



Agenda No: 3

CURRICULUM AND QUALITY STANDARDS COMMITTEE – MINUTES

THURSDAY 12 FEBRUARY 4PM TO 6PM – Gateshead College (Skills Academy for Construction)

Governors	Type	Initials	Attendance	Apologies
Peter Francis	Chair / Independent Governor	PF	X	
David Alexander	Principal / CEO and Ex-officio Governor	DA	X	
Michael Williams	Independent Governor	MW	X	
Aneela Ali	Independent Governor	AA	X	
Carol Davenport	Independent Governor	CD	X*	
Ryan Gibson	Independent Governor	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	
Ivan Jepson	Director of Business Development & Innovation	IJ	X*	
Vicki Cross	Interim Director of Curriculum & Skills	VC	X	
Melissa Gardiner	Head of Quality Improvement	MG	X^	
Darren Heathcote	Head of Learner Services & Customer Experience	DH	X^	
Richard Ward	Assistant Principal Quality & Performance	RW	X	

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

1. Initial Governance

CQ/308 1.1 Chair's Welcome / Apologies / Conflicts of Interest

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed the attendees. Introductions took place.

No apologies were received. The Committee **agreed** the meeting was quorate.

There were no conflicts of interest declared. Members were reminded to declare any conflicts that arose during the meeting. During the meeting CD noted a conflict with discussions within item 2.1 as an employee of Northumbria University. It was **agreed** CD could remain as part of the discussion.

It was noted this was DC's last meeting. The Committee **noted their thanks** for DC's commitment and innovation during her time at the College and **welcomed** VC as the incoming Interim Director of Curriculum and Skills.

The Chair noted the agenda would be taken in a slightly different order, with item 2 being taken as the second part of the meeting. The Chair noted the following:

- Reports would be taken as read.
- Reporting had improved however papers remained lengthy.

CQ/309 1.2 Minutes of the last meeting

The Committee **reviewed** the main minutes from the meeting on 20 November 2025 and **agreed** that they were a true and accurate reflection of the meeting.

The minutes were approved.

CQ/310 1.3 Matters Arising / Action Log

Action Log

The action log was presented. Two actions were ongoing and being progressed. All other actions had been closed, completed or not yet due as reported.

The action log was noted.

Ofsted Inspection Experience – New Framework – Governor Insight

The Chair invited RG to share reflections on recent experience of participating in an Ofsted inspection in his own employment role. RG reported the inspections had been conducted under the new Ofsted inspection framework and in accordance with the published criteria and guidance. Both inspections were broadly consistent in their approach.

RG noted leaders felt more engaged throughout the process, with inspectors placing greater emphasis on wellbeing checks and undertaking more comprehensive, in-depth discussions. The inspection process remained appropriately rigorous.

With regard to careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG), inspectors focused on the sequencing of learning, the clarity of intent, and how progress was being measured. Inspectors also expressed a strong interest in partnership working and sought to understand the impact of collaboration.

The Committee thanked RG and the verbal update was noted.

Item 3.2 taken at this point.

2. Strategy

CQ/311 2.1 College Curriculum Intent Overview

Item taken after 5 (DH, RG and MG had left the meeting).

CT presented the report and provided a supporting presentation which covered the following:

- Drivers for the curriculum
- Skills England priorities
- The College's departments / provision clusters
- The make up of learners across provision types
- Provision analysis for 16-18, apprenticeships and adults, including suggested areas for focus
- Considerations relating to higher education, 14-16, growth and targeting the top 10% achievement rates

The Committee **noted** the stated impact of the College's current estate, campus locations and transport links on learner recruitment, including potential opportunities arising from the wider regeneration of Gateshead. CT highlighted that the Construction Academy had capacity for approximately 1000 learners but was currently operating below this level. It was also acknowledged that, while the estate was a relevant factor, it did not in itself drive business or guarantee increased recruitment and therefore conversations needed to focus on what the College had available to it at the present time.

The Committee **discussed** the following:

- Equity of learner experience across the different campuses.
- Hard to reach learners and the need to strengthen outreach.
- Brand awareness of provision / campus location / opportunities.
- Ambition and intent of scale, and potential challenges of this.
- The impact of the political landscape and funding opportunities.
- Alignment and influence with partners.
- Challenges and risks across the College's different provision types.
- The continued focus delivery on being flexible and responsive.
- Opportunities around Higher Education provision and pathways.
- Values-led decision-making regarding partnerships.
- A need for clarity of the options governors were being asked to consider.

