

CHAIR APPROVED

The Corporation of New College Durham

**Minutes of the Corporation meeting
held on 25 September 2025**

Present:

Stephen King (Chair)

Andy Broadbent

Allen Eccles

Matthew Gamsby

Ben Fisher

Helen Golightly – *via MS*

Teams

Mark Gomersall

Jonathan Hamill

Kathryn McCloghrie

Chris Patterson

Bethany Robson

Suzanne Slater

Apologies:

Emily Baxter

Nigel Harrett

Rhiannon Hiles

Hayley Farrell

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

25/86 Chair's introduction and starred items

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted that this was the first meeting for Bethany Robson since her appointment as Support Staff Governor.

The Chair thanked governors for their engagement in the recent one-to-one discussions and confirmed that the outcome of these discussions would be reflected in the changes to committee membership proposed for consideration later in the meeting. The Chair updated that Ross Markwell had resigned from Corporation over the summer but would continue to be a valued stakeholder working with the College moving forwards.

The Chair reminded members to declare their interests in any item of business to be discussed at the meeting. It was noted that Chris Patterson had an interest in Paper I, Appointment of Safeguarding Governor.

Mark Gomersall joined the meeting at 4.02pm.

The Chair advised that following the initial feedback received from the external governance review some reports on the agenda included questions or specific discussion points for governors to encourage further challenge and discussion, and that starred

agenda items had been grouped together at the end of the agenda to ease navigation between reports in the agenda pack. The Chair reiterated the approach to starred items and emphasised the importance of members asking questions on these items where they had queries or concerns.

Members confirmed that they did not require any further discussion about the starred agenda items L, M1, M2, M3, M4, N, O, P and Q.

25/87 Apologies for absence were received from Emily Baxter, Nigel Harrett, Rhiannon Hiles and Hayley Farrell.

25/88 Minutes of previous meeting (Paper A)

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 July 2025 were agreed as accurate.

25/89 Matters arising not appearing elsewhere on the agenda

25/60 (arising from previous action 25/40) – Alison Maynard advised that the Deputy Principals within the Durham Learning Alliance were meeting every 6 weeks and that a small number of amendments were being made to the report on the review of local needs before circulation to governors.

AM

25/64 – the FE Commissioner letter notifying of the changes to financial benchmarks was circulated to governors in July.

25/72 – the Annual Report on Equality Diversity and Inclusion was on the current agenda at Paper J.

25/76 – the draft Governor Role description was further revised to reflect governor feedback, and the updated version had been uploaded to the Governor SharePoint site.

25/80 – the October Finance and Resources Committee would receive an update on the Health and Safety matters raised at the July Corporation meeting.

25/81 – written updates from the three link governors were circulated to all members in July.

Jonathan Hamill joined the meeting at 4.08pm.

25/90 Principal's Report (Paper B)

The Principal briefed members on matters of strategic interest including the high-level implications of the Cabinet reshuffle, developments in relation to Technical Excellence Colleges (TECs) following notification of the unsuccessful outcome of the College's application for the Construction TEC. Members noted the positive feedback received on the application and that there were potential

implications for the North East Institute of Technology (NEIoT). Further announcements on the defence-focused and other TECs were awaited in the near future. Members noted progress in respect of the College's involvement with the collaborative work between the AoC and Universities UK, an update on college pay negotiations and the College's early work in response to the launch of the new Ofsted education inspection framework.

From a College perspective, members were updated on the College's selection as an Insider Hub for T Levels, the award of SHINE accreditation by the North East Combined Authority and Bronze Status for the Inclusive Employer Standard, the annual Back to Business event and arrangements for governor and stakeholder engagement in developing the new five-year College strategy.

Members noted the potential for an imminent Ofsted inspection and asked about the College's preparation in response to the new framework. Alison Maynard advised that the College's approach to its day-to-day business meant it was already well placed for inspection and that in response to the new framework, weekly meetings ensured an overview of activity with allocations of specific areas to individual staff leads, such as safeguarding and inclusion. There were some adjustments in respect of changing terminology within the new framework and a clear focus on inclusion. Alison explained that the definition of inclusion would be key as this could include 90% of students at New College Durham.

