

CHAIR APPROVED

The Corporation of New College Durham

**Minutes of the Education Quality, Curriculum and Students
meeting held on 20 March 2025**

Present:

Suzanne Slater (Chair)
Andy Broadbent
Rhiannon Hiles

Kathryn McCloghrie
Mark Gomersall
Hailie Warren

Apologies:

Emily Baxter
Davey Benson

In attendance:

Alison Maynard (Deputy Principal)
Andy Stephenson (Vice Principal)
Adele Dowson (Vice Principal)
Colleen Peters (Vice Principal)
Peter Morrison (Vice Principal)
Julie Coverley (Director of Higher Education)
Suzanne Crane (Assistant Principal)
Caroline Winter (Head of Governance & Corporation Secretary)

Observing:

Joanna Watson, Good Governance Institute
Chris Patterson – *to 25/05*

Action

25/01 Chair's introduction and starred items

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Joanna Watson of the Good Governance Institute, the organisation appointed to conduct the external governance review, who was observing the meeting. The Chair also reminded members of the changes to the Committee membership and chairing arrangements, which had recently been approved by Corporation.

Members were reminded to declare their interests in any item of business to be considered at the meeting. No interests were declared.

Members confirmed that they did not require any further discussion about the starred agenda item, Paper F.

25/02 Apologies for absence were received from Emily Baxter and Davey Benson.

25/03 Minutes of previous meeting (Papers A1 & A2)

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2025 (including confidential minutes) were agreed as accurate.

25/04 Matters arising not appearing elsewhere on the agenda

There were no follow up actions from the previous meeting.

25/05 Attendance and Travel to Learn patterns (Presentation)

The Chair welcomed Emma Crosskey, Head of Advice, Support Careers (ASC) and Jill Lake, ASC Officer to provide an overview of recent work reviewing attendance levels and travel to learn patterns.

A pilot project was being progressed to review attendance across selected feeder schools to understand whether learners' attendance at college had increased or decreased since their school attendance levels. The project also considered distances travelled to college, the time taken and the related impact on attendance.

Of the 416 students for which attendance data had been provided by their former school, 180 had increased their attendance at college, 100 were within a 5% tolerance and attendance for 128 students had decreased. Emma advised that curriculum teams had a good understanding of their learners and related circumstances and that the reasons for the decrease would be explored at individual level. Fortnightly attendance meetings were held where falling attendance would be flagged and followed up so that staff understood individual learning needs, were able to explore incentives and work with Personal Learning Coaches to support students. Members noted that student travel to college was usually by bus and that journey times ranged from 15 to 140 minutes, with 80% of students in the pilot travelling between 36 – 80 minutes. A map was provided which plotted student postcodes and demonstrated that a number of students were passing other colleges to travel to NCD. It was hoped that this would assist Ofsted to understand the area and its rurality. Emma advised that the government had introduced guidance for local authorities and education providers on the use of risk indicators and information sharing to identify individual learner needs and put support in place at an early stage to support attendance, retention and a positive experience in college. Members noted that next steps would be to expand the pilot to all of the College's feeder schools, consider other information that may be relevant to this work and to work with curriculum schools to explore what other support may assist, such as parental engagement or reviewing timetabling.

Members asked about financial support for student travel to help address a potential barrier to attendance and Emma confirmed that learners were provided with bus passes by the College. In relation to the students travelling from Alston, the College had worked with the school to arrange a minibus that would connect them with the appropriate service bus to get to College. Whilst there was support for student travel, the work to plot the distances travelled illustrated the challenge and the significant difference between NCD and a city-based College where students may only be travelling 15 minutes.

Members noted that in some cases student attendance at school had been as low as 15%. The College was looking at the support

required at a very early stage to nurture these students back into an education setting. Members discussed the range of potential factors that could impact student attendance including students with special educational needs, looked after children, other vulnerabilities and those living in rural areas. Members asked if there was any relationship between the distance and travel time and drop-out rates. Adele Dowson advised that work to review retention rates the previous year demonstrated that the students travelling furthest actually had the highest retention rates, however there had been an indication that the student experience at the College had been a key retention factor. Emma advised that case studies would be developed to gain a greater understanding of individual challenges, and this would initially focus on Samuel Kings school in Alston.

Members welcomed the focus on developing a greater understanding of this area and thanked Emma and Jill for an interesting presentation.

Chris Patterson, Emma Crosskey and Jill Lake left the meeting at 4.18pm.

