

## Standards Improvement Committee Minutes

Meeting held on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> March 2024 at 5.30 pm, Room 043, Bede Sixth Form College

**Committee members:** Grant Glendinning (Chief Executive and Group Principal), Dot Smith (Chair) and Gary Wright

**Apologies:** Liz Dixon (staff governor), Lorraine Preston (staff governor) and Bernice Wood (co-opted member)

**Officials:** 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 (Director NETA Training), Patrick Jordan (College Principal Bede), Sarah Thompson (Clerk to the Corporation), Peter Wood (Group Director of Quality) and Sam Young (Governance Support Officer)

*For agenda item 2 only:* Ian Hewitt (Strategic Manager of Sport & Enrichment, Bede), Amelia Hyndman (Student, Full-time Sport and Exercise Science) and Meg Owen (Student, Criminology, Sociology and Sport Science)

*Phil Hastie joined the meeting via Teams.*

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### **SIC24/01 Agenda Item 1 – Welcome, apologies for absence, declarations of interest, notification of items of other business**

The Chair welcomed governors and officials to the meeting; she added that, at the end of the meeting, governors would be asked whether they had received sufficient assurance on the controls in place, about the appropriateness of the net and target risk scores and whether there were any risks or opportunities that were missing or had not been considered in relation to Strategic Risk 8 (STR0008): Curriculum and Strategic Risk 9 (STR0009): Quality of the student experience.

Apologies for absence had been received from Liz Dixon, Lorraine Preston and Bernice Wood and were **accepted**; a quorum was present and the required meeting notice of seven calendar days had been given. There were no declarations of interest in items on the agenda and no items of additional business were notified for consideration.

### **SIC24/02 Agenda Item 2 – Institute of Sport and Education (ISE) presentation**

*Ian Hewitt, Strategic Manager of Sport & Enrichment, and Amelia Hyndman and Meg Owen, Bede students, joined the meeting.*

The Strategic Manager of Sport & Enrichment presented to governors on the Bede Institute of Sport and Education (ISE). He outlined the Institute's purpose, to "Be the Tees-Valley Sixth Form of choice for talented athletes", as well as strategic objectives, current offer and programmes, impact/recruitment, success stories and future plans. He highlighted, in

particular, the aspiration to support students to move to professional or semi professional sporting careers and the exponential growth in ISE student numbers since its establishment. [REDACTED]

Governors thanked the Strategic Manager of Sport & Enrichment and the students for the excellent presentation and congratulated the students on their achievements, recognising that the sporting opportunities offered to students through the facility were at the highest level. [REDACTED]

Governors commented that the enthusiasm and passion of staff and students, as well as the fantastic success stories and ambitious future plans, should be celebrated more loudly; it was recognised that this would help raise aspirations, as well as drive recruitment. The Strategic Manager of Sport & Enrichment reported that videos and profiles of students were created but acknowledged that the profile of ISE could be raised, both within the Etc. group and more widely.

Governors also asked how the ISE offer could benefit more students across Etc., as part of the group's collaborative work. [REDACTED]

Governors **noted** the presentation and commended the Strategic Manager of Sport & Enrichment for his drive, ambition and success with ISE, as well as recognising the commitment and dedication of ISE coaches and students.

*Ian Hewitt, Amelia Hyndman and Meg Owen left the meeting.*

#### **SIC24/03 Agenda Item 3 – Minutes of Previous Meeting**

Minutes of the Standards Improvement Committee meeting held on 16 November 2023 had been circulated and were **approved** as an accurate record. The action progress log had been circulated and was **noted**; with updates as follows:

- The majority of actions were completed or to be covered on the agenda for this meeting
- Ongoing support was being given to presenters to ensure appropriate length and focus
- Governors **agreed** to mark the action relating to requesting departmental development plans of interest and arranging attendance at departmental Business Planning / Performance Review (BP / PR) meetings as completed and **noted** that documentation or arrangements for attendance could be requested from the Governance Team at any time.