Members reflected on the change in DfE and DWP responsibilities, noting the resulting need to form new relationships and asked about where this might lead to some misalignment in its impact with the College more aligned than schools to the world of work. Alison Maynard advised that there was more work for the government to determine and communicate the detail behind the changes, following which the College would be able to respond. Andy Broadbent commented that the timing was quite positive for the College in light of the impending move of the Business Development Unit to its new location, which would be widely promoted on social media. The College was discussing the changes with key contacts in a similar position following the announcement and remained well-placed to react quickly to policy changes.

A discussion took place on the implications following the unsuccessful CTEC application. Members asked about the forthcoming defence TEC and it was confirmed that the College's work in this area was still developing, whereas other providers may currently have stronger links to industry. In response to a question about the next TECs to be announced Alison confirmed that advanced manufacturing, engineering and digital were expected to be next. Members noted that the way TECs developed was still being worked through, but the lead college would bring partners around the table with the funding held by the area's combined

authority. Members emphasised the importance of ensuring the College's recent investment, its strong capability and ongoing commitment to construction was promoted within the region. It was noted that the College remained one of the biggest deliverers of Bootcamps and was recognised for its strength as a training provider and its strong partnerships with employers, underpinned by their endorsement of the TEC application. Members acknowledged the potential impact of the CTEC on the NEIoT which was continuing to grow and recognised the need to protect the work to date.

The Chair thanked members for a good discussion on some significant issues and members noted the report.

25/91 Receipt of Committee minutes and verbal reports from chairs:

Education Quality Curriculum and Students Committee (Paper C1) – the Chair approved minutes of the meeting held on 19 June 2025 were received. It was noted that Corporation received a verbal update from the meeting in July and there were no further queries or comments.

Search & Governance Committee (Paper C2) – the Chair approved minutes of the meeting held on 15 September 2025 were received. It was noted that a number of the key items were discussed were on the current meeting agenda. The Committee Chair updated on the Committee's review of the draft report on the external governance review. Members were advised that the detail in the report did not fully reflect the positive feedback received when the headlines were presented to the Board in July. Feedback was being collated to share with the external review team and it was agreed to share the draft report with Corporation members. **CW**

Audit & Risk Committee – the Committee Chair provided a verbal update from the meeting held on 22 September 2025. The Committee had reviewed the updates to the Strategic Risk Register and the annual report on key risks and held a detailed discussion on the latest developments in relation to the Oxford Business College HE partnership. The Committee had a lengthy discussion on the final report of the Apprenticeship Funding internal audit review, which was the first report with a weak level of assurance that had been received by the current members of the Committee. Colleen Peters attended the Committee to provide details of the comprehensive actions being taken to address the recommendations and the Committee had taken comfort from the detailed action plan. The Committee requested a further update on progress in due course. Members were also updated on a detailed fraud investigation into another of the College's HE partners, which was found to be unsubstantiated.

25/92 Update on 2024/25 academic performance (Paper D)

Alison Maynard presented Paper D, which provided an analysis of academic performance for the 2024/25 academic year. Members noted that the College had maintained its position as one of the strongest performing colleges nationally and were briefed in detail on achievement in Further Education, T Levels, A Levels and AS Levels, Maths and English, Apprenticeships and Higher Education. Members' attention was also drawn to the 'NCD on a page' document appended to the report, which provided a concise summary of provision and achievement data aligned to the Ofsted inspection toolkit.

Members commended the results and highlighted the achievement in maths, commenting that this was not just the College's Achilles heel, but a significant issue nationally. Members emphasised that the turnaround was phenomenal and would have a positive impact on other achievement metrics. Members commented that the hard work of the staff involved had clearly paid off and emphasised the positive impact this would have for students' life skills, with the challenge now to maintain this level. Members asked how the level of improvement had been achieved, and Alison re-capped the range of measures implemented from the establishment of the Steering Group of senior managers to oversee improvement actions, daily support for the team from one of the Vice Principals, accountability through individual staff targets and clear and shared expectations on improvements required. Ultimately the team placed students at the heart of activity and the impact on individuals had been significant.

