hoped – it was recognised this metric could be higher than other providers and it would be helpful for the Committee to understand this to provide reassurance. TF noted the College was exploring alternative progression routes, including foundation apprenticeships, to improve outcomes. The College maintained clarity on the limits of provision and was exploring opportunities to collaborate with employers to improve understanding and support for SEND learners in the workplace.

Action: TF to report back to the Committee on the progression of SEND learners into employment of other local providers (November 2025).

The Committee **recognised** the need to influence recruitment practices and expand partnerships to improve inclusive employment pathways. A campaign to shift employer perceptions was under consideration, alongside improvements in placement quality. A reverse consultancy model, where students provide their views and feedback to staff, was suggested by the Committee.

- The importance of managing expectations with parents and councils with regard to what support the College was able to offer. TF noted this was particularly important, as support was adjusted to promote learner independence whilst at the College. It was confirmed the College was actively engaging with learners during open evenings and enrolment to better understand needs, including those who may require an EHCP but do not currently have one. The Staff Governor (KM) confirmed that innovative approaches such as staggered starts were being used to support transitions back into education.
- The legal duty to support SEND learners and with the request for greater visibility on refusals – it was confirmed 42 learners were refused this academic year. Although not requiring detail, the Committee **sought reassurance** that this was in line with the College's values, particularly in relation to poverty and access. It was confirmed these refusals were where specialist provision was required and the College was unable to support this.

The Committee **recognised** the position that the College was likely to receive less funding but would be expected to do more to support SEND learners.

The Committee **reflected** upon what the College would need to do differently over the next two years to further support SEND learners whilst also maintaining financial sustainability and the learner experience. The Committee **noted** that improvements in English and Maths learners with SEND was crucial.

The report was noted.

Item 3.1 taken at this point.

CQ/282 2.2 Board and Committee KPIs

Item taken after 3.1.

CT presented the report, setting out the proposed KPIs to complement the Performance Report provided at each meeting. The DfE provider dashboard, skills priorities and the College's Accountability Agreement had all been considered as part of the proposed KPIs, with a focus on lead indicators to ensure they would be of use in-year.

The Quality and Curriculum Strategies KPIs would continue to be reported on annually.

The Committee **reiterated** the need to ensure relevant indicators were reported in-year to prevent any surprises in relation to outcomes at the year-end.

The Committee **discussed** and **queried** the following:

- The Committee's role in ensuring the curriculum was well designed, and fit for purpose and need, and how the Committee could be assured of this.
- Student voice outcomes changing across the academic year, and how the Committee could be assured of consistently high satisfaction rates.
- Lead indicators relating to performance, recognising that the assessment model across different qualifications was not linear and therefore difficult to aggregate in-year and provide indicators to the Committee. The Committee **took reassurance** from the College's close operational monitoring of progress throughout the year, however queried how the College monitored performance against target per learner.
- The continued reporting of outcomes, specific to EDI, captured within the Performance Report.
- The measurement of impact from bursary funding, and how this could be measured.
- The new Ofsted Inspection Framework and any KPIs linked with this.
- The importance of the Committee's role in monitoring retention progression, achievement and learner experience.

The Committee requested for the proposed KPIs to be refined, focussing on retention, progression, achievement and learner experience.

Action: CT to refine the proposed KPIs, focussing on retention, progression, achievement and learner experience, working with RG, CD and PF (November 2025).

The report was noted.

CQ/283 2.3 Strategic Risk Register

SJ presented the report, highlighting the following:

- A revised risk framework had been developed over the summer period and was due to be presented to Audit Committee in November 2025. Revisions had taken account of Committee and governor feedback, ensuring accessibility and digestibility.

- The current risk register was provided for information, noting additional work had been undertaken on the horizon scan which provided greater information of potential future risk.

The Committee **noted the helpfulness** of the improve horizon scan.

The Committee **supported** the direction of travel of the revised risk framework and **recognised** the strategic risks covered as part of this meeting.

The report was noted.

3. Policy, Procedure and Regulation

CQ/284 3.1 Safeguarding, Welfare and Wellbeing Annual Report 2025/26

DH presented the report, highlighting the following:

- The report set out assurance of the Board's compliance with its statutory duty in relation to Safeguarding across the College.
- The report provided further detail as to safeguarding and wellbeing concerns across the year, the number of referrals and the College's initiatives to improve and support safeguarding and wellbeing across the College. Behaviour was the most reported safeguarding concern, and mental health was the most reported wellbeing concern. The Committee **recognised** the significant increase in referrals across the last couple of years.
- The report provided reassurance that the Safeguarding, Welfare and Wellbeing Team was a well-established and effective presence across all college sites, providing essential support to learners. Three team members had recently been appointed following vacancies arising within the team. The new team members were being embedded within the College and the wider safeguarding structure to ensure continuity of service and sustained impact.
- The team continued to explore trend data to implement proactive actions where common themes / risks were arising.
- Following the publication of the new Ofsted Inspection Framework, the team were considering any impact on safeguarding and wellbeing and were responding with action. DH provided positive reassurance of the College's safeguarding processes being aligned to what was required as part of the inspection framework.

