**Minutes of the Curriculum and Quality Meeting held on**
**Wednesday 22nd May 2024 at**
**Bedford College, Tower boardroom**
**16:00**

**Present:**      Richard Dimbleby (Chair)
Catherine Barr
Joseph Gallacher
Yiannis Koursis
Allan Schofield
Sheila Selwood

**In attendance:**   Sheraz Amin (Executive Director of Digital Transformation)
Sarah Baxter (Executive Director of Marketing and Student Recruitment)
Debbie Houghton (Executive Director of Apprenticeships, BD & Commercial)
Em Lowe (Deputy CEO Education)
Rachel Nicol (Group Director of Governance)
Natasha Stringer (Senior Governance Coordinator) (Minutes)

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| **CQ/12/24** | **Apologies and Declarations of Interest** |

Apologies
Apologies were received from Luisa Vecchio and Yasmin Jones

Declarations of Interest
There were no declarations of interest relevant to the matters on the agenda.

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| **CQ/13/24** | **Matters Arising not Covered Elsewhere on the Agenda** |

The Chair of the Committee summarised the Curriculum and Quality Local Group meetings for Bedford and Tresham that took place in March. Positive feedback was received from a student panel at Bedford. The Tresham local group student feedback included a discussion on disability, and it was positive to see all three sites over the year. The next meeting is scheduled to be held at the National College for Motor Sport (NC4M).

Cathy Barr, Chair of the Central Bedfordshire College (CBC) Curriculum and Quality Local Group summarised the CBC March meeting for the Committee. The principal's report received positive feedback, in helping identify strengths and areas for improvement. Additionally, a student panel provided positive feedback, but the Local Group struggled to find consistency in the learning structure.

*Questions and Discussions*

CEO provided an update on the work done by the Executive team on the streamlining of writing reports, which includes work on the cover letter and executive summary.

**The Committee noted the feedback and reports.**

## CQ/14/24   Qualification Achievement Rates ("QAR")

The Deputy CEO Education provided for the Committee a paper which gave an overview analysis of the Qualification Achievement Rates (QAR) for the Bedford College Group (TBCG), which included a breakdown for the Bedford Sixth form (TBSF) and Central Bedfordshire College (CBC). Key highlights from the report included:

- All data had been previously reported to the Committee, the QAR data provided the national comparison for the last year, which was not published at the time of writing the Self-Assessment Review (SAR)
- The QARs for TBCG show that improvement is required in the majority of cases. The current position is below the national rate overall

*Questions and Discussions*

14.1 The Committee noted the poor performance, and The Deputy CEO Education acknowledged that it was expected from the SAR. The Committee discussed the need for transparency and openness in reporting, commenting on the Committee's feeling about receiving an incomplete picture during the November SAR.

14.2 The Committee questioned the consistency and reasons for the poor performance, and the Deputy CEO Education acknowledged a mixed impact from COVID-19 and a need for robust management of internally assessed grades but provided assurances that improvements were being made.

14.3 The Committee questioned if improvement with time had been seen and enquired as to the confidence Ofsted would see in the data. The Committee received assurances that consultants are working with departments on deep dives to shape their thinking in preparedness for an Ofsted visit. A discussion was held on activities and approaches to help lead to a positive judgement. The Committee discussed consistency and standardisation and received assurances that non-negotiable activities and key elements would occur. The Committee heard further anecdotal evidence of increased activity, oversight, and on-the-ground support.

**The Committee noted the paper.**

Chair approved 22/07/2024

## CQ/15/24　Predicted Achievement 2023-2024

The Deputy CEO Education summarised the Quality of Education and Predicted Achievement report for the Committee. This included an explanation of the formulaic approach used at the Group level, which is different to how predictions at a local level are conducted as these are based on the knowledge of individual students. Staff training on predicted achievement is ongoing. Further highlights from the report included:

- Overall predicted achievement for TBCG is up from the previous year.
- The quality of education for young people is not consistently good, with areas at risk under intervention.
- The report highlighted good practice areas and common themes needing improvement, such as engagement and student-led activities.