25/06 Accountability Agreement (Paper B)

Alison Maynard presented Paper B, which provided a mid-year update on the NCD Accountability Agreement (AA) approved by Corporation in May 2024. To assist new members of the Committee, Alison explained that the College was delivering its second AA following their introduction as a DfE requirement for colleges to access their funding allocation. The AA required both Senior Leadership Team (SLT) endorsement and Corporation approval before submission to the DfE. Members noted that Part One of the AA focused on the funding agreement and Part Two was developed around a standard structure provided by the DfE.

Alison summarised the objectives in the current AA and members reviewed the progress against the action plan appended to the report. Excellent progress was being made in all areas but Alison advised that the impact would be confirmed at the end of the year. Members noted that internal delivery of Bootcamps had been graded amber and was the only concern. Whilst some internal delivery was progressing this had been more challenging than anticipated. The learning from current activity would be used to adapt the approach to next year should the College be successful in securing more Bootcamp provision.

Alison explained that there would be a greater focus on the duty to review local needs in the 2025/26 AA, and that the Durham Learning Alliance had commissioned a report to assess whether priority areas were being covered across the Durham colleges, undertake a review of each curriculum, and consider any areas where there was potential for one college to take a lead in light of their resources and investment. Members considered the

proposed areas of priority for the next AA and Alison emphasised that whilst the College would continue to work with key employers on priority sectors, there was also a need to support the culture and tourism and creative sectors which were critical to the local area and to the College.

Members were supportive of the College's emerging work in lithium and in response to a query on whether there was any duplication with other institutions, Alison confirmed that a meeting was scheduled with local universities and a key lithium sector employer to scope activity in this area.

Members highlighted the government childcare scheme and focus on early years quality of education in the context of a significant gap in childcare assistants. In response to a query on whether this should be an area for the College to consider, Alison updated on existing work across the region to train teaching assistants. Following the recently announced reduction in adult funding, there was a need to prioritise delivery, however it was recognised this qualification could assist in meeting a skills need in the region.

In response to a member's question about opportunities for more formalised arrangements through the Durham Learning Alliance, the Principal confirmed that Corporate Services were looking at potential synergies but that the Alliance was in its very early stages. Past experience of shared services had demonstrated the complexities of contractual arrangements and so the Memorandum of Understanding between the partners outlined areas that could be explored without a formal legal agreement.

Members welcomed the significant increase in the number of T Level placements and queried the amber rating in the update. It was noted that whilst significant progress had been made, the work placement team were still working to secure opportunities this year. The College was feeding back to the DfE on the need for a more flexible approach to placement requirements and this had been discussed at the Audit and Risk Committee earlier in the week where the Committee had been updated on the risk around engineering placements. Members noted examples in midwifery and engineering where student placements had been implemented through working with key employers to find creative solutions to meet requirements. The North East Institute of Technology was also exploring how partners could collaborate in a joint approach to agree which employers could place students from different colleges.

Members asked about the impact of the current internal Bootcamp delivery challenges on learners and on the College's financial position. Alison explained that the delivery plan had been produced 18 months ago, however significant changes in global context and employer demand had necessitated change requests to be agreed by the DfE. This process could take up to four months and prevented a responsive approach to changes in the

environment. Delivery to date had gone well, with high levels of expectation among learners, employers and other stakeholders. There had been two visits by the DfE this year to review internal and external provision and the feedback on quality of provision had confirmed this was very good. Members noted that the short-term nature of Bootcamp contracts created a staffing challenge and whilst a decision had been taken to overstaff in Schools, this had been absorbed by the unexpected growth in 16-18 students and recruitment challenges remained in some areas. The College was now looking at the variation between the success of different Bootcamp sectors and remained one of the biggest Bootcamp providers regionally and nationally. Lessons had been learned and a strong partnership base had been established for future delivery.

Members discussed the purpose of the AA and the Principal explained that the SLT had taken the view that it had to be a useful document for the College, which provided the link between strategy and operational plans. It would be a useful document for governors' preparation for the forthcoming strategic review and it was being used by external applicants for senior roles to learn about the College. Alison explained that the DfE had not provided feedback on the AA in previous years but had confirmed that it would now be used as part of its Annual Strategic Conversation with Colleges.

Members noted the progress to date for the AA 2024/25 and the proposed areas for development of the AA for 2025/2026.

25/07 Update on 2024/25 Strategic Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) (Education & Training, Apprenticeships and Higher Education) (Paper C)

Andy Stephenson presented Paper C, which updated on progress against the Quality and Curriculum Strategic KPIs for the 2024/25 academic year.