In response to a member's question about the link between achievement and attendance Alison advised that this had been a factor at the start of the year, however over time greater focus had been on ensuring students were challenged and that staff had autonomy where needed to make improvements, so the impact of attendance had lessened as the year progressed. The Principal confirmed that identifying the root cause of previous performance issues had been key and sustaining the improvements into next year and beyond was a priority. Members highlighted that Level 1 results had seen an impressive increase and Alison confirmed that these results were among the best in the country with high grades and functional skills also showing significant improvement. The positive impact of the College's performance for post-16 English on national figures was also highlighted.

Members asked about the response from staff in other subject areas to the improvements in maths in terms of the opportunities for shared learning as well as understanding potential consequences of not meeting expectations. Alison confirmed that the approach was being used as a flagship and replicated in other areas, resulting in some competition. Members felt that the improvements had been achieved through additional support in a positive way and the significance of the team having retained staff

under significant pressure in a teaching area that was in high demand was emphasised.

Members noted the achievement position for 2024/25.

25/93 Update on 2025/26 enrolments (Paper E)

Alison Maynard presented Paper E, which updated on the enrolment position at 11 September 2025, covering 16-19 learners, T Levels, Higher Education and Apprenticeship provision.

Members reviewed the enrolment data and considered the areas of over-recruitment, those not yet at capacity, the potential risk areas and implications for plans to develop the campus.

In response to a member's question on whether the lower enrolment numbers for Graphics might be related to the rise in use of artificial intelligence, Alison advised that whilst there was some uncertainty among students, it was positive that Art and Design numbers had actually increased, indicating a potential move of Graphics learners to Art and Design as a more traditional subject. Members asked about the number of digital apprenticeships and commented that having digital skills was now potentially seen as being embedded within other areas rather than as an end in itself. Alison confirmed that recruitment numbers had been low and that the offer was being reviewed with a view to moving from wide coverage across the digital agenda to more specific areas of focus.

Members discussed T Level recruitment and the need to consider whether a sixth form building or a different type of capacity was required in light of the current and future market. It was noted that travel to learn intelligence would assist in planning future needs and that Heads of School were reflecting on target and actual recruitment numbers to project three to four years ahead and inform building plans. Members highlighted the significant increase in catering numbers following a decline in previous years and Alison confirmed that this was a result of word of mouth relating to the reputation and quality of the College's performance in this area following competitions, accreditations and award successes last year and social media was being used to promote the wider benefits and facilities at the College. Behaviour issues had been a concern in this area previously, but students were well-behaved and enjoying their programme, enabling an earlier start to the training restaurant than in previous years. Andy Broadbent advised that this reflected the position across the College where the improvement in behaviour had been astounding with very positive feedback on the student population and a significant reduction in incidents compared to the same point last year.

In response to members' questions about HE and Apprentice participation in Welcome Fest, Peter Morrison explained that Apprentices don't access Welcome week as they start the following week and because they are employed they have a slightly different

focus to the start of year due to only being on site one day per week. Feedback had also indicated there was no demand for a similar event for HE students, many of whom were working around their studies. Issuing free hoodies to HE students was one area which had been raised and implemented following student feedback, which was continuously sought with issues being picked up through HE forum meetings.

Members asked whether the College received feedback on the reasons students chose to enrol at NCD. Alison confirmed that questions were included in meet and greet activity in the first four weeks of enrolment as well as the induction survey undertaken in October and also in student form meetings.

Members noted the report.

25/94 Students Union Report (Paper F)

Matt Gamsby presented Paper F, the Students Union Report.

Members were briefed on Welcome Fest, which had been well-received. Students were offered a range of activities to familiarise themselves with the campus and facilities and Students' Union staff visited classes to introduce SU services and enrichment opportunities. Members noted a 44% increase in attendees in the first week of enrichment activities with a wider range of activities on offer and a significant increase in female participants this year. Matt advised that the timetable was already being reviewed to consider requests to include different activities and that more events were being added the following week. Matt confirmed the continued provision of period poverty packs due to the success of the programme in previous years and that arrangements for students to access benefits and discounts would also continue. Members were updated on a visit by the Learning Development Coordinator to Oxford Business College (OBC) in July to carry out student voice activity and support students transferring from OBC to CECOS. It was noted that the feedback from these students had been generally positive.