*Questions and Discussions*

15.1 The Committee asked if distance learning was provided through partnerships and received confirmation that it was not.

15.2 The Committee commented positively on the report's openness and the work that has been done. Questions centred around risks of not achieving, confidence in achieving a given position in the year, and historical accuracy of the predicted grades.

15.3 The Committee enquired about the behaviour seen since Covid and whether there has been any improvement. The Deputy CEO Education shared that concern about behaviour has continued and is likely to persist for a couple more years, but staff have adjusted, and work has been done on staff training. The Committee discussed in detail the ongoing journey the college is undergoing and how staff have adapted and received training. Despite this, there is still a two-year gap. Mental health is a significant concern, and next year, there will be a focus on wellbeing.

15.4 The Committee discussed the TBCG group's shift towards becoming a trauma-informed college. The CEO provided insight into the staff training, focusing on changing how behaviour is viewed and dealt with. The Committee heard anecdotes about how behaviour can influence other behaviours. For instance, when disciplinary actions are increased to improve attendance, attendance often decreases instead of improving. The Committee noted that many providers in the sector are adopting a trauma-informed approach, which has its merits. They discussed the importance of looking at each individual and the language that staff use. The possibility of providing training focused on governors will be considered.

**The Committee noted the paper.**

Chair approved 22/07/2024

## CQ/16/24 Quality Improvement Plan ("QIP") Monitoring

The Deputy CEO Education summarised an update on the Quality Improvement Plan for the Committee. Key themes from the update included an explanation of the amber rating, which means actions are implemented but haven't yet seen an impact in terms of results. Further key messages within the report included:

- English and Maths attendance still rated red, but improvement has been seen. Assurances given that the quality of teaching within the lessons is good

*Questions and Discussions*

16.1 The Committee discussed the level of confidence that the intended progress will achieve results. The CEO provided assurances.

16.2 The Committee discussed whether reporting year to date or projected year-end position would be more beneficial to see at future meetings. **The Committee agreed on consistent year-end reporting for QIP progress.**

**The Committee noted the paper.**

## CQ/17/24 English and Maths Update (November Series)

The Deputy CEO Education summarised the updated report of GCSE results for November re-sit learners, which included:

- All students with a Grade 3 in GCSE English and those close to Grade 4 in Maths were entered for re-sits, to give the students the opportunity to improve
- Percentage comparison would not be as meaningful, and entry criteria for November exams were different
- Moving towards GCSE for everyone model with the removal of Functional skills.
- Good practice from CBC on revision to be followed at all sites moving forward.
- Investment in a higher teaching assistant model across the Group to support students

*Questions and Discussions*

17.1 The Committee noted improvements in attendance and engagement for English and Maths. They discussed the cultural shift, which was supported by vocational areas. They also received updates regarding the management structure. The roles of English, Math, and SEND have been split into two director-level positions to provide better focus on each.

**The Committee noted the paper.**

## CQ/18/24   Sixth Form

The Deputy CEO Education/ The Principal (Northamptonshire) summarised an update on the Sixth forms, which included:

- An update on the change in senior leadership, including interim roles and staff recruitment
- Ongoing work within Business planning to help shape the strategic intent priorities and aims and to help support the introduction of a collective vision
- A new 'Sixth Form' strategy is being developed with the focus of improving teaching and learning, the student experience and increasing outcomes
- Professional development scheduled for faculty leads focused on management development
- Exploratory work was conducted in February to understand what had impacted the year 13 grades, highlighting that the U grade profile was not a true reflection of the current achievement prediction. Intervention, support and further reviews have indicated the predicted pass rate to be around 97%
- The recent strategic decision to move to ALPs, a national value-added system to measure performance between level 2 and level 3 and an explanation of how ALP profiles work. Data from ALPs provided

*Questions and Discussions*

18.1 The Committee discussed the competitive market in Bedford, the need to offer the right subjects, and the need to continue to offer a range of subjects not offered elsewhere. It also stressed the importance of focusing on quality and meeting the needs of the community.

