Standards Improvement Committee Minutes

Meeting held on Thursday 23 January 2025 at 5.30 pm, via Teams

Committee members:	Liz Dixon (Staff Governor), Grant Glendinning (Chief Executive and Group Principal), Dot Smith (Chair), Jane Spence (Co-opted member) and Gary Wright (Safeguarding Link Governor)
Apologies:	There were no apologies from governors
In attendance:	Ofsted Group members: Stuart Blackett and David Watson Prospective committee members: Kirsty Wharton (Governor) and Lydia Jones (Student, Bede Sixth Form College)
Officials:	Rebecca Cadden (Vice Principal Curriculum, Stockton Riverside College), Jason Faulkner (Deputy Chief Executive Officer), Phil Hastie (Chief Operating Officer), Sarah Johnson (Vice Principal Curriculum, Redcar & Cleveland College), Sean Johnston (Director NETA Training), Patrick Jordan (College Principal Bede Sixth Form College), Erika Marshall (Group Director of Marketing and Business Engagement), Peter Wood (Group Director of Quality) Sarah Thompson (Group Director of Governance) and Sam Young (Governance Support Officer)

SIC25/1 Agenda Item 1 – Welcome, apologies for absence, declarations of interest, notification of items of other business

The Chair welcomed Jane Spence to her first meeting and Kirsty Wharton and Lydia Jones attending with a view to joining the committee; she added that apologies had been received from Lucas Rasmussen and Aishat Summonu who had been invited to attend following their interest in becoming student governors. Ofsted Group members had also been invited specifically for agenda item 4, Skills Lead Presentation, with Stu Blackett and David Watson attending and requesting to stay for the full meeting. There were no apologies for absence from committee members and no items of additional business had been notified. Gary Wright declared an interest, particularly under agenda item 6, as a senior manager working across the North and South Tees NHS trusts; there were no further declarations of interest in items on the agenda.

SIC25/2 Agenda Item 2 – Minutes of Previous Meeting

Minutes of the Standards Improvement Committee meeting held on 24 October 2024 had been circulated and were **approved** as an accurate record.

The committee chair asked for an update on Higher Education (HE). The Vice Principal (VP) Curriculum Stockton Riverside College (SRC) confirmed that the Partner's Report had been submitted and had been accepted and approved by the Teesside University Board. [REDACTED] A Counselling focus group had been established and, having met with first and second years, students had reported higher levels of satisfaction with

organisation and management; the VP Curriculum SRC confirmed that monitoring would continue. She added that student numbers in Counselling had reduced from the previous year with the BA programme no longer offered. She and the Deputy Chief Executive Officer had met with HE curriculum heads as part of the HE Strategy review; plans developed would be considered through Business Planning (BP) and inform the new strategy.

The action progress log had been circulated and was **noted**. The staff governor highlighted that, in response to her feedback at the last meeting, dedicated time had now been allocated for target setting, adding that staff had been very appreciative of the additional time. The Deputy Chief Executive Officer thanked the staff governor for bringing these time pressures to senior management's attention and confirmed that target setting days would also be built into timetables from the start of next academic year.

SIC25/3   **Agenda Item 3 – Managing risks**

The committee had been asked to review the risks allocated to the committee: STR0008: Curriculum Development and STR0009: Quality of Student Experience and Welfare; changes to risk scoring and controls added to STR009 had been outlined in the circulated report.

With reference to STR0009, the Group Director of Quality outlined the rationale for increasing the net risk score; this reflected that it would only take a small number of students having a bad experience to adversely affect the reputation of a course or college and of the additional support currently being provided to a small number of teaching colleagues.

The role of management in reviewing perceived risk and the FE Corporation's role in setting and reviewing risk appetite was noted and members supported the relatively low target risk given the low appetite for risks to student welfare. In response to members' questions, an explanation of the three levels of assurance and clarification of the process for feeding back governors' comments to the Risk Management Group (RMG) via the Governance Support Officer's attendance was provided.

Governors **noted** the risks relevant to the committee and that governor oversight should be added as a second line of assurance to appropriate controls; the committee chair highlighted that members should reflect on assurance gained or any concerns during the meeting.

SIC25/4   **Agenda Item 4 – Skills Lead Presentation**

The VP Curriculum SRC, also Ofsted Skills Lead, explained that, though it was uncertain whether there would be an opportunity to present specifically on skills, a presentation was under development. During a run through the following key points were highlighted:
- Strategic skills sectors, Tees Valley context and key curriculum advisory employers
- The mutually beneficial partnership with Stockton Globe
- Stakeholder involvement in the curriculum – health and social care, NHS trusts and local authorities – including work experience, masterclasses and co-assessment.

