

CHAIR APPROVED

The Corporation of New College Durham

Minutes of the Corporation meeting held on 3 July 2025

Present:

Stephen King (Chair)
Andy Broadbent
Davey Benson
Allen Eccles
Matthew Gamsby
Hayley Farrell
Ben Fisher

Helen Golightly - *via Teams*
Mark Gomersall - *via Teams*
Jonathan Hamill
Kathryn McCloghrie - *via Teams*
Chris Patterson
Philip Pollard

Apologies:

Suzanne Slater
Rhiannon Hiles
Ross Markwell
Emily Baxter
Alison Maynard

In attendance:

Karl Fairley (Deputy Chief Executive)
Paul Bradley (Chief Finance Officer)
Colleen Peters (Vice Principal)
Andy Stephenson (Vice Principal)
Adele Dowson (Vice Principal)
Peter Morrison (Vice Principal)
Rob Graine (Vice Principal)
Caroline Winter (Head of Governance and Corporation Secretary)
Chloe Freeman (Administrator)

Action

25/57 Chair's introduction and starred items

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked those attending the earlier session to receive the headline feedback from the External Governance Review, which had given members a lot to think about in terms of further improving governance effectiveness.

The Chair welcomed Matthew Gamsby and Hayley Farrell to their first Corporation meeting following their appointment as Student Governors.

The Chair reminded members to declare their interests in any item of business to be discussed at the meeting. The following interests were noted:

- Ben Fisher – Paper I1 – Appointment of Corporation members
- Allen Eccles – Paper I1 – Appointment of Corporation members
- Helen Golightly - Paper I5 – Careers and Education Guidance Governor

Members confirmed they did not require any further discussion about the starred agenda items E2, E4, G, H, I3, L and M.

It was noted that this was the last meeting for Davey Benson as Support Staff Governor as his term of office was due to expire on 31 August 2025. The Chair thanked Davey for his contribution to

the Corporation over the last three years highlighting in particular his service as Safeguarding Governor.

25/58 Apologies for absence were received from Suzanne Slater, Rhiannon Hiles, Ross Markwell, Emily Baxter and Alison Maynard.

25/59 Minutes of previous meeting (Papers A1 & A2)

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 May 2025 (including confidential minutes) were agreed as accurate.

25/60 Matters arising not appearing elsewhere on the agenda

25/40 – members noted that the external consultant’s report on the review of local needs would be shared in the coming weeks, after circulation to all College Senior Managers across the Durham Learning Alliance.

AM

25/61 Principal’s Report (Verbal update)

The Principal gave a verbal briefing about matters of strategic interest including the publication of the Government’s Industrial Strategy and announcement of £1.2bn skills investment, an update on the Construction TEC application process and implications for the region, announcements on other forthcoming TECs in engineering and defence, publication of the Government’s Infrastructure Plan and associated capital funding, attendance at the Universities UK roundtable at Westminster, the delayed AoC pay recommendation and confirmation that levels of in-year 16-18 growth funding was still awaited.

From a College perspective, members were updated on NCD ongoing provision in Tees Valley, employer engagement activity, developments in respect of the Ashington property lease, HE franchise developments, governance changes at New College Durham Academies Trust, approval of the North East Institute of Technology (NEIoT) licence extension and addition of new members, recent award nominations and the early work and timeline to develop the next 5-year College Strategy. The Principal emphasised the strength of the College’s reputation regionally and nationally and highlighted that the operating environment continued to be very fluid in the context of local and national politics. The College had enjoyed a successful year with strengths in student recruitment, student outcomes, financial position, a positive strategic conversation, achievement of the majority of strategic KPIs, placing the College in a great position to meet the challenges ahead.

Members welcomed the positive update on the NEIoT, particularly in light of the TEC application and in response to a question about support from the region’s combined authorities (CAs), it was confirmed that the Tees Valley CA had endorsed the College’s bid alongside others in the region. In response to a member’s

question on the focus of the defence TEC the Principal advised that a definition on what this would comprise was expected as part of the documentation issued to commence the application process. Members asked about informal discussions with government officials and it was confirmed that a series of Q&A sessions and a helpline were made available after the application window opened.

