

**Minutes of the
QSA Committee held in person on
Tuesday 13th June 2023, 4:00 pm – 7:00 pm
In the Tower Board Room at Bedford**

- Present:** Richard Dimbleby (RD) (Chair)
Cathy Barr (CB)
Ian Pryce (IP) ((Principal and Chief Executive)
Allan Schofield (AS)
Sheila Selwood (SS)
Luisa Vecchio (LV)
- In attendance:** Sarah Baxter (Executive Director of Marketing and Student Recruitment)
John Guiney (Group Director of Quality)
Em Lowe (Deputy CEO Education)
Rachel Nicol (Group Director of Governance)
Helen Smith (Group Director of Sixth form)
Natasha Stringer (Senior Governance Coordinator) (minutes)
Robin Webber-Jones (Principal (Northamptonshire))

QSA/14/22 Apologies and declarations of interest

No apologies were received, and no declarations of interest were made by those present relevant to the matters on the agenda.

It was confirmed to the Committee that Emily Parnwell (student governor) is coming to the end of her studies and is no longer serving as a student governor. The Committee noted their appreciation to Emily for her strong contribution.

QSA/15/22 Matters arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda

The Group Director of Governance shared the amended terms of reference for the Committee next year with the proposal that the Committee will be known as the Curriculum and Quality Committee. This is in preparation for the upcoming Board meeting on June 20th, 2023. The document was presented for the Committee's attention and information.

The Committee supported the terms of reference and noted there will be an opportunity at the board meeting to discuss.

QSA/16/22 Sixth Form Presentation

The Committee welcomed the Group Director of Sixth Forms and the Principal (Northamptonshire) to the meeting. They provided a PowerPoint presentation to update the Committee on the Sixth Forms.

Key messages from the presentation included:

- An increased focus on value-added. This is planned to be achieved through utilising golden hours and increasing assessment points to every half term. As well as exploring data analysis systems to help teachers obtain a simple analysis of student and subject performance. Plans to improve the value-added score to +0.2 by 2026.
- Recruitment challenges. Working closely with the quality department to enhance the skills of the current teaching staff, with the ultimate objective of ensuring that the standard of teaching is consistently high.
- Improved communication following survey results from students and parents. Improvements included appointing a new Deputy Head Teacher to focus on Student Experience and sending weekly bulletins and termly newsletters. Two parental drop-ins were also held and received positive feedback.

Other improvements mentioned:

- Increased emphasis on progression to Higher Education (HE), such as the 'Oxbridge entrants club'.
- Offers for Russell Group Universities have risen. Last year 24 students held offers. This year it is 47.
- Good promotion and support for Higher and Degree Apprenticeships.
- The new Corby Sixth-Form building work is on track for completion.

The Committee inquired about the confidence in the assessments and abilities used to predict the grades. The Group Director of Sixth Forms reassured the Committee that a significant amount of effort went into this process, including a collaboration with an external company to obtain predicted grades for specific areas to ensure accuracy and give a comparison.

The Committee inquired about the thoroughness and coherence of the curriculum across all subjects, ensuring that all teachers can effectively deliver it. The Group Director of Sixth Forms acknowledged the need for improvement in the curriculum and provided assurance that the staff are actively working on it. They emphasised the importance of collaborating with the local community and using local resources, such as inviting guest speakers and collaborating with local schools to send teaching staff to observe local year 11 students. The Committee discussed the advantages of this approach, including the use of a common vocabulary and the significance of starting from a place of understanding where the a level students are at on joining to ensure value-added education.

The Committee questioned the influence of the surrounding culture on schools in the Corby area and whether this affected recruitment. The Group Director of Sixth Forms and the Principal (Northamptonshire) discussed with the Committee the efforts being made to promote the Corby Sixth Form to a broader audience by emphasising the convenient location and accessible public transport, as well as organising open

events to showcase the Sixth Form and provide assurance that it will be open in September.

A member of the Committee inquired with the Principal (Northamptonshire) about the potential benefits of increased direct governor oversight of Sixth Forms. The Principal responded that discussing the possibility of more strategic oversight is worthwhile. Still, they are aware operationally of what they need to do to achieve the agreed objectives and are working towards it.

The Committee thanked the Group Director of Sixth Forms and the Principal (Northamptonshire) for the detailed presentation and work.

16:54 The Group Director of Sixth Forms and Principal (Northamptonshire) leave the meeting

QSA/17/22 TBCG plans for preparing and delivering changes. (DFE publication guide to the post-16 landscape)

The Deputy CEO Education updated the Committee on the qualification reforms.