#### **SIC24/04 Agenda Item 4 – Apprenticeships**

The Chair highlighted that apprenticeships remained a standing agenda item. The Group Director of Quality supplemented the circulated report with a presentation focused on current data, which was made available to committee members following the meeting. Key points included:

- Achievement by Standard for 2022-23 highlighting those Standards to which the group had stopped recruiting [REDACTED]
- Explanation of underperformance which was being addressed through:
  - improved Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)
  - recruitment better aligned to End Point Assessment (EPA) dates

- more rigour during the first weeks of the apprenticeship, ensuring the right apprentice was with the right employer and on the right standard
- Withdrawal reasons analysed, evidencing the impact of the pandemic on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), poor IAG and lack of buy-in from employers.
- 2022-23 achievement, with Standards now not offered excluded, benchmarked against a national achievement rate of 57% which illustrated that a streamlined curriculum offer would lead to improved achievement rates
- Predicted achievement rates for current Standards offered evidencing the attention to detail from curriculum teams, addressing specific issues line by line
- Summary of key improvement measures:
  - Annual 360° review of apprenticeship curriculum offer
  - Greater group cohesion and use of Bootcamp and Bespoke Employer Led Programmes (BELPs) where demand for a Standard was low
  - Improved rigour of sign up, increased communication between Business Development and curriculum teams and ensuring end dates aligned to EPA windows
  - Regular in year progress review meetings and line by line review of progress and actions for cause for concern apprentices
  - Curriculum reviews aligned to the Ofsted Education Inspection Framework

In response to a governor's question about no fault withdrawals where an employer withdrew due to lack of work, the Group Director of Quality confirmed that the apprentice would receive support and that endeavours would be made to find an alternative employer.

Noting that some apprentices had withdrawn due to being unable to complete the full apprenticeship requirements with their employer, a governor asked if there had been any progress on employers' requests for flexible apprenticeship models, as referenced in the Tees Valley Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP). The Chief Executive and Group Principal confirmed that flexi apprenticeships had been trialled but had proved difficult to administer due to working with multiple employers; although they could work in, for example, higher level construction degree apprenticeships, he was not sure that Etc. offered any apprenticeships suitable to be delivered flexibly. However, this did highlight the importance of not signing apprentices up for Standards they would be unable to complete with their employer and the group's focus remained to offer fewer Standards of higher quality.

[REDACTED]

A governor asked if management was confident that the apprenticeships now offered aligned to skills priorities and labour market needs. The Group Director of Quality confirmed that strategic leads met regularly to discuss regional needs and meeting the skills agenda and that apprenticeship provision had been reviewed through Business Planning / Performance Review (BP/PR). [REDACTED]

Governors **noted** the update and presentation and thanked senior managers for their work delivering improvements to date; committee discussions and oversight would be reported to the next Corporation meeting.

## **SIC24/05 Agenda Item 5 – Quality and Performance Update**

The Group Director of Quality presented an update and highlighted that this included a comparison against local authority school attendance data; current data for UK schools showed an absence rate of 7%, with persistent absence just over 20%. The Association of Colleges (AoC) was currently surveying colleges on both staff and student absence which should provide comparative benchmarking data but, anecdotally, college attendance was between 85% and 90%. The Assistant Principal RCC was currently developing an attendance strategy to be used across the group. Behaviour across the group was considered a strength though with occasional exceptions linked to the ongoing effects of interruptions to schooling and therefore impacts on resilience and study skills. Behaviour management was a focus. The importance of developing learners' employability skills was acknowledged by governors.

The Executive Principal RCC & NETA added that, following data analysis, the Assistant Principal RCC had identified that only [REDACTED] RCC students were persistently absent and, if these were discounted from the data, attendance would increase to [REDACTED]. It was, therefore, important to support each individual persistent absentee student, rather than simply withdrawing them from the college, and develop a narrative as evidence of support and its impact.

