

Standards Improvement Committee Minutes

Meeting held on Thursday 14th May 2020 at 5.30 pm via Zoom

Members present: Sam Beel, Ken Bowes-Dalton, Phil Cook (Chief Executive and Group Principal), Vanessa Housley, James Ruddock, Dot Smith, Mark White and Gary Wright (Careers Link Governor)

Apologies: There were no apologies from committee members

Officials: Liz Boynton (Group Director of Quality), Lesley Graham (College Principal SRC), Phil Hastie (Group Executive Director Planning and Infrastructure), Mark Moore (Group Head of Student Services), Mandy Morris (Group Vice Principal Curriculum and Development), Gary Potts (Group Director of Business Engagement), Ben Robinson (College Principal Bede), Sarah Thompson (Clerk to the Corporation), Alys Tregear (Deputy Group Head of Student Services) and Sam Young (Governance Support Officer)

The Chair thanked staff for all the support to students at this time and for the quality of the reports for this meeting; she also commented on the helpful layout of the agenda. She welcomed Vanessa Housley and Ken Bowes-Dalton to their first Standards Improvement Committee meeting. There were no conflicts of interest declared and no items of other business notified under agenda item 16.

SIC20/14 Agenda Item 1 – Minutes of Previous Meeting

Minutes of the Standards Improvement Committee meeting held on 13 February 2020 had been circulated and were **approved** as an accurate record.

Members considered the actions arising from previous meetings and noted those completed. Members **agreed** to remove three actions no longer applicable.

Position Statement Pre COVID-19 measures (20 March 2020)

SIC20/15 Agenda Item 2 – Update re College Performance (QAR)

The Group Director of Quality highlighted from her previously circulated report that, in the Group's first year since merger, Group achievement rates for 2018-19 compared against the Qualification Achievement Rate (QAR) report and National Achievement Rate Tables (NARTs) were strong and provided a firm foundation. Achievement rates compared favourably against a control group of six other college groups whose mergers also took place on 1 August 2018.

The Chair confirmed for members that the 2018-19 data would be used for Etc.'s first full Ofsted inspection and the Group Director of Quality added that, although there remained some pockets of underperformance, systemically performance was positive. A member highlighted that, [redacted] Hartlepool College's achievement rate for GCSE maths represented a clear outlier and asked if the reason for this was known. The Group Director of Quality explained that, whilst not knowing the answer, it could be the result of a particularly strong maths department or a specific enrolment strategy. In response to a member's question on the disparity between GCSE English and maths achievement rates, the Group Director of Quality explained that GCSE maths had been identified as an area for improvement and progress had been monitored in 2019-20 through a specific Group Improvement Plan (GIP).

Members **noted** the update.

SIC20/16 Agenda Item 3 – Group Improvement Plans – progress update

The Group Director of Quality emphasised that the six GIPs had provided consistency and firm foundations for improvement during the year with the developmental deep dive programme enabling accurate progress updates. With the suspension of face to face teaching on 20 March, it had been recognised that some actions would need to be carried forward into 2020-21; GIPs would be reviewed during the end of year self assessment process.

In response to a member's question regarding information required by the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA), the Group Vice Principal Curriculum and Development outlined the specific destinations data provided for TVCA funded Adult Education Budget (AEB) students only.

The Group Director of Quality highlighted progress on the Instructional Leadership action plan, included with the meeting papers. Its implementation had increased the skills of middle managers to make accurate observations and use that information to drive specific improvements. Department-led audits into the quality of SMART targets and feedback to learners, with the results sampled by the quality team, had demonstrated that managers had become more accurate in their judgements overall; a presentation given by the Bede Year 12 and 13 managers at the last meeting had provided evidence to members of the professional dialogue brought about by the developmental deep dive process. Having been temporarily halted by measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the intention was to continue with the deep dive process as soon as possible.

The Chair commented that the format of the action plans had made it easy to see progress and members noted that progress on all GIPs in 2018-19 would be reported at the next Standards Improvement Committee (SIC) in October.

A member asked whether the second round of developmental deep dives, if it had taken place, would have identified more challenging issues. The Group Director of Quality assured members that even in the pilot stages there had been some challenging discussions, [redacted]. A key focus was to gain an understanding of programme areas and take specific actions to drive improvement.