Key themes from the presentation included:

- Reforms will affect 16- 19-year-olds on Level 3 qualifications and 19+year olds on Level 3 qualifications funded by the Adult Education Budget (“AEB”), the European Social Fund or Advanced Learner Loans.
- Qualifications not redeveloped will no longer be eligible for funding.
- A qualification that overlaps with an existing T level will no longer be eligible for funding.
- Potential narrowing of content in qualifications.
- Criteria development by DfE, including technical qualifications, requirements to meet occupational relevance and employer demand tests developed by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE).
- Level 2 qualifications that support progression to higher levels will be reformed from September 2026.
- Ofqual launched a consultation regulating level 2 and below qualifications on their proposed approach to support progression.
- Routes for the learners to take, an academic route which includes A levels and Alternative Academic Qualifications (AAQs), which include BTECs. The other route will be a technical route in which T levels will form the core.

The Deputy CEO Education provided an overview of the classification of AAQs and their development cycles. The Committee expressed concerns about the changes and the potential confusion for students when selecting their options. It was emphasised that providing appropriate Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) sessions in schools and the College is crucial for enabling informed decisions by

students. School and career adviser events are currently being held in Bedford, and the Gatsby Benchmarks will aid in achieving this goal.

The Deputy CEO-Education was thanked for the presentation

QSA/18/22 External assurance framework (including an update on CBC monitoring)

The Deputy CEO Education provided an update on the recent Ofsted monitoring visit at Central Bedfordshire College (CBC). The monitoring visit focused on three areas, the first being the harmonisation of safeguarding across the College Group, which showed significant improvement. The second area focused on the collaboration between apprenticeship employers and assessors to ensure good progress, in which progress was deemed reasonable. Lastly, Ofsted evaluated progress in improving English and maths skills and attendance and again saw reasonable progress in this area.

The Deputy CEO Education shared with the Committee that there would not be another monitoring visit as progress had been made. The next visit from Ofsted will be for a full inspection.

From September, Bedford and Tresham will be trialling using only GCSEs for 16-18-year-olds, rather than functional skills, to boost attendance, engagement and achievement for English and maths.

The Deputy CEO Education updated the Committee on work being done to map assurance and asked the Committee to note the document summarising the current position across the Group.

The Committee noted the report.

QSA/19/22 Academic Risk

The Deputy CEO Education presented to the Committee the Academic Risk report.

Key highlights from the report included:

- Student Progression and outcomes are not yet at the level expected; however, there has been good progress. Curriculum planning is being done to meet local needs and aid students' professional opportunities to achieve positive destinations.
- An increased focus on teaching, learning and assessments to reduce inconsistencies.
- Achievement at The Bedford Sixth form and additional support being provided.

- Retention across the Group, especially for The Bedford Sixth form, is a risk. Changes are being made to the curriculum, and the new English and maths model being trialled will hopefully see improvements.
- Higher Education (HE) enrolments are still low, which is in line nationally. A general discussion was held on why this could be, and a research project will be carried out next year to understand the market for HE and develop the strategy.
- Staff recruitment was highlighted as challenging in some areas, with a discussion about the job market and competitive salaries.

The Committee raised and discussed the topic of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology and its potential inclusion in the risk register. The discussion focused on using AI and other technologies in work assessments and the need for staff and students to receive adequate training and increase understanding. It was suggested that various assessment methods be utilised for insurance purposes. While acknowledging the risks involved, the Committee also emphasised the importance of considering AI's opportunities and finding ways to embrace it practically and effectively.

The use of AI technology will be added to the risk register.

The Committee noted the report.

QSA/20/22 QIP monitoring report

The Group Director of Quality summarised the report and explained the rating for the Quality Improvement Plan across the Group.

The Committee discussed the attendance for English and maths as an ongoing item, and the planned trial for teaching should hopefully see improvements for this. Feedback from students supports the new model. The Committee questioned, and assurances were given, that the data backs up that attending classes from the beginning increases the likelihood of students continuing to attend and achieving their academic goals.

A discussion was held around the teaching and assessment of English and maths, the gaps in knowledge, and how technology could be used to highlight the areas needed to develop.

The Committee noted the report.

QSA/21/22 HE updates, regulatory and QIP.

The Deputy CEO Education summarised the Higher Education (HE) Quality Improvement Plan.

A new Higher Education strategy is being developed and will be presented to the Executive team before being reviewed by this Committee in the upcoming autumn term.

The Committee discussed the recruitment of international students, the importance of student progression, and the current market for Higher Education.