The Chief Executive and Group Principal added that attendance data had been discussed at a recent AoC North East Principals' Forum and that most colleges had similar attendance rates at 86% to 87%; it had also been noted that, rather than sharing attendance targets at inspections, the focus should be on what measures the college was taking to improve attendance. Governors agreed that the emphasis should be on the impact of the support provided, both financial and pastoral.

The Group Director of Quality added that the retention data was compelling as it demonstrated that staff were working hard to ensure students achieved even where their attendance was lower; it was noted that in the Stockton local authority area secondary school attendance was around 90% and that in Redcar, year 7 attendance was around 94% but, in some schools, dropped below 80% by year 11. The College Principal Bede reported from a recent Secondary School Heads Forum that the local authority approach was that schools should not be excluding and instead supporting students with low attendance rates.

The Group Director of Quality outlined the group's work with the FE Commissioner on Teaching and Learning values and expectations aimed at refining Etc. pedagogy which would support teaching staff induction, continuing professional development (CPD) and coaching.

Governors **noted** the key quality data, with in year attendance comparable to the previous year and in year retention currently at [REDACTED]; the development of narratives to support attendance data and anecdotal regional benchmarking were noted with interest.

## **SIC24/06 Agenda Item 6 – Group Development Plans 2023-24**

The Group Director of Quality explained that the two apprenticeship and Teaching and Learning Group Development Plans (GDPs) had already been covered in detail under agenda item 4 and that All about ME (Maths and English) weeks had been developed as part of the 16-

18 GCSE High Grades GDP. Updates following PR6 were being finalised and would shortly be available for governors on the Etc. Governors' SharePoint.

Governors **noted** the update and **agreed** that they had gained assurance from the report and the detailed discussions on apprenticeships that positive progress was being made on GDPs.

#### **SIC24/07 Agenda Item 7 – Areas for improvement update**

A summary of progress on areas for development identified in College Self Assessment Reports (SARs) and not included in GDPs had been circulated with the following discussed in greater detail:

##### Bede

[REDACTED]

##### NETA

[REDACTED]

##### Redcar and Cleveland College

The Executive Principal RCC highlighted that skills language was now aligned to employers, civic and community, with increased levels of employer engagement in curriculum design, work experience and placements. [REDACTED]

##### Stockton Riverside College

Governors highlighted the encouraging update on employer engagement [REDACTED]

Discussion then focused on whether report writers were overly tempted to focus on the positive, with the potential to bring positivity bias to the board, and whether areas for improvement were presented to governors allowing them to challenge and support. It was noted that, at the end of the meeting, governors should reflect on their ability to challenge and whether they felt something had been overlooked. The Chief Executive and Group Principal appreciated this fair challenge, whilst recognising that, when striving to improve, senior managers wanted to emphasise the positive; he agreed that cultural or tonal considerations should be considered by the executive, with consideration of the concerns that needed to be highlighted. It was also noted that the GDPs highlighted the group's priorities in terms of areas for improvement and that there was regular reporting on the response to the challenge in apprenticeships.

Governors **noted** the comprehensive overview of identified areas for development and verbal updates from college principals and the Director NETA Training; governors were pleased that college principals found the reporting helpful, noting that it was good for the committee to hear about individual college issues.

#### **SIC24/08 Agenda Item 8 – Subcontracting Quality Monitoring**

The Executive Principal RCC & NETA highlighted that the first round of quality monitoring visits with all subcontractors were taking place, [REDACTED] Quality monitoring visits had been positive and current retention rates were high, with some increased contract values recently approved by the FE Corporation. To mitigate the impact on students should Etc. need to

withdraw from a subcontract provider due to quality issues, qualifications had been reviewed to reduce risk and focus on shorter courses.

[REDACTED]

Governors **noted** the update and expressed confidence in quality monitoring arrangements for subcontracting.