In response to a question on stakeholder involvement in the new College strategy it was confirmed that the detail would be fleshed out in the coming months to include internal and external stakeholders with an opportunity to develop the strategy from the bottom up.

In response to a member's question on HE partnerships, Paul Bradley confirmed the College's maximum potential liability, which was significantly reduced in light of the number of students transferring to CECOS and those in a retake position. Members thanked the HE team for their work in dealing with the issue, supporting students and mitigating the financial risk.

In response to a member's question, the process to appoint the NCDAT Chair was clarified and it was confirmed that a review of the sponsorship arrangement would be undertaken as planned.

25/62 Receipt of Committee minutes and verbal reports from chairs:

Search & Governance Committee (Paper C1) - the Chair approved minutes of the meeting held on 9 June 2025 were received. The Committee considered governor attendance over the academic year and committee composition, which would be discussed further in the Chair's 121s with individual governors over the summer. Updates were received on the governor training and development plan and members noted a number of other matters were to be considered later on the current meeting agenda.

Audit & Risk Committee (Papers C2 & C3) - the Chair approved minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2025 were received. The Committee Chair updated on the Committee's consideration of the internal audit report on procurement which provided substantial assurance, the report of the College's Risk Management Group and ensuing discussion on the potential impact of the HE partnership issues on the Medium Term Financial Plan. The Committee discussed the learning gained from the recent disaster recovery exercise undertaken by the Senior Leadership Team, the plan for a further exercise focused around plans to respond to a cyber security incident and also considered the external audit plan.

Finance and Resources Committee (Papers C4 & C5) - the Chair approved minutes of the meeting held on 18 June 2025 were received. The Chair updated on the detailed update received on marketing which presented extremely positive numbers and demonstrated the value of the marketing activity underpinning and enabling student recruitment. The Committee had been impressed

by the depth and breadth of activities, discussed return on investment and the strong performance of the Marketing Team. The remaining key issues considered by the Committee would be considered on the current meeting agenda.

Education Quality Curriculum and Students Committee – in the absence of the Committee Chair, committee members provided a verbal update from the meeting held on 19 June 2025. The Committee were briefed on the latest transfers from OBC to CECOS and were assured that the right protection was in place for students. A discussion followed on what contingency planning was taking place in the event that all franchised provision was stopped by the Government. Members discussed attendance levels and the importance of teaching and learning as a key factor in engaging students to attend. An update was provided on the excellent progress made in maths and members discussed the aspiration to improve the Ofsted grade. Members were updated on the plan for the potential of student recruitment being oversubscribed at the start of the next academic year and received feedback on the student voice.

The Corporation Chair invited Rob Graine to provide a further update on the progress in Maths. Rob recapped the background from the initial paper to the EQCS Committee the previous November outlining performance concerns and a SAR validation grade of Requires Improvement with Leadership and Management as inadequate. Members noted the range of interventions implemented to manage and support staff, alongside intensive Teaching Learning and Assessment support from the Quality Team and sharing best practice to replicate simple systems and processes operating in the English department. Rob updated on the latest performance figures, which demonstrated significant improvement in learning interactions and in-year achievement, which now met the National Achievement Rate. Based on the level of improvement, a further SAR validation session was undertaken, resulting in a grade of Good for Behaviour and Attitudes, Good for Personal Development and all other areas graded Outstanding.

In response to a member's question about feedback from students over the period of intervention, Rob advised that the majority of learner voice feedback had been very positive.

The Chair commented that maths had been a concern for some time and that the focus to secure improvements had been excellent, resulting in a fantastic achievement. Members commended the progress made by the department.

25/63 Internal Audit Plan 2025/26 (Paper D)

Allen Eccles presented Paper D, the Internal Audit (IA) Plan for 2025/26.

Members noted that the Audit and Risk Committee had considered the views of the IA provider, the Strategic Risk Register, other sources of assurance and the areas that the IA service had and had not looked at in recent years to agree the draft plan for Corporation. Members were directed to the Assignment Plan within the document, which summarised the areas for review in 2025/26 and Allen explained that the Committee had amended the number of days allocated across the plan to ensure an appropriate level of focus for each review.

Members queried the number of days allocated to the review of educational visits and were advised that the process for educational visits had been entirely refreshed in light of the safeguarding implications for students involved in visits off site. The review was intended to ensure that the revised systems and processes based on lessons learned over the last year were working as envisaged.