In response to a member's question on plans for areas to be covered in the next round of deep dives, the Group Director of Quality confirmed that all departments and all managers or heads of department had been involved in the first round, with a broad approach of looking at departments rather than individual courses. [Redacted] The second wave of deep dives planned to cover accountancy, 16-18 provision, and apprenticeships. The Chief Executive added, once an action plan had been developed from a deep dive, resolution of actions was expected within agreed timeframes; anything significant identified as systemic would be added to GIPs. The Group Director of Quality also explained the importance of the Performance Review (PR) process and identified that, during PR6, departments not only had to give progress updates but also evaluate the impact of completed actions.

The Group Director of Quality confirmed that the COVID Instructional Leadership Action Plan focused on greater use of learning technology and on developing guidance around online learning.

Members **noted** the update.

SIC20/17 Agenda Item 4 – Attendance, Retention and Progress

The Group Director of Quality reported on 2019-20 retention rates up to March 2020; 2018-19 retention rates had generally been above national rates (NRs) and further improvements had been made into 2019-20. In terms of apprenticeships, retention in the relatively new apprenticeship standards had improved significantly compared to March 2019 [redacted]. Significant work on ensuring accurate marking of registers had allowed identification of underperforming areas; [redacted].

A member commented on the significant improvement in retention at NETA and the Group Director of Quality agreed that this was a positive impact from much more timely intervention at NETA in 2019-20, including increased contact with parents. [Redacted]. The College Principal Bede confirmed that the 2018-19 retention rate had been so far above NR that it had not been expected to be sustained or improved on; this had been considered in target setting.

The Group Director of Quality referenced her report for Agenda Item 10 (Post COVID-19 Quality Update) and explained that, as of 7 May, retention remained high

though maintaining engagement with learners on more practical courses had been identified as a risk. She noted that attendance data, based on learner engagement through Teams, differed to standard attendance measures; securing valid data through Teams analytics was an ongoing focus. It was too soon to predict the impact of remote learning on completion rates.

Members **noted** the update.

SIC20/18 Agenda Item 5 – Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment

The Group Director of Quality highlighted that a more holistic approach had been taken to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment (TLA) this year, with many positives identified through teaching and training walkthroughs. The Redcar Learning Coach, in particular, had been proactive and supportive in the drive for improvement. Since Easter, the Teaching and Training Manager had completed walkthroughs of 18 online delivery sessions on Teams, with feedback and support to staff, with a view to identifying good practice to inform future delivery with Teams. Headline learner satisfaction rates from Learner Survey 1 (LS1) had been provided and results from the recently commenced online learner survey would also be evaluated. In terms of external verification and moderation, the Group had built on the strong position in 2018-19; plans were in place to meet all awarding body deadlines to ensure students received their qualifications in a timely manner though completion of some competence-based qualifications could be delayed.

Members **noted** the update.

SIC20/19 Agenda Item 6 – Deep Dive Strategy Implementation

The Group Director of Quality explained that her previously circulated report outlined progress on the Deep Dive Strategy up to early March and added that staff had engaged well, responding positively to the process.

Members **noted** the update.

Strategic Development

SIC20/20 Agenda Item 7 – Bede Timetabling Change

The College Principal Bede introduced his report detailing stakeholder responses on a proposed change to the Bede Sixth Form College timetable; the most significant change proposed was to start teaching at 10.00 am.

A member asked whether the student contact hours and staff teaching hours at Bede had been benchmarked. The College Principal Bede explained that these had been benchmarked in March 2020. A full-time equivalent member of staff currently

had 23 hours 20 minutes teaching per week, which closely matched the Sixth Form Colleges' Association average, and students were allocated 4 hours 40 minute per subject each week, slightly above the national average of 4 hours 30 minutes.

The Corporation Chair confirmed that he had been kept informed during the consultation and felt that it had been thorough, with statements of support from stakeholders, including the MP for Stockton North. The College Principal Bede added that, having discussed the later start time with a selection of secondary headteachers, there had been no opposition. A member acknowledged the research on sleep patterns in adolescents but asked if consideration had been given to work readiness, given earlier starting times in employment. The College Principal Bede confirmed that this had been considered but that typically Bede students would have reached adulthood by the end of their educational pathway; in addition, employment patterns were also becoming more flexible. He emphasised that the building would still be open from 7.45 am for staff and students.

Members **noted** the report and supported the proposal to change the teaching start time at Bede Sixth Form College.

