GATESHEAD COLLEGE
EDUCATION WITH EMPLOYMENT EDGE

CURRICULUM AND QUALITY STANDARDS COMMITTEE – MINUTES
TUESDAY 20 NOVEMBER 2025 1PM TO 3PM – Gateshead College (Baltic Campus)

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	
Dylan Smith	16-18 Student Governor	DS		X
Anthony Gibbon	19+ Student Governor	AG		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	
Suzanne Cunningham	Head of Quality Assurance	SC	X	
Melissa Gardiner	Head of Quality Improvement	MG	X	
Richard Ward	Assistant Principal	RW	X	
Tracy Foreman	Assistant Principal	TF	X	
Tom Bradley	Assistant Principal	TB	X	
John Deary	Assistant Principal	JD	X	
Vicky Cross	Assistant Principal	VC	X	
Graham Stouph	Head of Department – Automotive & Engineering	GS	X	

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

1. Initial Governance

CQ/295 1.1 Chair's Welcome / Apologies / Conflicts of Interest

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed the attendees.

Apologies were received from DS and AG. 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 Committee **thanked** the report authors for their papers and presentation and **recognised** the level of work undertaken across the College in undertaking the annual self-assessment process.

CQ/296 1.2 Minutes of the last meeting

A. The Committee **reviewed** the main minutes from the meeting on 30 September June 2025 and **agreed** that they were a true and accurate reflection of the meeting.

The minutes were approved.

CQ/297 1.3 Matters Arising / Action Log

NT presented the action log. 2 actions were ongoing and 1 action was not yet due. An update was provided. All other actions had been closed, completed or not yet due as reported.

The action log was noted.

2. Quality and Performance

CQ/298 2.1 Self-Assessment Report (SAR) Validation Process 2024/25

CT presented the report, supported by a presentation, which provided an overview of the agreed self-assessment outcomes for 2023/2024 as a reminder. CT set out an overview of the quality improvement cycle, with the SAR being a key part of this. SC and MG provided detail of the work undertaken by the Quality Team, and how quality improvement was embedded across the College and remained a continued focus. SC and MG noted the ability to consider data across a range of different metrics to identify areas for improvement.

CD joined the meeting.

SC and MG provided detail of the quality assurance processes at a course-by-course level, leading up to departmental SARs (including those of the College subcontractor partners) and the College's overall SAR.

The report was noted.

Two curriculum areas were invited to provide a short presentation of their SARs.

2.2 Curriculum Area SARs

CQ/299 ESOL

TF provided a presentation setting out the proposed grade of requires improvements, and the strengths and areas for improvement. TF reiterated that adult provision was the focus, with the College continuing to demonstrate strengths with high quality teaching.

TF provided assurance that improvements were already being made with impact being seen into the start of 2025/2026.

The Committee **discussed** the challenges faced by ESOL learners.

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

- Resource to respond to the areas of improvement identified and challenges faced – it was confirmed that resources had been enhanced to address current challenges, with departments better aligned to provide targeted support. This alignment was intended to strengthen delivery and improve outcomes across the College.

- Lower attendance – it was acknowledged that lower attendance could be influenced by conflicting priorities, including other meetings, arrangements, and commitments of learners. The need for a responsive and flexible approach to accommodate these competing demands was noted.

- Learning from other colleges – It was confirmed that the College had been learning from best practice across the sector, on a national basis, to create an improvement plan specific for the College.

- Mental health and wellbeing support for learners – it was noted the College remained well connected within the region to strengthen the efforts of providing and signposting to support. Expanding mental health and wellbeing provision was a key focus, with the aim of ensuring comprehensive support for all learners across the College.

The Committee **noted** the level of challenges faced and were **assured** by the improvements and initiatives already implemented to address the areas for improvement.

The report was noted.

CQ/300 **Engineering**

GS provided a presentation setting out the proposed grade of outstanding, and the strengths and areas for improvement.

Strengths included:

- Improved facilities and resources.

- Employer engagement and partnerships, including improved work placements and commissions.

- High learner satisfaction.

- Improvements in attendance, progress, retention and achievement ((including positive outcomes for learners with Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) and the tailored support in place for learners))

- Improved enrichment opportunities.

- Improved CPD for staff.

The Committee **recognised** the journey of improvement.

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

- The momentum of change – it was noted that staff reported enjoying their work and collaborating effectively, supported by the successful pilot of hybrid working and improved resources and equipment. There has been increased staffing stability and retention, with clear expectations and consistency across teams. The Quality Team continued to monitor performance with a strong focus on teaching

and learning, and staff engagement in the Teacher Academy was highlighted. A positive cultural shift was acknowledged by staff present at the meeting.

- Plans for parent / carer engagement – It was agreed that maintaining positive engagement is essential to keep learners motivated, alongside seeking parental support for those experiencing challenges. The contribution of teachers, the wellbeing team, and Learning Facilitators was also recognised, particularly in ensuring support for learners who may lack external assistance outside of the College.

- Further improvements – it was noted that apprenticeship programmes were often impacted by external factors, making sustained commitment of learners over four-year durations challenging. To address this, Level 2 apprenticeships had been introduced to improve retention and progression, and employer partnerships had become more selective to ensure positive investment and learner outcomes. The impact of withdrawals was noted, and the need for innovative solutions was emphasised, including the use of AI to tailor learning plans for resit learners, which had already demonstrated positive results.