- Video on the theme of Community produced by four Etc. media and film students
- Importance of College of Sanctuary status
- Civic – Bespoke Employer Led Programmes (BELPs) and Bootcamp provision co-created with the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA)
- Education – engagement with Teesside University, FE+ and 56 secondary schools
- Impact – exceptional achievement rates and positive destinations: "if you get it right for the most vulnerable, you get it right for everyone"
- Skills initiatives – Bootcamps and BELPs aligned to industry needs
- Case studies
  - bp scholars – currently 41 scholars in years 1 and 2; year 1 cohort 50% female
  - Institute of Sport and Education (ISE) academies
  - Scaffolding apprentices

A member queried whether community and civic should be included in the Chief Executive and Group Principal's presentation rather than Skills; she also suggested that the presentation could focus on a priority sector, for example net zero, rather than links with Stockton Globe. The VP Curriculum SRC confirmed that the Skills inspection included civic, community, employer and education strands. The Chief Executive and Group Principal agreed that skills had a wider focus than just technical skills and that the presentation could be reordered to focus earlier on links with bp and the NHS, meeting regional skills needs. He added that he would be giving the main Ofsted presentation at the start of the first day of the full inspection, which would focus on the group's even greater achievements since the last inspection, and that cohesion and alignment between the two presentations would be developed. Following discussion, it was **agreed** that the presentation order should be amended to communicate the greatest strengths first and perhaps repeated at the end to reinforce the key messages with inspectors.

A member added that the community video had been impactful and powerful and that it might be valuable to have an employer video focusing on the difference working with the group makes to them; senior managers **agreed** to reflect on this suggestion.

Acknowledging that the presentation was in early development, the VP Curriculum thanked committee members for their input. Members **noted** the value of reviewing the Skills presentation for both the committee and Ofsted Group members.

SIC25/5 **Agenda Item 5 – Level 3 Qualifications Reform**

The Deputy Chief Executive Officer presented the circulated report and highlighted that the curriculum review was currently paused to allow for review of the planned cuts to Level 3 (L3) qualifications. In December 2024, the government had announced that 157 qualifications, including some in health and engineering that had been due to be defunded, would be retained but, with further review pending, it would be some time before the process was concluded.

A member commented that the rapid review had only included L3 qualifications but that a broader review was planned from autumn 2025; it was confirmed that L2 qualifications would be included in this next review and, with eight strands, the work would be complex.

The Deputy Chief Executive Officer hoped that the government would take a pragmatic approach.

A member then asked if there was any move to give 14-16 learners more access to vocational qualifications. The Deputy Chief Executive Officer explained that the Department for Education (DfE) was undertaking a full curriculum and assessment review with no outcomes available as yet; the group was involved in meetings with Stockton secondary schools at which there had been discussions on widening the offer to learners less focused on GCSEs.

Members **noted** the update, recognising the significant challenges and concerns caused by curriculum reform across the sector and the need to ensure that the curriculum remained accessible to all.

SIC25/6 **Agenda Item 6 – T Levels Position Paper**

The VP Curriculum SRC presented the circulated update on T Levels and explained that the group was now in its third year of delivering T Levels. Results from the first full Health and Early Years cohorts at both SRC and Redcar and Cleveland College (RCC) had been released in August 2024; these showed particular strength in high grades [REDACTED] Five T Level cohorts, in Early Years, Health, Construction, Engineering and Business, would be completing their programmes in summer 2025. [REDACTED] Curriculum reform had brought uncertainties, but with the recent announcements, the group would offer Construction as a L3 rather than a T Level qualification; T Levels in the other four curriculum areas continued to meet the skills needs of our local area and provided positive progression routes into highly skilled employment.

[REDACTED]. In response to a follow up question, the VP Curriculum RCC confirmed that the issues had been resolved for the current year and that retention rates on both health and early years had been more positive this year; however, there would be a continued impact from year 1 withdrawals.

A member asked if there had been any assessment of employer capacity to offer T Level placements. The VP Curriculum RCC admitted that it had been a challenge to find placements but that close links with the NHS had been valuable. T Level reforms had recognised the difficulties in providing the placement hours required with some broadening of the definition to include, for example, virtual placements. There was also a risk of T Level students being encouraged to switch to apprenticeships by employers whilst on placement and, although these would show in the data as withdrawals, case studies could demonstrate that, for the students, this was often a positive step.

Noting that the hair and beauty T Levels had been withdrawn, a member asked if there were any other T Level routes that might be removed. It was confirmed that the construction route had already been removed after just one year due to employer feedback and retention issues; current students would continue to the end of their T Level qualification. There was also some uncertainty around the introduction of new T Level routes from September 2025.