Agenda Item 8 – Higher Education Update and Strategy

SIC20/21 Agenda Item 8.1 - Higher Education Skills Strategy and Action Plan

The College Principal SRC, also Strategic Lead for Higher Education (HE), introduced the previously circulated HE and Skills Strategy which covered a three year period to 2022-23. Three strategic priorities had been identified – curriculum innovation, learning and teaching and the student experience – with an action plan for each and key performance indicators against which progress would be measured. In developing the HE and Skills Strategy, consultation had taken place with Etc. HE lecturers and students and with Teesside University.

In response to a member's question on the range of subjects offered at HE level, the College Principal SRC confirmed that curriculum innovation would be tailored to meet local skills needs, for example, manufacturing at RCC, or the creation of a more diverse portfolio, for example, technical arts at SRC and professional services at Bede. A member asked about the potential to offer HE students at SRC a dedicated space and the College Principal SRC agreed that the HE student experience at SRC would benefit from the same bespoke facilities as at RCC. Due to the financial implications, this could only be achieved in phases and would need to be matched by an increase in HE student numbers; the first phase could be to provide a common room for HE students at SRC.

Members **noted** the HE and Skills Strategy.

SIC20/22 Agenda Item 8.2 – Higher Education Update

The College Principal confirmed that her report gave an update on current enrolments and applications for 2020-21. Marketing and student engagement activity had continued online, including an Educating Engineers campaign in conjunction with local employers.

Members **noted** the update.

SIC20/23 Agenda Item 9 – Distance Learning

The Group Director of Business Engagement outlined the current range and structure of distance learning provision and, in particular, the subcontract arrangements with The Skills Network (TSN). Quality issues identified at RCC in 2018-19 had been addressed and initial feedback from the internal audit of Etc.'s distance learning provision by AuditOne in March had given significant assurance. The COVID-19 lockdown had initially brought a spike of enquiries but this was now tailing off as more people returned to work. For distance learning programmes, Etc. bought in online and paper-based materials from TSN and Learning Curve, with assessors closely monitoring completion and giving timely feedback.

In response to a member's question about strategic direction, the Chief Executive confirmed that, in terms of the broader development of remote learning, the Senior Management Team (SMT) would be considering Teaching and Training and IT strategies in early June. Curriculum development would be an important aspect though the Group Director of Business Engagement cautioned that this could be limited by the range of courses available from specialist distance learning providers. The College Principal SRC noted how well students had engaged with remote learning and believed that they would welcome the continuation of this alongside traditional delivery and the College Principal Bede added he had been impressed by the rapid switch to Teams delivery by teaching staff.

Members noted that the Teaching and Training and IT strategies would be considered at the Corporation meeting to be held on 4th July; the strategies would also be shared with co-opted members.

Members **noted** the update.

Post COVID-19 Report

SIC20/24 Agenda Item 10 – Post COVID-19 Quality Update

The Group Director of Quality confirmed that much of her report had been covered in previous agenda items. The current online survey had already had over a hundred

responses and would run until the end of the following week. Apprenticeships had been most heavily impacted by COVID-19, with many apprentices furloughed, and this would continue to be an area of provision adversely affected by any economic downturn.

A member asked if predicted grades for GCSEs and A Levels had been submitted and the Group Director of Quality confirmed that they were not yet due for submission. Students would be put in ranked order and predicted grades sent in during a 12-day window from 1st June; there would be a three stage checking process with the final sign off by college principals.

Members **noted** the update.

SIC20/25 Agenda Item 11 – Services to Vulnerable People

The Group Vice Principal Curriculum and Development updated members on actions to support vulnerable learners and, with a total of 976 learner contacts since lockdown, contact had been made with all vulnerable learners. Regular meetings were in place with Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton local authorities to discuss vulnerable young people's engagement and safety. An additional annex to the Safeguarding Policy had been drawn up based on government guidance and curriculum teams continued to raise concerns with welfare teams.

A member added that supporting vulnerable learners was incredibly challenging and was also a focus of Stockton primary and secondary heads forums; it could be useful for Etc. to be represented in the secondary school group. The Group Vice Principal Curriculum and Development would follow this up.

Members **noted** the update.