The Chair noted the provision paper was an important document for the Board as it helped to illustrate in curriculum terms the size, shape, nature, and performance of the College. It was confirmed the curriculum intent was to align to the College's mission and vision. The next phase in developing and finalising the curriculum intent should involve considering what the future College provision could look like, the opportunities available, the areas that should be prioritised, and those elements the College might maintain, grow, reduce, or discontinue, while ensuring a continued focus on quality, standards, and excellent learner experience.

It was further noted that Curriculum Intent would form a key part of the Spring Board Strategy Day. For that session, the Board would require clearer options, underpinned by

business intelligence to support informed discussion. It was agreed that this consideration should extend beyond government policy.

Action: CT to create an options appraisal for the curriculum intent to facilitate conversation at the next CQS Committee (Accountability Agreement focussed) and Spring Board Strategy Day (April 2026).

The report was noted.

CQ/312 2.2 Strategic Risk Register

CT presented the report. The Chair recognised this had been through Audit Committee discussion and a governor risk workshop. The Chair **asked** committee members to reflect on the conversations as part of the meeting and consider in line with the strategic risk. The Chair **asked** the Executive Team to build in any Committee conversation at a strategic level on the Risk Register if not already covered.

The Committee **discussed** the removal of Learner Recruitment as a strategic risk, noting the reasoning of this being removed was that it had been seen as an outcome of other risks. The Committee **recognised** the changing nature of demographic of learners and **requested** for CT / Executive Team to reconsider this and the nature of the recruitment risk.

Action: CT to reconsider Learner Recruitment with the Executive Team as a strategic risk (April 2026).

The report was noted.

3. Policy, Procedure and Regulation

CQ/313 3.1 Safeguarding Update

Item taken after item 3.2

DH presented the report and highlighted the following:

- The report provided a Term 1 update and provided assurance of the College's compliance with Keeping Children Safe in Education.
- There had been an increase in wellbeing and safeguarding referrals. This correlated with an increase in learner numbers.
- There had been a change in the number of referrals across the different campuses, with there being a higher number of referrals at Sport. This was being explored, however was suggested that some referrals linked to behaviour, rather than wellbeing or safeguarding.
 - The Student Governors queried the increase, it was suggested this was due to increased reporting due to the positive and proactive work undertaken at the Sport campus, rather than being a cause for concern. It was agreed there was a need to ensure consistency of safeguarding / wellbeing approaches at each campus to ensure a consistent learner experience.
- The College continued to deal with complex cases. There had been reported cases of sexual violence, all taking place away from the College. The College continued to support external agencies and learners involved.
- Referrals relating to ideation of suicide had increased, following lower levels in the previous year. Safety plans were in place for learners where there were concerns. The College continued to work with external agencies and were signposting learners to external support, as well as continuing to support internally.

The Safeguarding and Mental Health Link Governor (MW) provided reassurance of the work of the Safeguarding Steering Group and commended the College for their national campaign as part of the DfE toolkit, Flag It. DH confirmed that Flag It had been presented to a number of secondary schools, and primary schools were also registering interest.

The Committee discussed and queried the following:

- What more the College could do to support learners, and what could be done differently to support the complexity and growth of referrals, recognising boundaries and resource restrictions, including partnership work with external agencies.
- Learner voice regarding safety away from the College campuses, it was suggested that a learner survey question did ask about safety away from the College campus with individual learners being followed up with.

The report was noted.

Item 3.3 taken at this point.

CQ/314 3.2 Careers Advice and Guidance Annual Report 2024/25 and Cross College Careers Programme 2026/2027

Taken after Item 1.3.

DH presented the report and highlighted the College continued to undertake termly assessments against the Gatsby framework, were transitioning towards the new benchmarks and had identified challenges with:

- Benchmark 3 (*Learners have different careers guidance needs at different stages. Careers programmes should help learners navigate their concerns about any barriers to career progression or progression pathways. In addition, opportunities should be tailored to the needs of each learner, including any additional needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged learners, young people with SEND and those who are persistently absent*), this was challenging due to the need to obtain careers information from prior institutions, and
- Benchmark 8 (*What proportion of learners have had at least one personal guidance meeting with a qualified adviser by the end of their programme of study*), this was challenging due to resource.

The Careers Link Governor (RG on behalf of the Committee) confirmed he had met with DH to discuss the report in advance, including considering the challenges the College faced and how these could be overcome. RG provided his reassurance of the excellent work being carried out across the College. Next steps were for the College to evolve and strengthen the careers provision, ensuring employment edge for all learners.