Members approved the proposed Internal Audit Plan for 2025/26.

25/64 Financial Monitoring to 31 May 2025 (Paper E1)

Paul Bradley presented Paper E1, which detailed the financial position of the College at 31 May 2025.

Members noted the increase in projected surplus and Paul explained the factors which had impacted the position, including accelerated DfE Bootcamp delivery, an increase in contribution from the NECA Bootcamp contract, increased bursary funds for bus passes, a reduction in adult skills sub-contracting, electric vehicle grant funding, an increase in expected National Insurance grant and reduced staffing expenditure. Paul highlighted the number of short-term contracts where the College needed to bid each year and emphasised the resulting lack of certainty around this significant proportion of income. Members were also reminded of the provision in the accounts for NA College and noted that confirmation of whether these funds would be written off was still awaited from the DfE. Paul updated on the changes to financial benchmarks for Colleges recently communicated by the FE Commissioner and the prediction that only 36% of colleges were expected to be able to achieve the revised EBITDA measure of 6%. It was agreed to circulate the FEC letter notifying the changes to all governors.

CW

Members noted the position in respect of NA College and asked whether there were any other potential issues that would impact the financial position. Paul advised that there may be further changes arising from staffing vacancies and whilst this was expected to have a positive impact on the surplus it was unlikely to be as significant. Members commented that it was important to recognise the level of uncertainty around the income from short term contracts when the clock resets each year.

Members noted the draft financial position to 31 May 2025.

25/65 Financial Monitoring – Westfirst Limited to 31 May 2025 (Paper E2)

Members received and noted the Westfirst Limited financial reports to 31 May 2025.

25/66 Cost of Living Pay Award (Paper E3)

Karl Fairley presented Paper E3 and advised that the paper responded to members' request at the December Corporation meeting that the Finance and Resources Committee conduct a further review on the potential for an additional pay award when there was a clearer understanding of the financial position for 2024/25.

Karl advised that the Committee reviewed the position at its June meeting and had considered the Trade Unions' view, the surplus position which had increased since the July 2024 budget position, further impacts on the budget as detailed in the report and the grounds for the Senior Leadership Team's (SLT) recommendation being conditional on a proposal that is affordable, does not jeopardise the College's long-term financial viability and does not result in staff redundancies.

Karl explained the initial recommendation to the Committee of an additional 2.5% award in the context of the schoolteachers pay award of 5.5%. The SLT had felt that although it was not possible to recommend a consolidated award, the level of reserves would allow an additional non-consolidated award whilst preserving the outstanding financial status of the College. It was noted that a further increase in the forecast surplus since the Committee's discussion would enable a higher award if desired and Karl explained the cost of any additional uplift.

Members commented that the financial position had improved significantly since the previous update and the proposed additional award would reflect the one-off nature of much of the funding and the associated uncertainty. The timing of and ability to invest in capital improvements should also be considered as staff would also benefit from the quality of facilities. Members asked about staff expectations and whether the proposal would be at a level acceptable to staff. Karl explained that whilst staff and Trade Unions would always want a higher award, the table in the report demonstrated pay awards in previous years and it was felt that staff appreciated the College's approach and track record on pay. Members observed that there was potential to increase the award by a further 1% and in considering what this would bring in benefit, the Principal advised that whilst staff looked at the accounts and would recognise that the increased surplus had been taken into account, the level of good will from staff would probably be

equivalent at the initial recommended level of 2.5%. A member proposed an increase which achieved a middle ground of a 3% additional award, on the grounds that this demonstrated a recognition of the increased surplus, resulted in a total pay award for the year of 6%, which was higher than the schoolteachers' award and retained a level of additional funding for further investment in the campus, in effect sharing the fruits of the strong financial performance.

After careful consideration of all relevant factors, Corporation agreed to pay a non-consolidated pay award of 3% or £750* (whichever is the greater) payable to all staff (including supply pool staff) in employment on 1 July 2025. (*pro-rata to hours worked.

25/67 Capital Projects Update (Paper E4)

Members received Paper E4, which updated on the College's major capital projects and noted progress on the Artificial Grass Pitch and Car Park relocation Project.