The Safeguarding and Mental Health Link Governor (MW) recognised the positive work undertaken and provided reassurance from his work as part of the Safeguarding Steering Group.

The Committee **noted** the positive implementation and investment of the Safeguarding, Welfare and Wellbeing Team, **recognising** the positive support in place for learners.

The Committee **discussed** the impact of increased learner numbers and diversity of learners in relation to increased, and potentially more complex, safeguarding and wellbeing concerns, and the need to remain proactive in relation to this.

The Committee **noted their confidence** of the work being undertaken in relation to safeguarding and Prevent.

DH presented the following policies for recommendation for Board approval, noting all had been legally reviewed and the equality impact assessments now updated:

- Prevent Policy
- Safeguarding Children and Child Protection Policy
- Adults at risk policy

The Committee recommended the Safeguarding Children and Child Protection, Prevent and Adults at Risk policies for Board approval.

Action: NH to present policies for Board approval (November 2025).

The Committee requested a flow diagram to set out the process for raising safeguarding concerns at their next meeting for information.

Action: DH to provide a flow diagram to set out the process for raising safeguarding concerns as part of the Term 1 report to the Committee (February 2026).

The report was noted.

DH left the meeting.

Item 2.2 taken at this point.

CQ/285 3.2 National and Regional Policy Update

CT presented the report, highlighting this was a new report setting out national and regional policy updates for information. The College was working on ensuring alignment with the newly published Ofsted Inspection Framework.

The Committee discussed and queried the following:

- Regional developments across Gateshead and Newcastle.
- The shifting policy landscape.
- The impact of those not in education, employment or training (NEET) in the region and what this meant for the College.
- The introduction of Construction Technical Excellence Colleges (CTECs) and Digital Technical Excellence Colleges (DTECs).

The report was noted.

4. Quality and Performance

CQ/286 4.1 Curriculum Strategy Annual Report

DC presented the report, highlighting that significant progress had been made against the objectives. The report set out some recommendations to adapt some of the KPIs and targets for 2025/2026 based on findings from 2024/2025. The new Ofsted Inspection Framework provided a greater focus on inclusion and learner experience, the College had an ambitious target in relation to this and continued to improve. For 2025/2026, the College's enrichment offer had been broadened.

DC noted the KPIs could continue to be further refined following further consideration of the new Ofsted Inspection Framework.

The College was continuing to explore improved ways of seeking richer feedback from employers and partners.

The Committee discussed and queried the following:

- Improvement being needed in English and Maths achievement for learners with SEND as per the previous discussion.
- Priorities to elevate and stretch ambition.

The Committee noted the progress made and approved the priorities for 2025/2026.

The Committee approved the KPIs (as per the targets set out within the Board and Committee KPI paper), noting that these would be reported to the Committee annually as part of the Curriculum Strategy Annual Report.

The report was noted.

CQ/287 4.2 Quality Strategy Annual Report

CT presented the report, highlighting that significant progress had been made against the objectives, and the KPIs continued to be ambitious.

The proposed priorities for 2025/2026 were based on the emerging themes as part of the College's Self Assessment Report (SAR) which would be presented to the Committee in November 2025, along with the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).

The College was looking to improve outcomes for English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learners, those who had been in receipt of Free College Meals, safeguarding and mental health support. The College was exploring steppingstone qualifications to better support learners to progress.

The Committee **noted** the amount of work undertaken and **recognised** their need for clarity of areas for focus across 2025/2026, which related to improving outcomes for ESOL learners, those studying maths and English, and learners with SEND. CT confirmed these priorities would be supported by the QIP and operational planning.

The Committee **discussed** and **queried** the following:

- Understanding value for money and impact of additional initiatives, noting the link with the previous discussion around SEND and the College choosing to offer SEND support and provision, recognising this was a values-based decision rather than a financial decision.
- The need to help learners understand the value of additional initiatives so this would feed through to employers, partners and the community, for example, fully understanding the purpose and added benefits of enrichment.

The Committee noted the progress made and approved the priorities for 2025/2026.

The Committee approved the KPIs (as per the targets set out within the Board and Committee KPI paper), noting that these would be reported to the Committee annually as part of the Quality Strategy Annual Report.

The report was noted.

