

Standards Improvement Committee Minutes

Meeting held on Thursday 5th October 2023 at 5.30 pm, SRC 301

- Governors:** Liz Dixon, Grant Glendinning (Chief Executive and Group Principal), Lorraine Preston (staff governor and Manager of Student Services - Curriculum and Support, joined via Teams), Dot Smith (Chair) and Anne Vickers
- Apologies:** Bernice Wood, Gary Wright
- Officials:** Kim Cutler (Head of Construction & Professional Services, to Agenda Item 3 only), Jason Faulkner (Executive Principal, Redcar and Cleveland College and NETA), Lesley Graham (Executive Principal, Stockton Riverside College and Higher Education), Phil Hastie (Chief Operating Officer), Sean Johnston (Managing Director NETA), Patrick Jordan (College Principal Bede), Alex Thompson (Construction Curriculum Manager, to Agenda Item 3 only), Sarah Thompson (Clerk to the Corporation), Peter Wood (Group Director of Quality) and Sam Young (Governance Support Officer)

SIC23/35 Agenda Item 1 – Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair

Governors **agreed** to appoint Dot Smith as Chair of the Standards Improvement Committee for 2023-24.

There were no candidates for Vice Chair and it was noted that the Search and Governance Committee had identified a need to recruit a new governor with experience / expertise in education and quality to support succession planning within the Standards Improvement Committee. It was **agreed** to defer the appointment of a Vice Chair for the Standards Improvement Committee until a new committee member had been appointed.

SIC23/36 Agenda Item 2 – Welcome, apologies for absence, declarations of interest, notification of items of other business

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting and a round of introductions took place. Apologies from Bernice Wood and Gary Wright were received and accepted. There were no declarations of interest in items on the agenda and no items of additional business notified for consideration at the end of the agenda.

SIC23/37 Agenda Item 3 – Construction, Professional and Service Industries

The Head of Construction & Professional Services and the Construction Curriculum Manager presented an overview of the Construction, Professional and Service Industries (CPSI) department; at the request of the committee Chair, this was particularly focussed on interventions that had had a positive impact on student experience and outcomes. Prior to the meeting, data tables had been circulated to governors which outlined key data for the CPSI department, including achievement, retention and pass rates, high grades, attendance and learner numbers.

It was highlighted that achievement rates across CPSI had improved for both 16-18 and 19+ learners, with achievement rates for 16-18 learners [REDACTED] above national rates in 2022-23 and most 19+ provision also above national rates. This had been achieved against a background of significantly increased student numbers. Work was continuing in a minority of areas where achievement was not yet above national rates, [REDACTED]; there was national concern regarding exam content and a low pass rate (national pass rate of 43.2%, Etc. pass rate [REDACTED]), and the department was considering moving provision to an alternative programme, for example, EAL or T Level. Poorer outcomes in [REDACTED] reflected below target retention, in some cases resulting from significant changes of staffing and also as some learners had left before completing for a positive destination, for example, an apprenticeship. [REDACTED].

2023-24 student numbers were very positive, with enrolment targets exceeded in most areas and particularly high numbers in Beauty Therapy, Travel and Aviation, Construction Skills and Electrical, demonstrating confidence from parents and students.

[REDACTED]

Employer engagement across the department was very positive, with strong relationships with a wide range of local and national companies. Recent initiatives included: a Careers in Construction day for year 10 students from local schools, attended by a range of employers; a new programme to provide a career pathway into Property Maintenance Apprenticeship; and 'industry insight' development for many staff within the team. Recent student successes included a third place in Joinery at a regional cross-college competition and third place at the Guild of Bricklayers competition hosted by Newcastle College. In response to a query, it was confirmed that programmes incorporated new construction methods and retrofit, and staff also regularly attended retrofit courses.