The Committee noted the update.

QSA/22/22 Full-Time FE students Early, Leavers & Conversion Report

The Director of Marketing and Student Recruitment provided a summary and explanation of the analysis on the conversion rate of applicants to full-time further education courses enrolments and those who left within the first 42 days for September 2022.

Key findings from the report:

- An increase in unique applications for this year with more applicants applying for more than one programme.
- Decline in conversion rates for the second year running due to a lack of growth at the National College for Motorsport (NC4M)
- A decline in adult applications, which reflects national data.
- Although still a small percentage, the number of 42-day leavers has risen.
- The full-time student inductions survey highlighted a lack of communication and awareness of the support available to change their course in the first 42 days which is being addressed.

The Executive Director of Marketing and Student Recruitment shared with the Committee the measures and practices being put in place to improve conversion and reduce the number of 42-day leavers. This included:

- A subgroup focused on improving conversion rates
- The commission of a company to use WhatsApp to keep in touch with students and provide careers advice and IAG if needed
- An emphasis on helping students settle in during the first six weeks.
- A new induction program to be introduced to ensure continued communication with students throughout their first six weeks
- The talk don't walk campaign, which was effective prior to the pandemic, is also being relaunched.

The Committee discussed NC4M and its conversion rates, considering that the courses offered are highly specialised and cater to a specific niche. The Committee inquired whether there was a distinction between the reasons for students leaving the program and whether the conversion rate was comparable to anything national. While it was mentioned that there is no industry average, the Committee acknowledged that the conversion data and percentage of students leaving is good when viewed from a national perspective.

The Committee discussed the timing of an application and the link to conversion. The Executive Director of Marketing and Student Recruitment informed the Committee that the results showed a significantly higher conversion rate for those who attended the welcome day. It was noted that many applications are typically received after the event, but these have a lower conversion rate. The Committee discussed the options to support these applicants, including providing greater IAG and relaunching the talk don't walk campaign should be beneficial.

The Committee noted the report.

QSA/23/22 Quality Dashboard

The Group Director of Quality presented the report and explained to the Committee that the report had been divided by College level as well as Group level to make identifying trends easier.

The Group Director of Quality shared that although attendance has slightly improved, it remains an area of focus. The Committee expressed concerns over recurring issues and discussed attendance, retention, achievement, and efforts to refocus attention on these areas at all levels. Additionally, the Committee considered the impact of attendance and retention on the overall student experience. The Committee discussed retention and the impact of A-levels on data analysis. The discussion identified certain mitigating factors that the Committee felt were important for them, as governors, to comprehend the measures behind the data fully.

The Committee deliberated on the appropriateness of the targets in light of the post-COVID situation and engaged in a conversation regarding target setting for the upcoming year.

The Group Director of Quality acknowledged that more work is still needed. Still, assurances were given that there could be improvements with a complete Quality team in place, along with training, guidance, reflection, and internal research. Targets will be revisited in the autumn term.

The Committee noted the report.

QSA/24/22 Stakeholder feedback

The Executive Director of Marketing and Student Recruitment summarised the stakeholder feedback survey results, which consisted of five surveys, four student surveys and one parent survey.

Areas highlighted as having positive student feedback included the Learning centres and Part-time induction. The Higher Education survey results have improved since last year, with most questions resulting in results above those returned in the National Students Survey (NSS).

An area highlighted for development was communication and engagement with parents. Assurances were given to the Committee that actions have been undertaken or are planned to improve this. This included inviting parents to welcome days and having two parents' evenings. An internal audit revealed some inconsistencies in parent communication and engagement. However, efforts are being made to improve this through a parental journey mapping project, with activities set to be implemented in September.

Another theme that emerged from the survey was related to technology resources. This has already been brought to the executive team's attention, and efforts have been made to address it.

The Committee noted the report.

QSA/25/22 Full-Time FE Student Destinations

The Executive Director of Marketing and Student Recruitment summarised the report, which detailed the destinations of students who completed a full-time programme in 2021-2022.

It was noted that the report included CBC data, although they carried out their survey internally. The use of a new third-party provider, Purlos Whatsapp, resulted in a much higher response rate than in previous years.

The results showed that more students decided to continue their education instead of entering employment than the previous year. The Committee questioned this outcome, considering the current job market. Throughout the discussion, the impact of the higher response rate on the results was taken into account, and it was observed that more people are also choosing to pursue higher apprenticeships.

The Committee noted the report.

QSA/26/22 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting on 8th March 2023 were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.

Meeting ended 18:45