The committee **noted** the update and, whilst recognising their uncertain future, praised the exceptional performance for students completing T Levels in summer 2024, particularly at SRC, and the extremely positive benchmarking against national rates.

SIC25/7   **Agenda Item 7 – Group Development Plans**

The Group Director of Quality outlined the group's self assessment process for new committee members and confirmed that it resulted in a suite of Group Development Plans (GDPs) for the coming year, rather than one single quality improvement plan. Each GDP had a different Senior Management Team (SMT) lead, strengthening monitoring over the year. He added that, at the request of committee members, actions around student wellbeing had been reflected and included in the Enhancing the Curriculum GDP. The committee had also requested more explicit references to apprenticeships and, in response, the relevant provision type had now been added to each improvement action.

In response to a member's question, the Group Director of Quality clarified that the self assessment process took place at programme area level and then fed up to group level. He added that there were also development plans for each programme area which were subject to validation each October; governors were welcome to attend validation panels. Development plans were then monitored during the year through the Quarterly Review (QR) process.

A staff governor asked for further detail on the creation of an 'At Risk' dashboard and particularly whether this had the potential to duplicate work for staff. The College Principal Bede, lead for the Stretch and Challenge GDP, confirmed that the aim was to reduce workload; the dashboard would use metrics from ProMonitor or ProSolution to flag those 'at risk' using agreed parameters. Managers and teaching staff could then identify students for follow up; he added that this was a process that had been used successfully at Bede for the last three or four years.

The staff governor's comment prompted discussion of any other areas where staff were concerned about duplication of work; OneGrade and the Etc. Datahub were felt to be useful but the Skills Tracker often required information already logged for enrichment and work experience. It was **agreed** that relevant SMT members would review the interaction between some of the multiple systems used and the impact on staff workload and provide an update at the committee's next meeting.

A member then asked if there was a timeline for development of this 'At Risk' report by the Director of Digital Transformation; it was anticipated that the first version of this report would be in place by February half term.

A member commented on the impactful attendance strategies [REDACTED] The VP Curriculum RCC, Attendance GDP lead, confirmed that the current attendance rate was [REDACTED] but that the group, in line with the rest of the education sector, generally saw a dip in attendance post-Christmas. Expectation panels and Rapid Improvement Plans (RIPs) had been put in place in response. Attendance data represented a complex picture but some patterns were emerging, for example, in Electively Home Educated (EHE) students, with a small number of learners missing many sessions, correlating with

local authority data. Members acknowledged the rise in EHE pupils post-Covid, often related to poor mental health and wellbeing and an increase in Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs. Initial conversations had commenced with Redcar and Cleveland Local Authority around extended transition programmes and information sharing to smooth the transition to full-time college programmes and reduce withdrawal rates. King's Trust short programmes were being used to support transition.

The College Principal Bede added that the pre- and post-Christmas attendance dip had been worse nationally this year and that attendance rates at Etc. remained above local school data; absence rates in the north east in particular were alarmingly high. The Safeguarding and Prevent concerns arising from the rising levels of absence and EHE learners were recognised, with this being a focus for both local authorities and the government. The Deputy Chief Executive Officer confirmed that tutorial materials had been developed in response to the Southport trial as part of the group's work to keep our learners safe.

A member asked whether the vocational high grade target of [REDACTED] in the Stretch and Challenge GDP was realistic and for clarification of the timescale. The College Principal Bede explained that, given that this was currently between [REDACTED], the [REDACTED] target was not unachievable; he added that the timescale was the current academic year and that OneGrade would support by providing minimum and aspirational target grades. The ambition was for vocational high grades to be greater than [REDACTED].

A member asked whether OneGrade worked as effectively for vocational qualifications as for A Levels and the College Principal Bede explained that the initial proposal had been to roll out Bede's system cross-group but this had proved unsuitable and the new tool, OneGrade, worked across both academic and vocational. The VP Curriculum RCC confirmed that brick, carpentry and joinery were finding it a useful tool for progress tracking, flagging students 'at risk' and providing predicted grades. This was the first year the group had had progress monitoring in place cross-group and it was supporting raising aspirations and timely, focused interventions.

Governors **noted** the update on GDPs and commented that it had been helpful to receive the detailed plans.

SIC25/8   Agenda Item 8 – Areas for Development

Areas for development not explicitly covered within GDPs had been provided at appendix A; an update would be brought to each meeting if deemed useful by the committee. The template for monitoring programme area and departmental development plans through QRs had been included at appendix B. The report also included a suggested cycle for updating the committee on between two and four programme areas per meeting.