Members commented on the positive start to the term and welcomed the positivity in the student feedback following the visit to OBC/CECOS students. In response to a member's question about the feeling among transferring OBC students, Peter Morrison confirmed they had appreciated the opportunity to meet with an NCD representative in person. The only concerns related to some students having to travel slightly further to college, but assurance had been provided on the support available to them. Peter emphasised that the HE team always asked about the progress and wellbeing of transferring students in their meetings with CECOS and that the majority of negativity was directed at the Secretary of State for the decision which led to the transfer.

Members noted the report.

25/95 Corporate Services Update (Verbal update)

Karl Fairley updated on developments across the Corporate Services Directorate over the summer break. Members were briefed on activity to benchmark services against key national and regional indicators (ISO accreditations in estate management and the confirmation of Cyber Essentials Plus for another year), the achievement of new quality benchmarks including the Inclusive Employer Standard which recognised the College's commitment to diversity and the Better Health at Work Award. The development of both Armstrong House and the Construction Centre of Excellence Learning Space 2 had continued and the 4G grass pitch was now open and in regular use by community groups. New policies and procedures had been implemented to reflect the updated Keeping Children Safe in Education guidance and the testing of new college lockdown procedures had been largely positive with further drills planned in the coming weeks. Safeguarding reports over the summer and into September had been analysed with a focus on peer to peer and mental health issues being raised by students, all of whom were being supported.

Members noted the updates.

25/96 Financial Monitoring to 31 July 2025 (Paper G1)

Paul Bradley presented Paper G1, which detailed the financial position of the College to 31 July 2025 and represented the first draft of the College accounts for 2024/25.

Members noted the estimated surplus position and Paul highlighted the recent changes which had impacted the position against the forecast. Paul advised that further changes were expected in the coming weeks following the next Individualised Learner Return.

Members welcomed the consistently strong financial position but noted that the forthcoming budget in November may generate some challenges to future finances.

Members noted the report.

25/97 Financial Benchmarking Data (Paper G2)

Members **agreed to defer** the item to a future meeting due to time pressure in the current meeting and the importance of ensuring the paper was allocated adequate discussion time.

25/98 Capital Projects Update (Paper G3)

Paul Bradley presented Paper G2, which updated on the College's major capital projects.

Paul recapped the progress to date in respect of the Construction Centre of Excellence Learning Space 2 and briefed members on

works required to the steel frame and foundations of the building. In response to a member's question about the impact of this work on the business case for Learning Space 2, Paul confirmed that the only change was to add an additional year to the payback period. Paul advised that the works were not expected to impact on the timetable to have the main project completed for the start of the 2026/27 academic year.

The Principal briefed members on the actions being taken to explore whether the costs of the additional work could be recovered in consideration of the use of public funds.

Members noted the progress on the Construction Centre of Excellence Learning Space 2.

25/99 CECOS Update (Paper H1)

Peter Morrison presented Paper H1, which updated on performance relating to the College's HE partnership with CECOS.

Members were briefed on completion and continuation rates, teaching and learning activity and current contract numbers, noting that provision now spanned five campuses with new programmes commencing in September 2025. Peter outlined recent developments in CECOS provision and a proposal to increase contract numbers with CECOS as the College's sole continuing franchise partner, set against the current external landscape relating to franchised provision.

Members asked about any disadvantage of increasing the contract numbers and Andy Broadbent advised that previous experience with HE partners demonstrated the need to be comfortable with the clear intent, quality of provision and that numbers were appropriate in the context of the College's resources. Members queried and considered a range of factors including the increased level of assurance required from NCD as the lead organisation, the desire to support CECOS to deliver high-quality provision and achieve strong outcomes, their aspirations for further growth balanced against the need for caution, the risk of concentrating franchise activity with a single partner, approaches from other agents and new franchise markets, implementation of additional safeguards and the scenario planning which had been undertaken to mitigate potential risks should there be any concerns with CECOS.

Members emphasised the importance of ensuring quality of provision for what were NCD students and the need to ensure all potential issues were reflected in the strategic risk register.

Members noted the approved September 2025 cohort target and after careful consideration, **approved a revision to the maximum contractual numbers from 800 per academic year to 1,400 to reflect management of the growth requested by CECOS.**

25/100 Oxford Business College (OBC) Update (Paper H2)

Peter Morrison presented Paper H2, which updated on the transfer of students studying at OBC to CECOS College under the Student Protection Plan.