Governors congratulated the team on the significant improvements [REDACTED]

Governors asked for more information about how students were selected for work experience and industrial placements; the Construction Curriculum Manager clarified that students were allocated to specific placements on the basis of maturity and with the aim of securing good relationships with employers and the best experience for all students. Governors noted potential difficulties for students travelling to placements and the Head of Construction & Professional Services outlined efforts made to support students, providing an example of support to a student that needed to travel to Teesside airport.

Governors asked about the potential impact of curriculum reform and it was confirmed that de-funding of the Level 3 Electrical programme was planned for 2025. Within the current programme, students had particular challenges with the large jump from multiple choice at Level 2 to a national written exam at Level 3.

Governors thanked the Head of Construction & Professional Services and the Construction Curriculum Manager for the presentation and reiterated their congratulations for the excellent improvements achieved.

SIC23/38 Agenda Item 4 – Minutes of Previous Meeting

Minutes of the Standards Improvement Committee meeting held on 15 June 2023 had been circulated and were **approved** as an accurate record.

Progress against actions was **noted** and:

- [REDACTED]
- It was **noted** that the request to consider referencing the corporate risk register within the 'Risks' section in reports / articulate risks more fully in all reports would be picked up as part of the external governance review actions;
- Governors thanked the Alternative Provision Manager for the additional data as requested and noted the positive comments relating to the alternative provision presentation that had taken place at the last meeting.

Agenda Item 5 – Self Assessment Reports

SIC23/39 5.1 – College Self Assessment Reports

The meeting pack included draft Self Assessment Reports for each of the individual colleges, as well as a covering sheet highlighting key strengths and areas for improvement. The Committee Chair highlighted that Self Assessment validation / Performance Review meetings were currently in progress and thanked governors that had attended or were planning to attend meetings. In response to a governor's query, it was confirmed that Self Assessment Report (SAR) judgements were based on the Ofsted framework, although the Skills Academy SAR did not provide a judgement on contribution to meeting local skills needs in light of its specialist provision. It was also highlighted that a fixed group of senior managers had attended every SAR meeting to ensure judgements were consistent. The Group Director of Quality clarified that the aim was to ensure a consistent house style which reflected Ofsted reporting, with a clear judgement, evidence and an explanation of impact on learners.

SIC23/40 5.1.1 – Bede

The College Principal Bede reported that the Bede SAR validation meeting had now taken place and it had been agreed that the content of the SAR document should be reviewed to ensure this more fully reflected Bede's provision. This included drawing out the strength of the Institute of Sporting Education (ISE), which had grown student numbers by around [REDACTED] and had exceptionally high performance in sporting leagues. Data would also be updated to reflect improved grades following a significant number of re-marks. [REDACTED] governors suggested additional guidance on writing SAR reports could be helpful for managers.

The College Principal Bede highlighted that Quality of Education at Bede was judged to be 'Outstanding' (Grade 1), with strong evidence from curriculum reviews that there was clarity in feedback to students and effective support. Teaching and learning were very strong and overall retention and achievement were above national rates. The SAR outlined subjects identified as requiring improvement and the College Principal Bede highlighted, in particular, that further investigation was ongoing in relation to [REDACTED] and these subjects would be re-structured. [REDACTED]

Behaviour and attitudes was graded as 'Outstanding' (Grade 1) and overall attendance was strong and above the national average. A Level attendance, in particular, was very high [REDACTED]. In response to a governor's query, it was clarified that [REDACTED] of Bede students progressed to university and it was confirmed that this very positive position would be highlighted in the revised SAR.

Governors **noted** the Bede SAR validated grade [REDACTED] for 2022-23.

SIC23/41 5.1.2 – NETA

The Managing Director (MD) NETA and Group Director of Quality confirmed that the NETA SAR validation had taken place and some amendments would be made to the NETA draft SAR, particularly in relation to ensuring specificity of improvement areas. A governor that had attended the NETA SAR validation commended the rigour of the self assessment process and noted that quality of commercial provision had also been reviewed during the validation meeting.