Members were updated on retention, attendance and student satisfaction in Further Education and achievement rates and attendance in Adult education. In apprenticeships, members noted the current retention rate and predicted achievement rate. In Higher Education members reviewed performance across the Durham campus and individual partner institutions, focusing on retention rate, student satisfaction and attendance. Andy drew attention to areas that required a continued focus but confirmed the early indicators suggested overall positive performance trends for the year. The College remained committed to strong oversight and support for all HE partners with targeted interventions in place as necessary across all FE, HE and Apprenticeship provision.

Members commended the performance to date but queried the decline in student satisfaction. Andy confirmed that a number of lower performing curriculum areas had been identified and whilst there were a range of individual issues raised, feedback on

teaching and learning was a concern in one area which had been impacted by staff turnover with newer staff from industry replacing experienced teachers. The College had responded with a support programme providing bespoke CPD for new teachers bringing their industry experience into a teaching role. The timing of the survey was also a potential factor where students may be studying a dry topic and there was a need to share the intention of some content with students to assist understanding of why particular areas needed to be covered. Students were very complementary about Personal Development coaches but there were issues where students had progressed and some of the content was potentially repeated. The College was keen to share practice seen in areas with strong satisfaction rates. Members discussed the potential impact of the relaxation of the requirement to study English and maths and were updated on the views of key employers considering exercising the new flexibility.

Part of this item was recorded confidentially under confidential minute 25/07a.

In response to a member's question about the College's approach to supporting career aspirations of young women and girls it was noted that the College was working with key employers around engineering as well as opportunities with the Fire and Rescue Service both regionally and nationally. The School Engagement Team were also working with partners and schools to address perceptions around working in these areas.

25/08 Update on FE Quality Development Plan 2024/25 (Paper D)

Alison Maynard presented Paper D, which updated on the FE Quality Development Plan (QDP).

In relation to the areas for improvement (Afi), members were updated on the range of interventions overseen by the Maths Steering Group to improve achievement rates, which showed early signs of improvement, and the implementation of attendance strategies to secure improvements across all age bands. Whilst attendance remained an ongoing challenge, the College was focused on targeted interventions to achieve an impact on the overall attendance rate. In areas for development (Afd), Alison updated on the drive to ensure all teaching meets or exceeds expectations using the Enhanced Learning Model. Staff were accessing an exemplary CPD programme which offered a range of flexible and bespoke options. Members were briefed on areas requiring additional support and noted the early impact of the focused interventions recently seen in Art & Design.

Members welcomed the update on maths, recognising the challenge being faced and thanked the team for the reassurance provided on the work being done. Members felt assured by the strong leadership and management actions taken and commented that green shoots of improvement were starting to be seen. Alison

emphasised the focus on ensuring rapid improvement in light of the limited time to impact the lives of these young people.

25/09 Curriculum & Quality monitoring (FE) – discussion report (Paper E)

Adele Dowson presented Paper E, the Curriculum and Quality discussion report. Members were updated on attendance, student behaviour, the curriculum planning process for 2025/26, the forthcoming changes to the Ofsted inspection regime, apprenticeships, enhanced learning activities, employer engagement, delivery of Skills Bootcamps and UK Shared Prosperity Fund projects and the National Battery Training and Skills Academy.

Members commended the College's work with key partnerships to deliver skills training, highlighting the Learning Legacy Trust work to widen participation for women as well as exciting initiatives to deliver tailored programmes to BAE Systems and Cummins as key employers in the region. It was noted that the College had recently been awarded an additional £1m funding for the following year to deliver more short vocational courses to meet employer need. Members also highlighted the College's involvement in delivering training for mentors as part of the 'Into the Light' project within County Durham.

Members noted the increase in unacceptable student behaviour and asked about student feedback on the impact. Whilst there were a number of factors linked to the behaviour issues, feedback from other students indicated an awareness of low level disruption but that they felt safe, knew who to contact to raise concerns and viewed measures including drugs dogs visits and weapons searches positively as a demonstration the College acted to deal with issues and send a clear message on behaviour. The majority of students' behaviour was in line with expectations and the relevant policies had been revised to prevent widespread impact.

Alison Maynard left the meeting at 5.28pm.

25/10 Curriculum and Quality Monitoring (FE) – information report (Paper F)

Members received Paper F, the Curriculum and Quality Information Report, which provided an overview of Learner Surveys, the Learner Support Fund and student discipline and competitions in Term 1.