The Student Governors noted the impact weak careers guidance could have on course engagement and suggested that some learners needed more guidance and encouragement from staff.

The Committee discussed and queried the following:

- The use of aspirational imagery within the College, it was suggested that this could be a positive way to improve aspirations of learners and be a reinforcing reminder.
- Training needs for staff, in terms of currency of careers information and raising aspirations. Staff training was discussed, including links with the Teacher Academy, to ensure all staff were able to raise aspirations of learners to help towards careers advice and guidance. It was suggested the UniFrog system could assist with raising aspirations as the system would allow learners to explore alternative career paths, as well as allow learners to continue career path

considerations from their prior schools. UniFrog was also expected to assist with collating destination data. It was noted each department had employer skills panels which assisted in the currency of information.

Action: CT / RW / DH to consider staff training relating to offering careers advice and guidance (July 2026).

Action: CT / VCr to link in with Student Governors to test UniFrog (July 2026).

- Recognition was given to the need to identify learners who were not accessing careers advice, to analyse any emerging trends, and to understand the barriers preventing engagement. It was agreed that this would be explored further, and that consideration was already being given to potential work with secondary and primary schools. The Staff Governor noted this happened previously with anecdotal positive impact including learners referring to College activities at their prior schools.
 - The Committee specifically discussed learners who were hard to reach or had Special Educational Needs (SEN), noting the importance of ensuring careers guidance was offered to all learners.

Action: CT / DH to report back on those learners not accessing careers advice and highlight any emerging trends / barriers / specific learner groups (June 2026).

- The need for guidance to articulate the purpose and impact of the process, specifically, what the implications were, what outcomes or destinations were achieved, and how this supported a more robust record of alumni. The aim was to strengthen the College's commitment to providing employment edge for everyone.
- The links between this work and the curriculum intent were highlighted, particularly the focus on ensuring employment edge for everyone and the differing models to achieve this and the need to understand going forward what this might mean for the College careers and guidance model.

The Committee **suggested** learner survey questions to focus on the appropriateness or impact of the careers advice and guidance, rather than confirmational questions.

Action: CT / RW to consider careers related learner survey questions with a focus on impact and benefit.

Action: CT / DH to consider how the College careers model might need to change/evolve to meet the future curriculum intent.

The Committee approved the College's Careers Programme for 2026/2027.

The report was noted.

CQ/315 3.3 National and Regional Policy Update

Item taken after Item 3.1.

CT presented the report which provided an update on the Curriculum and Assessment Review (CAR), Accountability Agreement guidance, Apprenticeships in England Policy Position and Reforms 2025/2 and the North East Local Growth Plan 2025–2035.

CT noted an additional CQS Committee had been set for April 2026 to discuss the Accountability Agreement intent ahead of Board, and CT would present a proposed approach to the Duty to Review for the following academic year. The Committee **recognised** the links between curriculum intent and careers advice and guidance.

Action: CT to present proposed approach to the Duty to Review for Committee endorsement (June 2026).

The Committee **queried** if the content of the National and Regional Policy update was shared with the wider staff and it was confirmed updates were provided as part of Heads of Department meetings as and when available.

The Committee **asked** about the timing of the post-16 English and Maths review however this wasn't known.

The report was noted.

4. Quality and Performance

CQ/316 4.1 Performance Report

RW presented the report and highlighted the following:

- In-year retention remained static and strong.
- Challenges continued in attendance specifically in Maths and English. The College were looking at a more holistic view and considering intersectionality when reviewing data. Improvements were being seen which was positive.
- Learner EDI data had been included in the report, and following presentation to this Committee, the data would be compiled with the staff EDI data and rolled into an overall EDIB Annual Report for 2024/2025 which would be presented for Board approval and published on the College website.

The Committee discussed and queried the following:

- Barriers to attending / learning, recognising that a number of learners were eligible for financial support however may not be coming forward for this. The Committee **recognised** the need to change the culture around this to break down any barriers to accessing support. The Learner Voice Link Governor (AA) noted there had been learner voice relating to the "stigma" around receiving free college meals and suggested work could be done with the Student Leadership Group to explore this further. The College were exploring how this could be better identified at transition, and in-year with circumstances changing. RW there wasn't a retention gap between non-free college meals and free college meals learners.