CQ/288 4.3 Performance Report 2024/25

CT presented the report, highlighting the following:

- The data relating to achievement remained provisional until finalised.
- Attendance remained stable at 86%, with notable improvements among 19+ learners and ESOL groups.
- Retention rates for both 16–18 and 19+ learners exceeded national averages. Forecasted achievement rates remained strong.
- A retention gap was emerging for learners eligible for Free College Meals (FCM), this was being explored further and mitigated by strengthening student services and the introduction of Student Progress and Retention Officers.
- Apprenticeship achievement rates continued to outperform national benchmarks, with strong departmental performance in Construction, Automotive, and

Engineering. Equality measures showed minimal variation across ethnic groups, though FCM learners showed slightly lower retention.

- Learner behaviour remained positive, with fewer Stage 3 concerns, suspensions, and exclusions compared to the previous year.
- GCSE and A Level results demonstrated high achievement and pass rates, well above national averages. GCSE achievement rates in Maths had risen significantly and English results were comparable with last year. T Level outcomes were equally strong, and Value-Added scores indicate positive learner progress.

The Committee **noted** the work to be done relating to Maths and English as previously discussed, and the strength of the College preparing early for learner number growth.

The report was noted.

CQ/289 4.4 Higher Education Annual Report 2024/25

TB presented the report, highlighting the following:

- The College continued to advance and refine its Higher Education (HE) provision in response to the evolving Level 3 curriculum and needs of industry, as identified through sustained engagement with employer partners. A central strategic focus had been the development and integration of Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs), which now served as a framework for the design and delivery of all full-time HE programmes. This approach complemented and reinforced the College's Further Education ethos, ensuring a coherent and progressive learner journey.
- In addition to HTQs, the College's broader HE offer included Higher Level Apprenticeships, Higher National Certificates (HNCs), and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs), all developed in close consultation with industry to maintain relevance and excellence.
- Assurance was provided that all new HE programmes underwent formal validation, and those not yet aligned with HTQs were subject to periodic review to ensure continued academic integrity and alignment with employer needs.

The Committee **discussed** and **queried** the following:

- Placements for learners – it was confirmed the College found placements for learners.
- The strategic HE framework being *alternative to university and apprenticeships* and why this couldn't instead be complementary and supplementary. It was confirmed the College would continue to diversity income and alternative opportunities however was not looking to gain validation powers. The focus of the HE provision was on employment edge, avoiding any competition with local universities, but work was ongoing to consider what complementary/supplementary opportunities there might be, and this would be brought back through the Committee as part of planned reporting.

Action: CT / TB to report back to the Committee on the future intent of HE provision, specifically considering complementary/supplementary opportunities.

The report was noted.

CQ/290 4.5 Recruitment 2025/26

CT presented the report, highlighting the College business plan was planned around 16-18 full time learner growth. Although there were additional learners for 2025/2026, this

was not as high as planned and therefore the College was considering the impact of this in terms of resource and staffing, with staff being mobilised in other areas.

The report was noted.

5. Student Experience

CQ/291 5.1 Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment - End of Year Survey Results 2024/25

RW presented the report, setting out the results of the End of Year (EOY) survey. The response rate remained positive. Highlights included:

- 95.9% of learners were satisfied with the College.
- 93.8% of learners rated teaching as consistently good.
- 96.4% of learners felt safe at college and 97.7% know how to stay safe outside of college.
- 97.1% of learners believed people of all cultures and backgrounds were valued.

RW noted that the perception of participation in Personal and Social Development (PSD) sessions had decreased and therefore the wording of this question was being explored further. RW confirmed that the wording of questions was reviewed by the Quality Team along with the Student Engagement Manager, with input from learners. The Committee **noted** the potential reframing of questions and learners being involved in this.

NH noted the work of the Course Representatives and Student Leadership Group in having a positive impact on the learner experience by bringing forward ideas and solutions to improve. Themes coming out related to catering, poverty and transport. This linked with the College's ongoing poverty research.

The Committee **discussed** and **queried** the following:

- Emerging risks to the learner experience and how these would be mitigated.
- The reasons behind learners choosing not to complete the survey and identifying any barriers of access.

The Committee **recognised** that the end of year learner survey results were at a particular point in time, similar to the induction and mid point survey. It was suggested that this could be supplemented by additional pulse surveys and that it may also be good to triangulate various means to capture student voice in the annual report next year, including student representatives, student leadership group etc.

Action: CT to consider pulse surveys throughout the year.

Action: CT / RW to include additional methods of student voice within the report for 2025/2026.

The Committee **noted** the positive results and **noted their thanks** to staff.

The report was noted.

6. Relationships and External Engagement

N/A

7. End of Meeting Governance

CQ/292 7.1 Actions Agreed

It was confirmed that actions would be circulated post-meeting.

CQ/293 7.2 Any Other Business and Meeting Evaluation

AOB

N/A

Meeting Evaluation

The Chair **recognised** the link between various discussions as part of the reports presented and **noted** the need for the Committee to triangulate learning from reports, such as being assured of the learner experience.

The meeting evaluation link would be circulated post-meeting.

CQ/294 7.3 Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was to be Thursday 20 November 2025 at 1.00pm.