A member asked if there were any areas of concern or whether progress on areas for development was as expected; it was highlighted that apprenticeship curriculum intent remained an area of challenge, with regular monitoring meetings still in place. A member then queried whether, if senior managers felt comfortable with progress, more ambitious

targets were needed. In terms of apprenticeships, the Deputy Chief Executive Officer explained that the group still needed to drive improvements and respond to policy changes in a timely manner whilst recognising legacy issues.

In response to a member's question about group systems, the Chief Operating Officer clarified that these were well developed in some areas but connections between systems was an area of focus.

Governors **noted** the progress updates against areas for development and supported proposals to continue receiving these updates and feedback on a sample of QR reviews.

There was a short break.

SIC25/9   Agenda Item 9 – Quality and performance update

The Group Director of Quality presented the quality and performance update covering attendance, in year retention and apprenticeships; he confirmed that apprenticeship forecasted achievement rates had been based on regular monitoring meetings with heads of department which looked at apprentices on a line by line basis. Colleagues had been encouraged to be cautious but were providing support and if all the current 'at risk' apprentices achieved their qualifications, the apprenticeship achievement rate would be higher than the current forecasted rate.

[REDACTED]

A member commented that, though good, this year's retention rate was slightly below the previous year; the Group Director of Quality explained that this was not due to one single factor and would also vary depending on the timing of the comparison. The levels of student support had been the same as the previous year.

In response to a member's question, the College Principal Bede confirmed that Innersummit's end of year performance had been strong and that, using the same processes and systems, Innersummit was now fully integrated into Etc. Professional Services. In relation to the mismatch between [REDACTED] retention and [REDACTED] forecast achievement rate, he then explained that the low forecast achievement was due to legacy issues including poor Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) for those with weaker English and maths. With targeted supported for these apprentices and Innersummit processes now mirroring Bede's, Innersummit achievement should start moving towards the rates achieved by Bede apprentices, [REDACTED]. The Group Director of Quality added that the data reflected the cautious approach taken to forecasting and that Innersummit achievement was expected to be higher than currently forecast at year end.

Members **noted** the update and the strong attendance and retention data; the cautious approach to apprenticeship achievement forecasting was also acknowledged.

SIC25/10   Agenda Item 10 – Work Experience and Industry Placements

The Group Director of Marketing and Business Engagement highlighted that the percentage data on work experience by department had been updated and that all departments were showing over [REDACTED]% completion; there had been challenges in data collection at Bede but the team aimed to complete the transfer of data from the current Bede system to GroFar by 10 February. Completion of relevant Preparation for Employment modules currently stood at [REDACTED]%. A detailed clarification of the improvements made, including more team working between work experience coordinators and clarification of the definition of a work experience placement, aimed to give committee members assurance that the [REDACTED]% target was not overly aspirational.

A member thanked the Group Director of Marketing and Business Engagement for the helpful definition of work experience placements and asked whether the spiky data profile reflected the sequencing of learning and the timing of work experience over the year; the Group Director of Marketing and Business Engagement agreed and confirmed that, though not a condition of funding, the group approach was rigorous and tracked effectively through GroFar.

Members **noted** the update and commented on the helpful information on the group's positive partnerships with a range of employers and the key role of work experience and industrial placements in learners' personal development, employability skills and behaviours for the future.

SIC25/11   Agenda Item 11 – Destinations

The Group Director of Quality highlighted that the destinations data for 2022-23 completers evidenced the impact of the Etc. curriculum with sustained positive destinations very high across the group; data had been collected for the significant majority of learners evidencing strong destinations across all areas of provision. Sustained positive destinations had also been high for disadvantaged postcode and other vulnerable learners.

In response to a request for clarification, the Group Director of Quality explained that positive destinations were determined through Individual Learner Record (ILR) categories, with full time employment and further study the main categories.

At between [REDACTED] to [REDACTED]%, adult positive destinations had been lower for a variety of reasons including ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) students ineligible to work and lower outcomes to employment for subcontracted provision. Both FE+ and local authorities were therefore challenging the TVCA target of 90% of Adult Skills Fund (ASF) learners going into employment. Etc. adult destinations data compared favourably against national data which indicated positive destinations of between [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]% for Work Programme, Bootcamp and Sector-based Work Academy provision. A member observed that, by trying to meet unrealistic positive destinations targets, the group could run the danger of only taking on adult learners closest to labour markets.