#### **SIC24/09 Agenda Item 9 – Personal Development update**

The Group Director of Quality presented the circulated update and highlighted that feedback on personal development in Learner Survey (LS) 1 had been strong, showing [REDACTED] agreement. He added that governors had seen evidence of the impact of the Bede personal development offer on ISE learners earlier in the meeting. Cross group personal development activities listed in the report showed range and creativity, with curriculum teams strongly supporting the connections between students' studies and careers advice and signposting.

Referencing a student governor's comments at the last FE Corporation meeting about extending enrichment coverage related to Prevent, the Chief Executive and Group Principal highlighted the need to also prepare students for the language used by Ofsted inspectors. The Group Director of Quality highlighted that Cleveland Police had recently supported events in college but that Prevent did need reviewing, also suggesting the use of ten-minute takeovers to sense check using Ofsted language. The Executive Principal RCC confirmed that weekly themes were circulated for Meet and Greet activities and, with over four thousand interactions with students, provided very powerful evidence of the strength of personal development at Etc.

Governors **noted** the update and, in particular, the Group's strengths in personal development but that promotion and engagement in cross-college extra-curricular activities was an area for development.

#### **SIC24/10 Agenda Item 10 – Work Experience and Industry Placements**

[REDACTED]

She clarified the work experience expectations for vocational learners; at Level 1, the 20 hours could be completed onsite, at Level 2, the 20 hours had to be external, and at Level 3, one week of external work experience would be undertaken during year 1 with two further weeks in year 2. She confirmed that these targets were achievable and that Work Experience co-ordinators were confident they could be delivered. Virtual work experience demonstrated how the group contributed to meeting skills needs and these interactions with employers amounted to over 3000 hours involving just over 1500 students.

A governor asked if it was legitimate to use the term Work Experience for these virtual sessions and the Executive Principal SRC agreed that a change of title could be considered as they were more about student interactions with employers and skills needs, rather than true work experience.

A governor asked whether different departments and group sites scheduled work experience differently to suit programme needs, [REDACTED] although every scheme of work included a

minimum of two employer contacts, for example a mock interview week for Year 13 students involving local employers, there was no requirement for A Level students to undertake work experience. Public services and sports coaching students had all completed their work experience and some would be done at the end of courses.

A governor asked about the status of Business and Admin Support T Level placements and it was confirmed that a phased approach was being taken, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Governors **noted** the update, commenting on the evidence of successful student placements through positive student stories and supporting the decision to tender new software to track work experience and placements.

#### **SIC24/11 Agenda Item 11 – Higher Education Update**

The Executive Principal SRC and Higher Education (HE) presented the circulated update [REDACTED] Performing Arts provision had changed to non-prescribed Level 4 Adult Education Budget (AEB) funded provision as students enrolled on the CertHE had to draw down a year of student loan. It was confirmed that the report only included data on Teesside University College Partnership (TUCP) provision. The report had provided verbal feedback from the Teesside University Ofsted inspection of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes at Etc. which had been positive; the Executive Principal SRC also gave a verbal update on the Teesside University Institutional Review which had taken place that day. The feedback had also been positive, with a small number of recommendations and many areas of good practice identified.

The committee asked the Executive Principal SRC to pass on their thanks and congratulations to Becky Cadden, Assistant Principal SRC.

The Chief Executive and Group Principal offered to circulate a research report on college delivered HE within TUCP; he added that the model in the Tees Valley was quite innovative as most FE delivery of HE was based on a franchise model. The strategic workshop held in January had resulted in a resolution to explore strengthening the partnership potentially through a joint venture model and the results of an application to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to support development of the TUCP brand were awaited.

Governors **noted** the update and the positive internal survey results and external assurance gained on the quality of HE provision at Etc.

#### **SIC24/12 Agenda Item 12 – Governor teaching and training walkthroughs**

No governor learning walks had been undertaken since the last meeting of the committee. However, Dot Smith confirmed that she had arranged some walkthroughs at RCC with the Group Director of Quality to take place the following day. It was also noted that Bernice Wood had visited the new Hair and Beauty facilities at SRC with colleagues from RCC.