Action: NH / DH to use Student Leadership Group / Student Representatives to further explore barriers to accessing support / attending.

- Continued low reporting of additional EDIB characteristics – RW confirmed a deep dive exercise was taking place into inclusion, including data reporting.

The EDI Link Governor (AA) provided reassurance of the EDIB work taking place across the College, focussing on both learners and staff.

The report was noted.

CQ/317 4.2 Committee KPIs to be approved

CT presented the report, noting that as per the Committee action, a subgroup of committee members had met to discuss KPI reporting at Committee and Board level. At Committee level, attendance and retention for 16-18, adult, high needs and apprentice learners would be reported, and at Board level, overall attendance, and retention for 16-18, adult and apprentice learners would be reported. CT noted the College were considering a measure for in-year achievement progress however this was difficult due to the different programmes being offered across the College. It was hoped to have something in place for 2026/2027.

Action: CT to consider in-year progress KPI monitoring and update the Committee on progress of this (June 2026).

Achievement lag indicators would continue to be reported at year end at both Committee and Board level.

The Committee **approved** the KPIs to be monitored at Committee level, with further information to be provided on achievement and **recommended** the KPIs to be monitored at Board level, for Board approval.

Action: CT/ PF to present proposed Board KPIs for Board approval (April 2026).

The report was noted.

CQ/318 4.3 Quality Improvement Plan Update

RW presented the report, providing further information on the 3 objectives currently rated as amber. All were expected to be achieved.

The report was noted.

CQ/319 4.4 Quality Assurance of Teaching, Learning and Assessment – Department Quality Review and Ofsted Readiness

MG presented the report and highlighted the College's quality processes had been refined, using the new Ofsted inspection framework to drive change, with a focus on ensuring impacting. This created better alignment for common themes. The first round had taken place. Areas of improvement aligned with the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) which was positive, providing further assurance of the strength of the College's Self Assessment Report (SAR) process. MG confirmed there were no major areas of concern.

DH left the meeting.

The Committee discussed and queried the following:

- Benchmarking against other colleges – it was noted it was difficult to benchmark at present due to the Ofsted framework being so new, however the College had started to receive requests from other colleges to share information for benchmarking purposes.
- Staff engagement – it was noted the first round proved to be resource intensive and therefore the Quality Team had further refined processes to streamline where possible, however greater staff ownership was required. Ensuring impact was a key part of the process. The Staff Governor provided positive assurance of the benefit and value of the process.

The Committee **discussed** the need for the College's strategy to set out the ambition towards "strong" or "expected progress", with the Board to agree the approach. The Committee **agreed** the need to understand what the College would need to do differently to achieve "strong" across the gradings. It was suggested that "strong" would be equivalent to the previous grading of Outstanding so would be difficult to achieve in all areas. The Committee **reiterated** the need to understand the College's stretch and ambition as part of the Strategy.

Action: CT to provide follow up information setting out what it would take to achieve a 'Strong' grading for provision under the new Ofsted framework (July 2026).

RG left the meeting.

The report was noted.

MG left the meeting.

CQ/320 4.5 Learner Recruitment Update

CT presented the report, providing the Committee with an update on recruitment for 2025/2026 across 16-18 learners, T levels, adult education, apprenticeships and higher education.

The report was noted.

5. Student Experience

As there was no item to be discussed, the Chair asked for any reflections from the Student Governors.

The Student Governors fed back the following:

- In relation to careers advice and guidance, personal social development (PSD) sessions could be used for this, along with additional support around finances, university options, rent / mortgages etc). It was suggested that an improvement in PSD sessions could facilitate better engagement in main programmes. It was noted that a review of PSD was being undertaken and this feedback would be considered as part of this.
- In relation to GCSE resits, it was suggested that resit windows were November and the summer term and if students were missing out on their required grade there was a long gap between resit opportunities which could be frustrating for learners. It was recognised these windows were provided by exam boards however it was agreed this could be reviewed in further detail with the possibility of feeding back into consultations and opportunities to lobby.

Action: CT to consider learner comments regarding length of time between GCSE resit windows, specifically considering what the College could do to feedback learner voice / lobby for change (July 2026).

Item 2 taken at this point.

6. Relationships and External Engagement

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

7. End of Meeting Governance

CQ/321 7.1 Actions Agreed

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

CQ/322 7.2 Any Other Business

N/A

CQ/323 7.3 Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was to be Wednesday 1 April 2026 at 2.30pm.

The Chair noted it had been positive to visit another campus.