18.2 The Committee discussed the impact of teacher recruitment and the importance of quality teaching and learning. Assurance was given that intensive work is being carried out by the Quality team and robust planning work is being done.

18.3 The Committee discussed and asked questions to understand how sustainable the model is and where improvements may not be achieved in a timely manner.

**The Committee noted the paper.**

## CQ/19/24   Apprenticeships

Executive Director of Apprenticeships, Business Development & Commercial summarised an update on the apprenticeships provision, which included.

- Strong enrichment for apprentices
- Meeting the employer's skills needs

- A low proportion of apprentices receive distinctions in End Point Assessment "EPA" final grades. Training is in place for the staff to provide developmental feedback. Detailed mock EPA tests prior to apprentice taking their EPAs
- Change to how attendance is marked when employers request apprentices to work on college delivery days. This is now marked as a positive attendance and monitored

*Questions and Discussions*

19.1 National figures were noted as poor, and the Committee discussed the importance of quality improvement.

19.2 The Committee discussed ongoing improvements and the need for better employer engagement to build better relationships with employers and improve engagement in progress reviews. The committee also discussed balancing the costs of running apprenticeships, compliance, and business development while serving the community.

**The Committee noted the report.**

## CQ/20/24   HE and Higher Skills

The Principal (Northamptonshire) summarised for the Committee the Higher Level Skills Update and QIP, which included:
- The development of a new Higher-Level Skills Strategy
- The appointment of a Director of Higher-Level Skills
- Re-purposing of the higher-level skills team, including a review of all process and the HE quality manual
- Work on educational gains to support a better TEF outcome

*Questions and Discussions*

20.1 The Committee sought clarification on Higher Technical Qualifications and the relationships to apprenticeships.

20.2 The Committee discussed Competitions and Markets Authority-regulated offer letters and received assurances that the legal team are reviewing the suite of contracts and an internal audit had confirmed compliance, but further external assurance is being sought.

20.3 The Committee requested more detail on research on student belonging and commuter students. This refers to the connection between students and the institution, ensuring that staff engage with students to help them progress and achieve Level 4 and above. Commuter students are those who do not live away from home to attend university.

Chair approved 22/07/2024

## Higher Level Skills Oversight Arrangements

20.4 The Principal (Northamptonshire) provided a report for the Committee on the Higher-Level Skills oversight arrangements, which detailed the English Higher Education legislative landscape and how it impacts TBCG. The report also detailed how TBCG complies with its obligations currently and detailed some changes to be implemented now that the Higher-Level Skills Strategy is approved.

20.5 The Committee discussed the TEF framework and the importance of educational gains.

## OfS Reportable Event - Legal Name

20.6 The Principal (Northamptonshire) provided the Committee with information on a paper that set out the issues with an error on the Office for Students (OfS) Register of Approved Providers in relation to the name of the College Group. The legal name of the College Group is "Bedford College" however on the register it is "Bedford College Group". This caused complications in access to teacher bursaries for six student trainees. Moving forward, there is a formal route for all OfS correspondence so that things will be reviewed in a timely manner through the Higher-Level Skills Committee.