The MD NETA highlighted the self assessment grades [REDACTED] it was recognised that NETA had a particular strength in industrial partnerships, with impressive alumni and global companies supporting curriculum design and delivery.

[REDACTED]

Governors **noted** the NETA SAR validated grade [REDACTED] for 2022-23.

SIC23/42 5.1.3 – Redcar and Cleveland College

The Executive Principal Redcar and Cleveland College (RCC) and NETA highlighted that Redcar and Cleveland College had performed well in 2022-23, with achievement rates above national rates and a five year trend of improvement. [REDACTED] Key strengths included future-proofing, relationships between managers and key stakeholders, improving quality of education, positive learner voice outcomes and strong staff satisfaction. A governor reported on her attendance at learner focus groups and the highly positive comments made by students.

[REDACTED] The Executive Principal clarified that Etc. was considering a change of examination board for maths programmes, with the aim of ensuring more accessible language in exams. No change of provider for English was planned but the English and maths strategy would be refreshed to reflect the change in maths; the strategy would be presented to a future SIC meeting for approval. [REDACTED]

Governors **noted** the proposed RCC SAR grade [REDACTED] for 2022-23.

SIC23/43 5.1.4 – Stockton Riverside College

The Executive Principal SRC and Higher Education highlighted that 2022-23 had been a positive year for Stockton Riverside College. Curriculum intent was strong and the diverse curriculum offer, including Foundation learning, Entry level, Level 1 and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learners, ensured engagement of those in the community that were furthest from employment. Following receipt of additional results, the All age achievement rate was

now [REDACTED] above the national rate, with both 16-18 and 19+ achievement above national rates. [REDACTED]

The Executive Principal clarified that the college was able to demonstrate contribution to meeting skills needs as courses offered provided appropriate qualifications and learners achieved positive destinations. In addition, the college had good links with employers and provided good work experience opportunities for students. [REDACTED]

Governors **noted** the proposed SRC SAR grade [REDACTED] for 2022-23.

SIC23/44 5.2 – Group Self Assessment Report

The Group Director of Quality presented the circulated Group SAR for 2022-23 and asked governors to note the proposed judgement [REDACTED] in relation to contribution to regional and national skills needs. [REDACTED]

The Group Director of Quality highlighted that the identified areas for improvement would be discussed in further detail at an upcoming management away day with a focus on ensuring specificity. Governors stressed the importance of using the strength of the group as a resource, for example, learning lessons from NETA's positive outcomes in apprenticeships.

Governors **noted** the proposed Group SAR grade [REDACTED] for 2022-23 and **agreed** to recommend to the FE Corporation that the Group SAR be approved, subject to any comments arising during the self assessment validation meeting. It was also **agreed** that an update on apprenticeships would be provided to each meeting of the Standards Improvement committee.

Agenda Item 6 – Group Improvement / Development Plans

SIC23/45 6.1 – Final progress update on areas for improvement 2022-23

A report had been circulated providing a final progress update on areas for improvement for 2022-23 identified in college SARs but not included in the Group Improvement Plans. The following were highlighted in particular:

- [REDACTED]

The update was **noted**.

SIC23/46 6.2 – Group Improvement Plans

The Group Director of Quality presented his circulated report outlining the impact of Group Improvement Plans (GIPs) in 2022-23. He highlighted, in particular, the longer-term impact of the Cost of Living GIP, with ongoing initiatives such as Re-Gifting tables and the Poverty Proofing Task Force; and the positive impact of the 'Maintaining Learning' GIP, reflected in improved student outcomes.

For 2023-24, a new title of Group Development Plans would be introduced, to reflect the supportive intent, and these would take account of the national and regional context. Potential themes for Group Development Plans were outlined in the report and a final

proposal for Group Development Plans would be presented to a future meeting following further discussion and review by senior managers.

Governors **noted** the final update against 2022-23 GIPs and potential themes for 2023-24 Group Development Plans.