In response to a member's question about the timing of data collection, the Group Director of Quality explained that sustained destinations data on the previous academic year's leavers was collected from Easter the following year; the 2022-23 data collection had been completed at the end of the 2023-24 academic year. Intended destinations were also collected at the end of each academic year. There was no direct national benchmark but the thoroughness of Etc.'s processes gave assurance and provided an understanding of learner progression and curriculum impact.

Members **noted** the sustained destinations data for 2022-23 and expressed delight at the strength of the data particularly for disadvantaged and vulnerable cohorts.

SIC25/12   Agenda Item 12 – Subcontracting quality monitoring

The Deputy Chief Executive Officer presented the report on subcontracting quality monitoring and explained that in addition to the internal quality monitoring cycle, Quality Enhanced Learning Reviews (QELRs) had been commissioned to provide assurance on the quality of some of the group's main subcontractors, including RelyOn, Evolution Training and South Tees NHS. Some contractors also received external assurance as they were subject to Ofsted inspections.

Members **noted** the quality assurance arrangements for the group's subcontracted provision and were particularly pleased at the individual tailored support for each subcontractor.

SIC25/13   Agenda Item 13 – Governor visits

The report collated feedback from recent governor classroom visits with positive comments from Dot Smith and David Watson on their 24 October visit to various provision areas at SRC and Amanda Olvanhill on her 14 January visit to Skills Academy; Dot Smith commented that the visit had been awe inspiring. David Watson added that he would be visiting RCC on 18 March and would welcome other governors joining him; Stuart Blackett indicated that he would be interested.

Members **noted** the positive feedback from visits to SRC and Skills Academy and **agreed** to remind all governors of the value of governor classroom visits and encourage them to undertake visits.

SIC25/14   Agenda Item 14 – Any Other Business

The Chief Executive and Group Principal gave an update on Ofsted preparations, which had been the focus of a recent SMT Awayday. There would be a week's notice for final detailed preparation but staff had worked hard and would be able to give a good account of the group and its impact on learners. Plans were now being put in place to prepare students, communications with support staff, and on deep dive areas. The staff governor agreed that staff felt ready for inspection but that it had been very much business as usual.

SIC25/15   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 report under agenda items 13; minutes would be made available following approval and consideration at the next meeting.

SIC25/16   Agenda Item 16 – Date, time and venue of next meeting

Thursday 3 April 2025, 5.30 pm, Redcar and Cleveland College Boardroom

SIC25/17   Agenda Item 17 – Meeting Review and Key themes

i)   Meeting effectiveness and impact, particularly impact on student experience:
- Thanks to report writers and the Governance Team for meeting preparation and support.

ii)   The following key themes were identified:
- Actions updates:
    - Gained assurance that appropriate time now allocated for student target setting, with staff reporting appreciation for the actions taken
    - Confirmation that Teesside University's board had approved the Etc. Partners Report and update on development of a new Higher Education Strategy
- Consideration of risks assigned to the committee (STR0008: Curriculum Development and STR0009: Quality of the student experience and welfare) with request to include governor oversight in second line of assurance
- Skills Lead presentation from the VP Stockton Riverside College, recognising that this was still in early development, governors offered constructive feedback and work would continue to refine this and the Chief Executive and Group Principal's presentation to ensure alignment and maximum impact
- Update on Level 3 qualifications reform and the potential impact of this and further qualifications review on students
- T Level update – impressive [REDACTED]% achievement at SRC with recognition of the impact of lower retention on RCC achievement rates; the challenge of employer capacity to offer work placements; withdrawal of some qualifications and uncertainty about future T Level programmes
- Update on Group Development Plans and their impact: action identified in relation to avoiding data input duplication across tracking systems; safeguarding and Prevent concerns in relation to rising levels of Electively Home Educated young people; and the use of OneGrade cross-group for effective progress monitoring and improving academic and vocational high grades
- Process for monitoring areas for development not covered by Group Development Plans and presentation of Programme Area Improvement Plans to future meetings agreed; discussion around continuing to drive improvements in apprenticeship intent and achievement rates
- Quality and performance data for the current year including forecast achievement
- Work experience and industry placements update, progress towards targets and assurance given that the 90% target achievable

- The committee welcomed the extremely positive sustained destinations data for 2022-23 including for disadvantaged cohorts, with a very small number of unknowns, demonstrating the positive impact of the group's curriculum
- Assurance gained on subcontracting quality
- Positive feedback from governor visits undertaken by Dot Smith, David Watson and Amanda Olvanhill; David Watson and Stu Blackett to visit RCC on 18 March
- Ofsted preparation: SMT Away Day, detailed preparation at management level but confirmed that very much business as usual at teaching staff level.

(*The meeting ended at 7.40 pm*)

Approved at a meeting held on 10 April 2025