25/68 Budget for 2025/26 and Indicative Budget 2026/27 (Paper E5)

Paul Bradley presented Paper E5, which detailed the expected forecast outturn position for 2024/25, the proposed budget for 2025/26 and a further year's prediction for 2026/27.

Paul reiterated the projected surplus position for 2024/25 as discussed earlier in the meeting and talked through the income and expenditure assumptions underpinning the proposed budget for 2025/26 and the balance sheet position as detailed in the report.

Mark Gomersall joined the meeting at 5.40pm.

Members reviewed the sensitivity analysis on the current year outturn and also the 2025/26 budget. A member sought clarification on the reference in the report to the potential cost of bringing catering in-house and Paul confirmed that this had been modelled because the current contract was due to come to an end in the period, however there was no proposal to bring the service back into the College.

Members noted that the budgets had been prepared following extensive work between Corporate and Curriculum teams and the proposals had been presented in detail to the Finance and Resources Committee.

Following detailed consideration of the underlying assumptions and noting the sensitivity analysis, Corporation:

- noted the forecast outturn for 2024/25, the proposed budget for 2025/26 and the forecast budget for 2026/27 and

- accepted the recommendation of the Finance and Resources Committee **to approve the budget for 2025/26 and the two-year financial plan which will be used for the College Financial Forecasting Return (CFFR) return due for submission at the end of July 2025.**

25/69 Medium Term Financial Plan 2025/26 to 2029/30 (Paper E6)

Paul Bradley presented Paper E6, the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2025/26 to 2029/30.

Members noted that the report built on the previous paper considering the two-year budget and set the context for financial planning for the next five years. Members reviewed the key issues emerging from the national FE context, considerations within the local landscape from a political and demographic perspective and noted the five-year forecasted financial and reserves position. Members noted the principles on which the plan was based, the current financial position as previously discussed and the future outlook.

Members approved the Medium Term Financial Plan 2025/26 to 2029/30.

25/70 Construction Centre of Excellence – Learning Space 2 – Business Case (Paper E7)

Paul Bradley presented Paper E7, which detailed the business case for the proposed development of the second warehouse at the College's Construction Centre of Excellence (CCoE).

Paul outlined the proposal emphasising the ongoing capacity challenges and further anticipated growth, explaining that the space in the CCoE was ideally placed for development, which would free up much-needed space on the main campus site.

Members noted the estimated costs and Paul confirmed that it was proposed to apply the recently confirmed Further Education College Condition Allocation to the project to offset some of the cost. There would also be an opportunity to bid for further capital funding. Paul advised on the Net Present Value position noting that the project would break even in year 13, after which it would generate a return.

Paul drew members' attention to the likely timescale should the project be approved and confirmed that following the tender exercise, a further report would be submitted to Corporation to approve the final contract award.

Members asked about the proposal to offer End Point Assessments at the facility and Paul confirmed that figures had not been included in modelling the costs as it was unclear at this stage the level of income this service would generate, however there was

a general expectation this would contribute a reduction to the cost base. The Principal highlighted that the timing of the project complemented the CTEC submission and the established objectives of the model, with further opportunities to bid for capital funding, whether the College was confirmed as the lead or a support partner.

Members asked whether solar power and rainwater harvesting had been considered, and Paul confirmed that the structural engineers had advised against any additions to the roof of the building, but that the same approach on rainwater would be taken as the main campus. Members queried whether publicising the project could impact on the allocation of capital funding however the Principal confirmed that the project would be presented within the TEC submission as a demonstration of the College's commitment to the construction sector with a shelf-ready project in the first year of establishment of a TEC. Members asked whether there may be competition for capital funding from the Sunderland Housing Innovation & Construction Skills Academy (HICSA) and it was noted that this facility was now complete.

Corporation agreed that the Construction Centre of Excellence - Learning Space 2 project proceeds to tender stage with the estimated budget of £2.5m.

25/71 Lease Renewal – Low Carrs (Paper E8)

Members reviewed Paper E8, which sought approval to renew the lease of Low Carrs Podiatry Clinic.