SIC23/47 Agenda Item 7 – Quality and performance update

The Group Director of Quality presented the circulated update on quality and performance and highlighted a continuing trend of good student outcomes, with very high achievement rates for education and training provision in 2022-23. He asked governors to note, in particular, an infographic included in the report highlighting the hugely significant disruption to the educational journey of students completing their A levels or vocational education in 2023 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, cost of living crisis and industrial action by teaching staff and commended the support provided by staff to ensure students could achieve such good outcomes.

[REDACTED]

The Quality and Performance report also outlined subcontracting performance data for 2022-23. In response to a query, the Group Director of Quality confirmed that he was confident that there was robust quality monitoring of subcontracted provision. [REDACTED] The Executive Principal RCC highlighted that subcontracting had been awarded a judgement of ‘substantial assurance’, the highest judgement available, in a recent internal audit.

Governors **noted** the update.

SIC23/48 Agenda Item 8 – Higher Education update

8.1 – Higher Education Update

The Executive Principal SRC presented the circulated report outlining outcomes of the recent National Student Survey (NSS) and higher education recruitment. She asked governors to note that the Etc. had performed well, with scores above the national average in all areas other than [REDACTED] The group was confident that action had been taken to resolve the issues.

Governors **noted** the update.

8.2 Higher Education / Higher Skills Strategy

The Executive Principal presented the Higher Education and Skills Strategy 2023-26 and highlighted that this linked to the Etc. three year strategic plan and the Local Skills Improvement Plan, and covered key areas such as curriculum and stakeholder engagement.

Governors commended the Strategy, commenting that this was a positive indicator of a good working relationship with Teesside University. Governors queried the level of involvement of employers and the position of Teesside University in relation to validating modular approaches, recognising that flexible accreditation was helpful. In response to a query relating to accountability for delivery of the Higher Education and Skills Strategy, the Executive

Principal clarified that a Higher Education Monitoring Group would be established; terms of reference would be shared with the Standards Improvement Committee.

The Chief Executive outlined potential plans for a Health Innovation Zone in the Stockton Riverside area and it was noted that this could provide a strategic context for career pathways in Health, from Level 3 to Level 5 via Etc., progressing to Level 8 with Teesside University and then on to high level employment within the borough.

Governors thanked the Executive Principal for an excellent strategy and **agreed** to recommend to the FE Corporation that the Higher Education and Skills Strategy be approved.

SIC23/49 Agenda Item 9 – Destinations

The Group Director of Quality presented the circulated report on sustained destinations for 2021-22. [REDACTED]; in relation to 19+ students, this included learners studying English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and their future progression could be limited by their designated status, for example, asylum seekers were prohibited from taking up employment or moving to higher education. In addition, some students would move to larger cities once refugee status had been obtained, particularly as refugees were required to move out of temporary accommodation within seven days once refugee status had been granted. It was confirmed that the group sought to support students wherever possible, for example, by using bursary funding.

Governors **noted** the update on sustained destinations, including data for vulnerable cohorts.

SIC23/50 Agenda Item 10 – Governor teaching and training walkthroughs

A report had been circulated reminding members of the option to arrange learning walks. The committee Chair reported that she would undertake a learning walk at Bede Sixth Form on 19 October and would provide feedback to a future meeting of the committee.

Governors **agreed** to remind all governors of the value of learning walks and encourage governors to undertake these as part of committee feedback to the FE Corporation.

SIC23/51 Agenda Item 11 – Policies and Strategies

11.1 Relationships and Behaviour Policy (2023-24)

The Manager of Student Services - Curriculum and Support presented the circulated policy and clarified that this had been updated to reflect current practice, particularly use of trauma-informed practice. In response to a governor's query relating to how the policy would be presented to staff and the level of confidence that all staff were aware of the revised policy, it was confirmed that the Group Head of Student Support and Wellbeing attended curriculum manager meetings to cascade information. A governor suggested that it would be helpful to provide a summary for staff, as it was a very long document.

Governors **approved** the updated Relationships and Behaviour Policy.

