

Caspian School of Academics Academic Board Meeting

Held on Thursday 16 July 2026 2:30pm- 4:30pm, 2026 on campus & online
CEME Campus, Marsh Way, Rainham RM13 8EU

Attendees:

Muhammad Iftikhar (MI) – Chief Executive Officer
Mandy Hobart (MH) – Principal and Chair
Anjum Naz (AN) – Head of Teaching and Learning.
Dom Conroy (DC) – Quality Manager
Chi Tan (CT) – Head of Department of Business & Management
Tanveer Ahmad – Head of Department of IT
Mr Nizam Uddin Sheikh (NuS) (DPM, UOD & Pearson)
Dr Mudassar Mehmood – Pearson Programme Manager
Corina Sava – Programme Lead HNC/D Leadership & Management
Yinka Akingboju – Programme Lead HNC/D Business
Shivangi Bhasgi (SB) Programme Lead (Construction)
Raman Sidhu- Board Secretary

Apologies:

Carmen Susma – Programme Lead HNC/D Hospitality Management & International Travel & Tourism Management
Kaniz Bukhari (KB)- Registry Manager
Divya Rajendran – Head of Student Services
Tahira Yasmin (TY) – Director of HR
Amjad Alam (AA)- Programme Manager NCFE

	Agenda Item	Lead
1.	Welcome, apologies and attendance. The meeting was opened with a welcome by the Chair. The Academic Board meets twice annually to review academic performance, ensure regulatory compliance, and align with standards set by awarding bodies and university partners. • Apologies for absence were noted. • Reports from programme teams had been submitted in advance to the meeting portal. • Declarations of interest: No conflicts declared. • Approval of previous meeting minutes: The minutes were accepted as an accurate record; action points are covered in today's agenda.	MH



2.	Programme & Strategic Updates 2.1 New & Expanding Provision ● University of Derby partnership: ○ Initially we had 65 students enrolled; 4 were withdrawn early, 1 self-withdrew after 8 weeks due to personal circumstances. Derby has approved progression for 60 students. ○ New pathway: Business and Leadership & Management top-up; full degree with foundation year launching September 2026, targeting 60 students across two groups (prioritising student quality for retention and success). ○ Submission underway for Hospitality Management and Travel & Tourism top-up degrees for approval by U of Derby. ● University of West London partnership: ○ Approved: BSc (Hons) Cyber security with Foundation Year and BSc (Hons) Information Technology Management for Business (ITMB) with Foundation Year pending final contract signature before advertising and recruitment. ○ FdSc Business Analytics and Top Up are in the final stages of development with the course development event scheduled for 20 July 2026, and the Approval to Delivery Event set for 29 September 2026. We hope to launch the Business Analytics in January 2027. ○ General Business Studies Top Up pathway is also being included in the Approval Event and will be added to the portfolio through UWL validation agreement . ● NCFE provision: ○ Level 4 and 5 Cyber Security Engineering progression route now available as CSA has been approved to offer the Level 5 Diploma in Cloud Systems and Secure Networking. ○ Level 4 Data Analyst course now has progression to Level 5 Data Engineer (launched Easter 2026). ○ IT students can also progress from Level 4 directly to the second year of a university degree through RPL which has	MH
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	been approved by UWL for the Cyber Security degree and for Data Analytics to the second year of the ITMB degree. ○ New: HNC/D in Construction Management is being launched in September 2026. 2.2 Strategic Priorities ● Employer & skills alignment: Focus on employer engagement, work-based learning, and modular provision under the Lifelong Learning Entitlement. ● Local skills context (London 2025–2029 plan): Key sectors include creative industries, hospitality, built environment, health & social care, life sciences, financial/professional services; digital skills are a cross-sector priority. ○ 45% of London employers report digital skills gaps. ○ London unemployment rose from 4.9% (early 2023) to 7.6% (December 2025); youth unemployment (16–24) reached 22.5%, well above the UK national average of 12.4%. ● Emerging requirements: Employers increasingly expect AI literacy; this will be embedded into curriculum and institutional operations.	
3.	Programme Self-Assessment Reports 3.1 NCFE Programs ● CSA currently has and is delivering to over 400 students increasing with 10 new groups September 2026. ● Pathways: L4 Cyber Security progressing to L 5 Cloud and Network Security) and L4 Data Analytics progressing to L5 Data Management & Engineering. ● Key focus areas: ○ Embed AI literacy (ethical use, practical tools such as generative AI, spreadsheets, visualisation) across all programmes to meet employer needs. ○ Update assessment criteria, feedback, and internal verification processes; align with awarding body guidance. ○ Improve website accessibility and learning resource navigation.	TA