In response to a member's question for more information on why the lease was needed, Paul explained that the space was required to conduct the Podiatry Clinic which had operated at the site for a number of years, however the ongoing need for the space had been challenged by management earlier in the year. It had been concluded that the space was still required and that subject to an acceptable level of rent increase, the lease should be renewed. In response to a further question Paul confirmed that the facility covered its costs, was part of a high value course, and as a live clinic with patients, considerable changes had been made to the building as an NHS delivery site. Members thanked Paul for the information which assisted in their understanding of the position.

Corporation agreed:

- **that the College completes the lease at Low Carrs based on the changes detailed in the report and**
- **that the Corporation Seal be applied to the lease in accordance with the Instrument and Articles of Government.**

25/72 Annual Review of Single Equality Scheme and Action Plan (Verbal update)

Karl Fairley updated that the Chair had agreed to defer the report to the next Corporation meeting to enable current and ongoing work on the Inclusive Employer Standard including benchmarking and action plan to be reflected in the report.

KF

25/73 Curriculum and Quality Monitoring Reports (FE, Apprenticeships and HE) (Paper G)

Members reviewed Paper G, the Curriculum and Quality Monitoring Reports discussed at the recent meeting of the Education Quality Curriculum and Students Committee.

Members noted the curriculum and quality activity and performance across FE, Apprenticeships and HE.

25/74 FE and HE Quality Development Plan updates (Paper H)

Members reviewed Paper H, the Quality Development Plan updates for FE and HE as discussed at the recent meeting of the Education Quality Curriculum and Students Committee.

Members noted the progress against the FE and HE Quality Development Plans.

25/75 Appointment of Corporation Members (Paper I1)

Applications for Reappointment

Ben Fisher withdrew from the meeting at 5.53pm.

Members noted that Ben Fisher's Term of Office as a Governor was due to expire on 31 July 2025 after serving four years as a member. It was noted that the Search and Governance Committee considered Ben's application for reappointment on 9 June 2025. The Committee reviewed Ben's updated application form which detailed his skill set, and commented on his strong attendance record, his significant involvement in events outside of formal meetings particularly in the last year, his individual contribution as a member of a number of different committees and his contribution as Vice Chair.

Members noted that the Committee had previously discussed the need to stagger governor terms of office to mitigate the risk of several vacancies arising at the same time and that Ben had indicated support for this approach and a preference for a two-year appointment.

Corporation approved the reappointment of Ben Fisher as a Corporation member for a further 2-year term expiring on 31 July 2027.

Ben Fisher re-joined the meeting at 5.54pm and was congratulated on his reappointment.

Allen Eccles withdrew from the meeting at 5.54pm.

It was noted that Allen Eccles' Term of Office as a Governor was due to expire on 14 September 2025 after serving four years. The Search and Governance Committee had considered Allen's application for reappointment alongside the Corporation Skills Audit and future succession planning requirements, and approved a written resolution to recommend Allen's reappointment to Corporation. It was noted that Allen had indicated a preference for a one-year term of office should he be reappointed. Members highlighted the risk to the Audit and Risk Committee in relation to future chairing arrangements and the Corporation Chair confirmed that the Search and Governance Committee would ensure that addressing the anticipated skills gap would be a priority for recruitment activity over the coming months.

Corporation approved the reappointment of Allen Eccles as a Corporation member for a further 1-year term expiring on 14 September 2026.

Allen re-joined the meeting at 5.56pm and was congratulated on his reappointment.

Appointment of Support Staff Governor

It was noted that Davey Benson's term of office as Support Staff Governor was due to expire on 31 August 2025 after serving 3 years.

Following a request for nominations, an election was held and College support staff had elected Bethany Robson, Apprenticeship Team Leader for the role of Support Staff Governor.

Corporation appointed Bethany Robson as Support Staff Governor for a period of 3 years from 1 September 2025 until 31 August 2028.

25/76 Review of Governor Role Description (Paper I2)

Members reviewed Paper I2, which proposed a revised role description for governors. Members queried whether the amendments sufficiently reflected the expectation for governors to contribute to the strategic role of the board and it was agreed to make a further amendment to provide further clarity in this respect.

CW

Corporation approved the revised Governor Role Description, subject to the amendment discussed.

25/77 Committee Composition (Paper I3)

Members **approved** the proposed changes to committee composition.