Peter talked through the position for the three respective cohorts, detailing the reasons for withdrawal and the number of students remaining with CECOS. Members noted the work of the HE team to obtain student records and work from OBC and the progress to date. Members welcomed the detail provided in the timeline of events which had been very helpful in understanding the position and were updated on the outcome of the judicial review which set aside the Secretary of State's decision to revoke designation of OBC provision.

Members agreed to:

- note the work of the HE Partnership team in the transfer of students from OBC to CECOS and
- note the outcome of the Judicial Review and the subsequent work to engage with OBC, Department for Education (DfE) and OfS.

25/101 Appointment of Safeguarding Governor (Paper I)

Chris Patterson withdrew from the meeting.

Caroline Winter presented Paper I, which updated on the outcome of the recent exercise to seek expressions of interest for the role of Safeguarding Governor.

Corporation appointed Chris Patterson as Safeguarding Governor for a 2-year period until 30 September 2027, subject to his term of office, to commence with immediate effect.

25/102 Equality Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report (Paper J)

Members **agreed to defer** the item to a future meeting due to time pressure in the current meeting and the importance of ensuring the paper was allocated adequate discussion time.

25/103 Annual Report on Sustainability (Paper K)

Members **agreed to defer** the item to a future meeting due to time pressure in the current meeting and the importance of ensuring the paper was allocated adequate discussion time.

25/104 Financial Monitoring – Westfirst Limited to 31 July 2025 (Paper L)

Members received and noted the draft annual report and financial statements for Westfirst Limited for the financial year 2024/2025 covering the period 01 August 2024 to 31 July 2025.

25/105 Committee Composition and Chairing (Paper M1)

Members **approved** the proposed changes to Committee Composition as set out section 4 of the report.

25/106 Search and Governance Committee Annual Report 2024/25 (Paper M2)

Members received and noted Paper M2, the Search and Governance Committee Annual Report for 2024/25. The report provided details of committee membership and attendance, terms of reference and a review of work undertaken during the year.

25/107 Review of Governing Body Business 2024/25 (Paper M3)

Members received and noted Paper M3, the review of Governing Body business for 2024/25. The report was considered and endorsed by the Search and Governance Committee on 15 September and replaced the Annual Self-assessment of Governance, which was not required in the same year as an external governance review.

The report retained elements of monitoring information including details of membership changes during the year, meeting attendance, review of meeting arrangements, development and training activities, major items of business conducted during the year, summary of Members' and Senior Postholders interests and progress made against the previous year's governance development plan.

25/108 Policy for the Independence of the Head of Governance (Paper M4)

Members received Paper M4, which proposed a Policy for the Independence of the Head of Governance. The policy was recommended good practice under the AoC Further Education Code of Good Governance was endorsed for approval by the Search and Governance Committee on 15 September 2025.

Corporation **approved** the Policy for the Independence of the Head of Governance.

25/109 Strategic Risk Register Update (Paper N)

Members received and noted Paper N, the Strategic Risk Register update.

25/110 Written Resolutions passed since the last Corporation meeting (Paper O)

Members noted that the following Written Resolutions had been passed since the last Corporation meeting:

- Policy and Procedure on Safeguarding Young People and Adults at Risk (passed 11 August 2025)
- Appointment of Corporation Member (passed 12 August 2025)

25/111 Use of the College Seal (Paper P)

Members noted the application of the College Seal to the following documents:

- Underlease relating to Armstrong House (seal applied 22 August 2025 and signed by Andy Broadbent and Mark Gomersall on behalf of Corporation)
- Deed of Novation relating to the collaboration agreement with the London School of Commerce (seal applied 10 September 2025 and signed by the Chair and Principal on behalf of Corporation)

as recorded in the Corporation Register of Seals.

25/112 Chair's Use of Delegated Authority (Paper Q)

Members received and noted Paper Q, which detailed the legal requirements and process followed to authorise Andy Broadbent to sign the underlease relating to Armstrong House referenced in Paper P on behalf of Corporation in addition to one other Corporation member.

25/113 Any other urgent business - none

25/114 Date of next meeting: 6 November 2025