	○ Ensure content reflects current industry tools, frameworks, and regulations. ○ Support students with career pathway clarity; work with local schools and colleges to address gaps in digital education. ○ Integrate study skills and employability skills as core, embedded components rather than optional add-ons. 3.2a Pearson Leadership & Management / Business Programmes ● Retention & engagement: Focus area for September 2024 intake; early identification of at-risk students. ● Curriculum adjustments: Address low pass rates in accounting/principles units by embedding maths and statistics support and time in class to work on assessments. ● Intake growth: 90 students projected for next intake; request for additional staff. ● Attendance policy: 80% attendance is a requirement, not a target; consistent communication must be maintained with students, with fair consideration for illness or personal circumstances via agreed leave/deferral processes. ● External examiner feedback: Minor refinements requested; actioned in assessment processes. 3.2b Pearson Hospitality Management / International Travel and Tourism Management Programmes ● All programmes meet or exceed internal benchmarks (80% attendance, completion, and pass rates) and external QAA standards; successful external reviews completed. ● HN programme: ~80% completion rate; target progression to Level 6 degrees. ● Priorities: Embed technical skills support; increase numbers achieving Merit/Distinction grades; leverage industry links to support graduate employment and business start-ups. 3.3 NOCN Construction Management	CS/ YA MM
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Risk Management must be considered, where appropriate, for all issues raised at the meeting and actions to reduce risk should be agreed and noted in the minutes.



	● LEAP (Live Enhancement Action Plan): Central data-driven improvement mechanism; programme-led, with aggregated reporting for annual review. ● Assessment standards: Introduce standardised oversight and calibration meetings to ensure consistency across programmes. ● Student voice: ○ Course Committee meetings working well; Student Committee-proposed to be renamed Student Council; survey response rates improving. ○ Recommendations: Move student reports to the start of future agendas; develop consistent training and clear benefits for student representatives. ● Governance & policy: Update Quality Handbook; create a central policy register with ownership and review timelines; establish a single source of truth for student data. ● Curriculum development: Dedicated staff development day planned to review employability integration across all programmes.	DC AN
	3.7 External Examiner & Quality Review Outcomes ● All external reviews (Pearson, NCFE, NOCN) returned no mandatory action points; confirmed academic standards are maintained, QA processes are effective, and support is strong. ● Enhancement recommendations: ○ Increase opportunities for Merit/Distinction grades. ○ Standardise referencing guidance. ○ Clarify marketing language for new qualifications.	
4.	Academic Integrity & AI Policy ● Policy update: Revised to include clear guidance on AI use; 94% of students report using AI tools. ● Position: AI may be used for research, idea generation, and drafting support, but must not be used to generate or write final assessed work as this constitutes academic misconduct. ● Actions: Develop simple "acceptable/unacceptable use" guidance for students; ensure all staff and students understand how to cite AI use appropriately.	MH



	Reported cases: Minor incidents resolved via re-submission and warnings; no major issues identified.	
6	Student Handbook Refresh (2026–27) - Type: Light-touch update, not full rewrite - Key focus: - Strengthen student representation, feedback loops & "You Said, We Did" - Clarify attendance rules (face-to-face/online + safety) - Simplify assessment, AI integrity, extensions & appeals guidance - Update support contacts & policy signposting - Improve accessibility, navigation & live links - Process: Section reviews by relevant teams - Deadline: Final version ready mid-August 2026 Quality Assurance Handbook Refresh (2026–27) - Type: Structured update only - Key focus: - Add revised institutional quality framework - Clarify governance links & reporting routes - Explain roles of LEAP (course monitoring) & STAR (assessment standards) - Integrate student voice, risk & compliance - Align with OfS B Conditions - Deadline: Final version ready end August 2026	DC
7	Any Other Business & Next Steps Student voice: Future agendas will place student items earlier to support attendance; will clarify benefits and integrate training for reps. Student co-design: Involve students in policy development via simplified summaries and dedicated discussion time.	All