25/11 Update on HE Quality Development Plan 2024/25 (Paper G)

Peter Morrison presented Paper G, which updated on the HE Quality Development Plan.

Peter reported progress on full-time and part-time Durham based enrolments, which had seen a significant rise in acceptances. Members also noted the latest continuation, retention and completion rates for Durham and partner provision in comparison with Office for Students (OfS) benchmarks as well as current attendance rates. Members were updated on the staff training and development programme across HE, noting developments relating to HE Fellowship accreditations, CPD sessions covering OfS conditions and the focus on 'AI proofing' of assessments.

Members asked whether the College worked with local universities to share best practice and Peter updated on support provided to Durham University in relation to their Access and Participation Plan and reaching a wider demographic, as well as discussions around ongoing recruitment challenges. The team had gained an insight into the scale of the organisation's resources and had welcomed the opportunity to share best practice. Members also noted the College's involvement in the North East Uni Connect Programme, which worked to plant seeds early for young people on the benefits of considering higher education.

25/12 Curriculum & Quality Monitoring report (HE) (Paper H)

Julie Coverley presented Paper H, the HE Curriculum and Quality Monitoring report.

Members were updated on quality assurance, noting the increased response rate for the National Student Survey and the positive results in the start of programme questionnaire. Assurance of internal and external quality assessment continued to be robust and members were updated on preparations for the launch of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement in 2026/27. Members noted the OfS had lifted the pause on new registrations and were also consulting on two new conditions of registration relating to consumer protection and governance.

Julie briefed members on the latest developments in respect of a complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) including a recent meeting with OfS representatives. Discussion with the OfS focused on the College's proposed approach to compliance with Condition E6 (Harassment and Sexual Misconduct) which would come into effect later this year. Members were advised that the OfS had been content with the College's position and had acknowledged relevant amendments made to the College's Fitness to Practice Policy over the last academic year.

Updates were also provided in respect of teaching observations, the North East Institute of Technology, the latest application for Turing funding to support overseas work placements and the College's continued support for HE Fellowships.

Members thanked Julie for the detail in the paper and were pleased to note that the OIA complaint was moving towards

resolution. Members noted comments in respect of survey fatigue and asked about the process of feeding back outcomes to students. Julie confirmed that Student Voice activity took place throughout the year and that feedback from HE students the previous year suggested a lack of engagement from some students who did not see the value in undertaking the survey in their final year. The Students' Union President continued to work closely with Heads of School to encourage participation in the survey.

In response to a member's question about the financial compensation offered to the student complainant, it was confirmed that this had been a recommendation of the OIA following its investigation and a judgement had been made by the College to comply with the OIA request.

25/13 Partnership Update (Paper I)

Suzanne Crane presented Paper I, which updated on key issues impacting the College's HE partnerships.

Suzanne reported on evolving DfE policy in respect of HE franchise arrangements and the requirements for OfS registration. Whilst there were exemptions for mixed economy colleges, the potential impact on the College's income and current and future partnership arrangements was noted. Suzanne updated on developments in each of the College's HE partner providers and advised that the College would continue to support CECOS through the re-started registration process with OfS.

Members commented on the challenges with HE partner provision and welcomed the ongoing scrutiny of the arrangements and the plans and mitigation being put in place to address the areas of concern.

25/14 FE/HE Student Forum feedback – Overview of issues raised and progress update (Paper J)

Hailie Warren presented Paper J, the FE and HE Student Forum feedback. Hailie reported that the FE forum continued to be well-attended by a wide range of students and highlighted the positive feedback in relation to campus security, maths and English provision, support from teachers and Personal Development sessions. Hailie also updated on various concerns raised covering IT software, keyboard wipes, food quality and pricing. Members noted the support for free college meals at NCD was the highest outside London and that consideration of how this could be spent in College was a potential solution being explored. Issues discussed at the HE forum included positive feedback for tutors and the support provided to HE students, student lanyards and an update on building developments. The Principal confirmed that the College's caterers would attend future forum meetings to ensure swift feedback on any catering issues raised. The issues raised in each forum were being progressed with the relevant areas of the

College and an updated version of the 'Issues and Actions' document would be circulated after the meeting.

25/15 Academic Board minutes (Paper K)

Members received Paper K and noted the content of the Academic Board minutes of the meeting on 17 December 2024.

25/16 Any other business – none.

25/17 Date of next meeting: 19 June 2025