Governors **agreed** to consider undertaking learning walks and to remind all governors of their value and encourage them to undertake these.

### **SIC24/13 Agenda Item 13 – Relationships and Behaviour Policy**

Governors **approved** the proposed amendments to the Relationships and Behaviour Policy and that the policy should be reviewed by the committee in March 2025.

### **SIC24/14 Agenda Item 14 – Any Other Business**

There were no additional items of business.

### **SIC24/15 Agenda Item 15 – Approval of Documents for Public Inspection**

It was **agreed** that the agenda of the current meeting be made available for public inspection; supporting documents were deemed confidential for reasons of commerciality, with the exception of the presentation for agenda item 2 and the report for agenda item 12. The policy considered at Item 13 would be published in finalised form on the Etc. website. Minutes would be made available following approval and consideration at the next meeting.

### **SIC24/16 Agenda Item 16 – Date, time and venue of next meeting**

Thursday 13 June 2024 at 5.30 pm, Redcar & Cleveland College

### **SIC24/17 Agenda Item 17 – Meeting Effectiveness and Key themes**

- i) Meeting effectiveness and impact, particularly examples of exceptionality:
  - The presentation by Ian Hewitt and the Bede ISE students was seen as an example of exceptionality
  - Governor challenge on potential positivity bias in reports would be reflected on by senior managers

- ii) Strategic risks relevant to the committee were discussed:

#### STR0008 – Curriculum (Risk owner – Chief Executive and Group Principal)

As risk owner, the Chief Executive and Group Principal agreed that there had been robust discussions about work experience [REDACTED]. In response to a governor's query about whether the curriculum supported staff, the Executive Principal SRC highlighted that the curriculum was developed to work to staff strengths, staff taught in their areas of expertise and managers were robust about staff not working over contracted hours. Staff were also equipped to the best of the group's ability through regular CPD. The Group Director of Quality highlighted that a collaborative approach was taken to curriculum planning, stemming from the work undertaken to prepare for the introduction of T Levels. Governors **agreed** that they were comfortable with the target and net risk scores.

#### STR0007 – Quality of the student experience (Risk owner – Group Director of Quality)

Governors **agreed** that the very low target risk score was appropriate for this risk. [REDACTED]. Governors suggested that controls could be updated to be made more specific and discussed whether actions needed to be incorporated and reported; it was, however, decided that the two Apprenticeships GDPs added a level of assurance and that this could be reflected in the risk controls. Managers would consider whether the development of an Apprenticeship risk report would be of value.

In response to a governor's request, the Governance Support Officer **agreed** to circulate the risk matrix scoring.



iii) The following key themes were identified:

- Presentation on the impact and growth of the Institute of Sport and Education from the Strategic Manager and students; students' and sports teams' achievements recognised as an example of exceptionalism and consideration of expanding the ISE model cross-group
- Detailed discussion on apprenticeships, the impact of historical issues and key improvement strategies; development of narrative to evidence good practice in apprenticeships
- In year attendance data and strategies to support persistent absentees; strong in year retention rates
- Assurance on progress against Group Development Plans and college areas for development; effective use of rapid improvement plans cross-group following their original implementation at Redcar and Cleveland College
- Discussion of possible positivity bias in reports to governors
- Tender under development for a new software package to improve work experience reporting and monitoring; assurance that despite software issues work experience opportunities were being delivered as planned, with student placement successes noted
- Positive feedback from Ofsted inspection of Initial Teacher Education and Teesside University Institutional Review
- Consideration of Strategic Risks 8: Curriculum and 9: Quality of the Student Experience; assurance gained on plans to mitigate apprenticeship risk whilst recognising the continued need for scrutiny to ensure evidence of impact

*(The meeting ended at 7.35 pm)*

**Approved at a meeting held on 13 June 2024**