SIC20/26 Agenda Item 12 – Careers (progress against Gatsby Benchmarks)

The Deputy Group Head of Student Services highlighted that her previously circulated report gave an update on progress made in achieving the Gatsby Benchmarks. A whole-Group approach had been taken, with a strong focus on developing skills, behaviours and attitudes, underpinned by the vocational knowledge provided by tutors. There continued to be a real focus on careers in light of COVID-19, including supporting students whose plans had changed, support for those completing university or finance applications, and offering 1:1 guidance to help positive transitions particularly for vulnerable students. As Careers Leader, she was also using local and national networks to identify best practice.

The Deputy Group Head of Student Services added that she had presented on Benchmark 1 at a Careers Hub NE event held in Hartlepool and that the Careers Link

Governor had also spoken about how the Corporation Board supported Etc.'s Careers strategy.

Members **noted** the update.

SIC20/27 Agenda Item 13 – Pastoral Care Update

The Group Head of Student Services confirmed that, since lockdown due to COVID-19, many elements of the Pastoral Care GIP had been paused; behaviour management incidents had been reported up to 20th March and the last formal progress reviews had taken place in February. The current focus was now on learner engagement in online learning, achievement of qualifications and keeping learners safe.

Sam Beel left the meeting.

In response to a member's question about the 'Reason not recorded' category for behaviour management meetings, the Group Head of Student Services explained that this was due to how meetings were recorded in Individualised Learning Plans (ILPs) and staff had now received training on more accurate completion. The reason was usually detailed in the comments within the ILP and the majority referenced attendance and punctuality. The Group Vice Principal Curriculum and Development added that, as a result of COVID-19, the Pastoral Care GIP had been streamlined to reflect the current key priorities for supporting learners.

Members **noted** the update.

SIC20/28 Agenda Item 14 – Destinations Strategy

The Group Vice Principal Curriculum and Development summarised that the intention of the strategy was to capture destinations data more centrally and inform curriculum planning, including the establishment of a process and timeline for collecting positive destinations data, particularly for sustained destinations.

In response to a member's question, the Group Vice Principal Curriculum and Development confirmed that the Progression and Destination Strategy, including the collation of data, had been agreed by SMT in February; however, the timeline was being reviewed in the light of COVID-19. The Careers Link Governor added that he had valued the opportunity to work with the Group Vice Principal Curriculum and Development on this vital strategy and stressed the importance of recording and understanding destinations. Similarly, the Group Vice Principal Curriculum and Development had been interested in the NHS's approach to destinations and accountability measures.

Members **noted** the update.

Specific Report

SIC20/29 Agenda Item 15 – Construction, Engineering and Design (CED) Update

The College Principal SRC highlighted that, in response to an action from a previous meeting of the Standards Improvement Committee, her report gave an update on progress to date within the CED programme area. [Redacted] She outlined the key areas for improvement arising out of this 2018-19 self-assessment process, the initiatives implemented in 2019-20 to drive further improvements in CED and noted that, at the time of lockdown, a range of improvements had been identified, [redacted].

A member thanked the College Principal SRC for her balanced report [redacted] In response to another member's question, the College Principal SRC confirmed that, as one of Etc.'s largest provision areas, CED was likely to be a focus of an Ofsted inspection.

Members **noted** the update.

SIC20/30 Agenda Item 16 – Any Other Business

There were no items of other business.

SIC20/31 Agenda Item 17 - Approval of Documents for Public Inspection

It was **agreed** that the agenda and approved minutes would be made available for public inspection. All other items, except for the HE and Skills Strategy and Progression and Destination Strategy, were deemed to be confidential.

SIC20/32 Agenda Item 12 - Dates and times of future meetings

1 October 2020, 5.30 pm
19 November 2020, 5.30 pm
25 February 2020, 5.30 pm
20 May 2021, 5.30 pm

SIC20/33 Agenda Item 19 – Key Themes

The following key themes were identified:

- Position statements on pre COVID-19 measures, including performance data, Group Improvement Plans and Deep Dive Strategy implementation
- Consideration of strategic developments, including Bede timetabling change, Higher Education strategy and distance learning

- Post COVID-19 reports, including services to vulnerable learners and progress against Gatsby benchmarks
- Approval of the Progression and Destination Strategy and update on 2019-20 timeline
- Update on the Construction, Engineering and Design (CED) programme area

(The meeting ended at 7.30 pm)

Approved at a remote meeting

Date: 1st October 2020