- Relationships with employers – it was confirmed the College worked closely with employers, with employers recognising the value of course completion and therefore actively supporting learners throughout their programmes. Efforts were being made to ensure learners understand the distinctions between qualification levels, reinforcing the importance of progression and achievement.

The report was noted.

The Committee **thanked** GS and TF for their presentations and for the work undertaken across the departments to provide honest assessments, driven by data, to review the quality of provision and learner experience, with noted engagement from staff.

The Chair confirmed that a departmental overview of SAR gradings had also been provided for information.

The Committee **queried** the following:

- Behaviour and attitudes (specifically relating to Maths and English) - the College was aware of demographic changes over time and the impact these had on engagement. Early intervention was highlighted as a key strategy to improve attendance and learner participation. While key performance indicators were being measured, the importance of considering individual learner circumstances and context alongside these metrics was noted. Progress in Maths GCSE was reported as positive, despite some learners joining the College without prior qualifications in maths or English, including those who had not previously taken GCSE examinations.

  CT suggested a future presentation from staff within the Maths and English team to talk through their initiatives for improvement.

  Action: PF and CT to agree an appropriate meeting for the Maths and English team to talk through their initiatives for improvement.

- Quality of Education – it was noted that high achievement rates had been maintained across all provision types. The curriculum continued to be co-designed with employers to ensure relevance and incorporated inclusive practices to support all learners, underpinned by robust quality assurance processes. Challenges remained in adult functional skills provision, with an ambition to exceed national achievement rates. The Committee **discussed** the need to identify and address any gaps affecting disadvantaged groups. It was noted that while national datasets did not provide regional breakdowns, the College intended to explore regional data to better understand disparities,

particularly given the higher levels of deprivation in the North East compared to other areas of the UK. Additional challenges were noted around supporting learners once they were classified as adults, including barriers such as transport, and what the College could do to lobby for change.

The report was noted.

CQ/301 **2.3 Proposal of Grades and Judgements**

CT provided the proposed grades and judgements for the 2024/2025 SAR.

Action: CT to share presentation slides with the Committee post-meeting.

The Committee **recommended** the proposed gradings for Board approval.

The Committee **noted** the improvements in data, and the positive working between the quality and curriculum teams. The Committee **requested** for their recognition to be passed onto the staff. DA confirmed the proposed gradings had been shared with staff across the College, however we would now confirm they had been recommended by the Committee and would pass on their comments.

Action: DA / CT to pass on recognition of Committee to staff regarding SAR.

The report was recommended for approval.

CQ/302 **2.4 Quality Improvement Plan**

RW presented an updated version of the Quality Improvement Plan, mapping the areas for improvement highlighted within the SAR. RW noted that each department had their own QIP and data / benchmarking had been used where possible.

Action: CT / RW to share updated version of the College QIP.

The report was noted.

3. Strategy

CQ/303 **3.1 New Ofsted Framework**

CT confirmed that Board members would be invited to attend an Ofsted session, externally facilitated, ahead of the Board meeting in December 2025 to update them on the changes in the Ofsted Education Inspection Framework.

CT delivered a presentation outlining the new framework, noting that while it remains broadly similar to the previous version, there are key differences, including a revised grading system and updated criteria, which must be met sequentially to progress to higher levels. It was noted that it may not be feasible to achieve exceptional ratings in all areas, and that the definition of 'Good' now aligns with expected standards, requiring a refocus of efforts. CT highlighted that areas graded as 'urgent areas for improvement' could trigger FE intervention.

CT confirmed the College was currently self-assessing against the new framework.

CT suggested that Ofsted would take into account in-year improvements, even if their impact could not yet be fully evidenced, and inspections may occur at any time. The introduction of a report card for outcomes was also noted.

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

- How the inspection planning may differ – it was suggested that there would be additional planning calls to gain a greater understanding of the College's context ahead of attending on site.

The Committee was **assured** of the ongoing work to self-assess against the framework.

The presentation was noted.

CQ/303 **3.2 Post 16 Education and Skills**

CT presented a report providing an overview of the White Paper, following the briefing previously shared with Governors at the November Board meeting. The Committee discussed the potential impact, opportunities, and challenges arising from the White Paper, with particular reference to its possible effects on creative and cultural courses and qualifications.

The update was noted.

4. Policy, Procedure and Regulation

Nothing to report other than what had already been discussed throughout the meeting agenda.

5. Student Experience

Nothing to report other than what had already been discussed throughout the meeting agenda.

AA left the meeting.

CQ/304 **6. Relationships and External Engagement**

CT provided a verbal update on the new regional Construction Centre for Excellence, noting that every FE College would participate in the national CEC initiative, coordinated by Bedford College using a 'spoke' model. There was a meeting planned to confirm resource commitments for developing materials, with a particular focus on linking these efforts to the construction centres for excellence.

The update was noted.

7. End of Meeting Governance

CQ/305 **7.1 Actions Agreed**

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

CQ/306 **7.2 Any Other Business and Meeting Evaluation**

AOB

N/A

Meeting Evaluation

The meeting evaluation link would be circulated post-meeting.

The Committee **agreed** this had been a positive meeting with excellent papers, great discussion and high levels of assurance.

CQ/307   7.3 Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was to be Thursday 12 February 2026 at 4.00pm.