11.2 Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy

The Group Director of Quality presented the circulated Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy, which was planned for launch in early November. Governors commended the

focussed presentation, links to strategic objectives and involvement of students. A governor queried whether additional detailed guidance would be provided to support teachers and assessors, for example, in relation to the incremental coaching model. The Group Director of Quality clarified that he had asked to attend departmental meetings to discuss the approach with curriculum teams. He clarified that incremental coaching would replace annual observations, reflecting research evidence of the success of this approach in improving teaching and learning. In response to a further query, the Group Director of Quality clarified that coaches would be drawn from colleagues that had applied for coaching roles and from the existing management team.

A governor commented that there were few photos of students from ethnic backgrounds other than white used within the Strategy document. It was agreed that the Group Director of Marketing would be asked to clarify the rationale for selection of photographs.

Governors **approved** the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy.

11.3 T Levels Strategy / Monitoring

The Executive Principal SRC presented her circulated report clarifying the rationale for proposing to cease the T Level Implementation Strategy and to move to a focus on monitoring the quality of student experience. Proposed terms of reference for a T Level Quality Assurance Forum had been circulated. The T Level link governor commended the comprehensive information provided.

Governors **agreed** to cease operation of a T Level Strategy and to support the introduction of a T Level Quality Assurance Group. It was **agreed** that regular updates from the T Level Quality Assurance Group should be presented to the Standards Improvement Committee.

SIC23/52 Agenda Item 12 – Committee performance, membership, terms of reference and cycle of business

The Clerk presented the circulated report on committee membership, performance in 2022-23, proposed amendments to the SIC terms of reference and a cycle of business for 2023-24. Governors commended the comprehensive review and:

- i) **agreed** that the committee had met its terms of reference in 2022-23;
- ii) **recommended** the updated terms of reference to the FE Corporation for approval

SIC23/53 Agenda Item 13 – Any Other Business

There were no items of additional business.

SIC23/54 Agenda Item 14 - Approval of Documents for Public Inspection

It was **agreed** that the agenda of the current meeting and the report to Items 10 (Governor Teaching and Training Walkthroughs) and 12 (Committee Performance, Membership, Terms of Reference and Cycle of Business) would be made available for public inspection. Policies, strategies and other documents considered under Items 8.2 and 11 (Higher Skills Strategy, Relationships and Behaviour Policy, Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy, T Level Quality Assurance Group terms of reference) would be published in final form. All other supporting documents were deemed confidential for reasons of commerciality. Minutes would be made available following approval and consideration at the next meeting.

SIC23/55 Agenda Item 15 – Date, time and venue of next meeting

Thursday 16 November 2023 at 5.30 pm via Teams

SIC23/56 Agenda Item 16 – Meeting review and key themes

Attendees commented that items included on the agenda had been explored appropriately and all attendees confirmed that they felt they had had the opportunity to contribute. Governors also commended the quality of reports provided. In particular, it was noted that there had been helpful discussion relating to grading of skills judgements in self assessment reports and clarity on the agreed lines of enquiry for the group.

The following key themes were identified:

- Presentation on Construction, Professional and Service Industries department
- Review of individual college Self Assessment Reports and recommended group Self Assessment Report, subject to validation
- Good progress achieved against Group Improvement Plans and college areas for improvement – 2023-24 Group Development Plans would take into account regional and national priorities
- Quality outcomes reviewed, including outcomes for subcontracted provision; compliance with the Education and Funding Agency's subcontracting guidance confirmed by the strategic lead for subcontracting
- Very positive outcomes in National Student Survey 2023 and plans in place to address areas of concern; strong HE and Skills Strategy recommended for approval
- Destinations for students generally positive but some concern about poorer destination data for Children in Our Care and ethnic minority adults; group support to asylum seekers discussed
- Commended the clarity of the revised Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy; and approved the Relationships and Behaviour Policy (2023-24) and arrangements for monitoring T Level progress

Approved at a meeting held on 16 November 2023