25/78 Committee meetings 2025/26 (Paper I4)

Members reviewed the summary of responses to the recent surveys on the impact and effectiveness of online committee meetings and options for next steps.

Corporation agreed that committee meetings should continue to be held online in 2025/26, subject to the option for each Committee to decide at its first meeting in the new academic year whether to hold one meeting in person during the year.

25/79 Careers Education and Guidance Governor (Paper I5)

Helen Golightly withdrew from the meeting at 5.58pm.

Caroline Winter presented Paper I5, which updated on the outcome of the recent exercise to seek expressions of interest for the role of Careers Education and Guidance Governor.

Corporation appointed Helen Golightly as Careers Education and Guidance Governor for 2 years until 31 July 2027, subject to her term of office, to commence with immediate effect.

Helen Golightly re-joined the meeting at 6.04pm and was congratulated on her appointment.

25/80 Strategic Monitoring (Paper J)

- **2024/25 Strategic KPI update – to note**
- **2025/26 Strategic KPIs – proposed KPIs and targets – to note**

Members received Paper J, which detailed performance across Corporate Services and Curriculum and Quality for 2024/25, and updated on the 2025/26 targets as approved at the recent meetings of the Finance and Resources Committee and the Education Quality Curriculum and Students Committee.

Members highlighted the performance indicators rated red following the reported instances of legislative breaches in estates and health and safety. Karl Fairley explained that the estates breach related to a failure in the fire alarm system where a fire alarm panel had failed and become temporarily unavailable and updated on the immediate response to address the issue. Members queried whether action was needed to reset expectations around the health and safety measures, referencing the discussion in the previous session on the external governance review findings to 'look at the greens'. Karl explained that the Finance and Resources Committee received a detailed termly report on current Health and Safety matters and whilst this generally provided a positive picture of compliance with statutory requirements, it provided governors with an opportunity to discuss individual issues in detail and further information could be provided to governors if

required. Members clarified that the point being made was a more general issue around KPIs as an early warning indicator of potential concerns and an opportunity to consider whether on reflection anything would have been done differently. Karl confirmed that the position could be revisited, and the Corporation Chair welcomed the discussion, reiterating the opportunity for detailed scrutiny of the health and safety position at the Finance and Resources Committee to provide further reassurance.

KF

Corporation noted the progress to date against all College Strategic KPIs for 2024/25 and noted the targets for all College Strategic KPIs for 2025/26.

25/81 Link Governor Updates

Safeguarding Governor (verbal update)

Davey Benson provided a verbal update following his termly meeting as Safeguarding Governor. Davey updated on both the risk matrix for Safeguarding and the matrix for Prevent and advised that whilst both registers were largely static, a new risk had been added around student homelessness. Discussion had focused on the drivers behind the increasing cases of homelessness and the actions being taken by the College to respond.

The meeting also considered the changes anticipated in the forthcoming annual update of Keeping Children Safe in Education, changes to the Prevent Strategy in accordance with the introduction of Martyn's Law and the College's Freedom of Speech Policy. Davey confirmed his view that the meeting had provided further assurance around the College's arrangements to discharge its responsibilities in respect of Safeguarding and Prevent and Karl Fairley thanked Davey for his contribution as Safeguarding Governor, emphasising the difference he had made in the role.

Careers Education and Guidance Governor update and SEND Governor update

It was agreed that in the absence of the SEND governor and in recognition of the time constraints on the meeting, written updates from both the Careers Governor and SEND Governor would be circulated outside of the meeting.

**SS /
SK /
CW**

25/82 Corporation and Committee meeting dates and Schedules of Business 2025/26 (Paper L)

Members **approved** the meeting dates and Schedules of Business for 2025/26.

25/83 Use of the Seal (Paper M)

Members received Paper M and noted the application of the College Seal to the following documents:

- Sub-contractor's collateral warranty relating to the Construction Centre of Excellence
- Variation of Funding Agreement for Wave 6 Skills Bootcamps

as recorded in the Corporation Register of Seals. The documents were signed by the Chair and Principal on behalf of Corporation.

25/84 Any other urgent business

The Chair updated that 121 discussions with the Chair would be arranged over the summer and asked governors to complete the Individual Review and Reflection survey to support these discussions when the link was circulated the following week.

25/85 Date of next meeting: 25 September 2025