*Questions and Discussions*
**The Committee requested that Condition E3 and E4 be built into governance arrangements. Action.**

**The Committee noted the reports.**

## CW/21/24   Full-Time FE Students Early, Leavers & Conversion Report

The Executive Director of Marketing and Student Recruitment summarised the report, key messages included:
- A growth in Full-time students
- Conversion rates have seen an improvement on last year
- A review is needed on how data on NC4M numbers are considered
- 42day leavers are on a downward trend and below the sector averages
- Focus groups will be used to look at groups of higher-risk leaving.
- Improvement to the enrolment process for this year to include face-to-face enrolment

*Questions and Discussions*

21.1 The Committee discussed the challenges in comparing conversion rates with other colleges.

**The Committee noted the report.**

| CQ/22/24    Stakeholder Feedback |
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The Executive Director of Marketing and Student Recruitment summarised the report, key messages included:

- Three surveys were conducted. Results attached for information in the annexe
- Response rates to surveys need to improve. Engagement with the survey is low
- Part-time students on shorter courses show positive signs of student satisfaction.
- Higher Education student survey results show students are less satisfied than last year, with learning resources and organisational management scoring low.
- The Parents and careers survey showed poor results. Work over the previous summer was conducted to develop a participant participation strategy with minimum standards, but the survey results suggest a lack of consistency has been applied. An audit will take place, supported by the quality team, to look into this further, and the use of an App to engage with parents is being looked into.

*Questions and Discussions*

22.1 The Committee discussed the importance of meaningful data and improved engagement methods. A discussion on the methodology and use of technology in communication was held, including the current use of an external company for the use of WhatsApp and the future possibilities of a contact centre product.

22.2The Committee discussed the timeliness of feedback and triangulation with other information, especially around enrolment.

**The Committee noted the report.**

| CQ/23/24    Full-Time FE Student Destinations |
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The Executive Director of Marketing and Student Recruitment summarised the report, key messages included:

- Positive response rates and improvement on last year
- More students are progressing onto positive destinations than last year, CBC has seen an improvement but still below Bedford and Tresham
- A reduced number of NEETs shown in the report

*Questions and Discussions*

23.1 The Committee sought further information to understand the methodology and percentages provided. Clarification was provided that CBC had conducted an external survey, and The Executive Director of Marketing and Student Recruitment will ask for clarification on the figures. **Action**

23.2 The Committee noted the use of the external provider (Purlos WhatsApp) has increased the response rate.

**The Committee noted the report.**

## CQ/24/24    Virtual Learning Environment Update

The Executive Director of Digital Transformation summarised the report, which included assessing three virtual learning environments (VLEs): Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams, and Moodle. Various surveys were conducted, and the results were presented. A summary is available on page 4 of the report. The main system, Moodle, received a low score. Microsoft Teams and Google showed similar results. It was observed that students who use phones prefer Google.

It was decided to proceed with Microsoft Teams, as it received the highest scores and learners will use Teams more frequently after college. All teaching and learning resources will be transferred to Microsoft Teams during the summer, and staff will receive training.

*Questions and Discussions*

24.1 The Committee discussed bandwidth and transition challenges, with assurances provided by The Executive Director of Digital Transformation that key departments and users of Moodle have been consulted with on the transition plan. Assurances were sought and received that although there are bandwidth implications, the lines are being upgraded.

**The Committee noted the report.**

## CQ/25/24    Artificial Intelligence Update

The report was summarised by the Executive Director of Digital Transformation. It highlighted that most AI tools are US-based and do not comply with GDPR regulations, with only three out of the many tools found to be GDPR-compliant. These three tools are being utilised as part of the AI academy, and staff members are undergoing training to use them (Teachermatic – Initially 50 licenses for a pilot program). The evidence and feedback will be compared with Microsoft's co-pilot, and once staff members are comfortable, the tools will be introduced to the students.

*Questions and Discussions*

25.1 The Committee discussed AI's positive impact and the importance of responsible usage. The Committee questioned the tools used for assessing student use of AI and the Executive Director of Digital Transformation informed the Committee that there is an academic integrity policy.

**The Committee noted the report.**

**CQ/26/24    Minutes of the Previous Meeting (05.03.24)**

**The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the previous meeting subject to amendments shared by the Chair of the corporation.**

Meeting came to a close at 19:08.

Chair approved 22/07/2024