

The Corporation of New College Durham

**Minutes of the meeting of the Corporation
held on 23 May 2024**

Present:

Stephen King (Chair)
Davey Benson
Joy Brindle
Joyce Drummond-Hill
Allen Eccles
Ben Fisher

Mark Gomersall
Jonathan Hamill
Rhiannon Hiles
Chris Patterson
Suzanne Slater (*via MS
Teams*)

Apologies:

Andy Broadbent
Emily Baxter
Ian Green
Alice Tomlinson
Moss White
Alison Maynard

In attendance:

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

Action

24/30 Chair's introduction and starred items

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that both the Principal and Deputy Principal were not in attendance as they were attending the official opening of the new Oxford Business College campus in Brentford, in support of the College's new HE partnership.

It was noted that this would have been the last Corporation meeting for both student governors, Alice Tomlinson and Moss White, as their terms of office were due to expire on 30 June 2024. The Chair explained that neither was able to attend Corporation but that there would be an opportunity to thank them in person when they attended Committee meetings in June. The Chair asked that the Board's thanks for their contribution be placed on the meeting record.

The Chair advised that this was also the last Corporation meeting for Joy Brindle as her term of office was also due to expire on 30 June 2024. Joy was appointed to Corporation in July 2016 and served eight years as a member, in which time she had served on and chaired a number of the Corporation's committees. On behalf of Corporation the Chair thanked Joy for her contribution and commitment to the College and Corporation. Joy emphasised her pride in being associated with the College and highlighted in particular the culture of the organisation, which she felt had been particularly strong in the last few years, and commended the College for continuously seeking opportunities for its further improvement and development.

The Chair reminded members to declare their interests in any item of business to be discussed at the meeting. No interests were declared.

Members **confirmed** that they did not require any further discussion about the starred agenda items Papers E3, I and J2.

Rhiannon Hiles joined the meeting at 4.07pm.

24/31 Apologies for absence were received from Andy Broadbent, Emily Baxter, Ian Green, Alice Tomlinson, Moss White and Alison Maynard.

24/32 Minutes of previous meeting (Papers A1 & A2)

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 March 2024 (including confidential minutes) were agreed as accurate and signed by the Chair.

24/33 Matters arising

24/12 – Capital projects update - the reference to the site masterplan had been amended in the latest update report on the current agenda.

24/34 Principal's Report (Paper B)

Karl Fairley presented Paper B, which briefed members about matters of strategic interest including the outcome of the recent Mayoral elections, the new Mayor's education and skills pledges, and the College's representation in the working groups that supported the portfolios within NECA, the new Mayoral Combined Authority. Members were also updated on the North East Investment Zone (NEIZ) and the publication of the Public Accounts Committee report on HE franchising, which had implications for new HE partnership arrangements. In response to a member's question about the implications of the report's recommendations in respect of Office for Students (OfS) registration, Peter advised that the College could gain assurance that both CECOS and OBC were working towards OfS registration as part of their strategic plan. In relation to the issues identified in the report around attendance, Peter confirmed that there was now a greater transparency in the partnership working arrangements and that the attendance procedure had been significantly strengthened.

Members discussed early engagement with the North East Mayor and emphasised the importance of ensuring FE sector representation on each of the seven portfolio NECA working groups. Karl confirmed that the Principal was working with colleagues in other Colleges to achieve this and emphasised the importance of all colleges taking a collaborative approach in this respect.

From a College perspective, members were updated on collaborative working on the Battery Training Academy as well as the work between the four Durham FE Colleges to support the Local Skills Duty. Members also noted the latest progress on Bootcamp bids, the current work to review the Corporation's sub-committee structure and business cycle, recent awards nominations, high profile visits to the College and Senior appointments. Members welcomed the progress on Bootcamps and emphasised the need to maintain engagement with the Tees Valley Combined Authority whilst at the same time establishing a strong relationship with the emerging North East Combined Authority. Members noted the ongoing dialogue with the NHS to support midwifery students and congratulated the College on the awards announcements.

Members noted the report.

24/35 Receipt of Committee minutes and verbal reports from chairs:

Finance and Resources Committee (Papers C1 & C2) - the minutes of the meeting held on 8 May 2024 were received.

The Chair encouraged members to read the Workforce Planning paper discussed by the Committee, which provided a thorough analysis of the workforce challenges facing the College and the strategies for how the College would tackle them.

24/36 Accountability Agreement Statement – (Paper D)

Adele Dowson presented Paper D, the final draft of New College Durham's Accountability Agreement Statement (AA).

Adele advised that this was the second year the AA had been a Department for Education (DfE) requirement and that the document must be submitted by the end of June for the College to access its funding allocation for 2024/25. The statement had been developed in accordance with DfE guidance and included: a statement of the College's priorities, background to context/place, the approach to developing the statement, contribution to national, regional and local strategies, the Corporation statement confirming the plans for 2024/25 and a link to the College's Strategic Plan. Adele highlighted the work between the four colleges in County Durham in response to the duty to review local skills needs, which was summarised in the document.

Ben Fisher joined the meeting at 4.31pm

The Chair explained that the AA would ideally have been considered by the Further Education Quality curriculum and Students Committee (FEQCS) before Corporation but this had not been possible due to the DfE submission timetable, however high

level updates had been provided at the February FEQCS Committee and recent Strategic Review.

Members commended what they described as an excellent and useful document, which brought together the wide range of current activity into a single document and narrative. Members suggested that re-ordering the paragraphs in the 'Our Region the North East' section, to start with the regional position before moving on to County Durham, would provide greater clarity on the College's role in both the region and the County as well as improving the document flow for a potential national as well as local DfE audience. All members were supportive of the proposed change, which was consistent with discussions at the strategy day about the concept of the 'region'.

**AD /
AM**

In response to a member's question, it was confirmed that there had been minimal feedback on the first year's AA but there was a general agreement that developing the statement had been a useful exercise and the final document really demonstrated what the College was about.

Members approved the Accountability Statement for submission, subject to comments arising from the discussion being reflected in the final version.

24/37 Financial Monitoring to 31 March 2024 (Paper E1)

Paul Bradley presented Paper E1, which detailed the financial position of the College at 31 March 2024.

Members noted the increase in the projected surplus position and that the changes resulted from the additional in year 16-18 growth funding, adult funding from Tees Valley and North of Tyne contracts, European Social Fund, Bootcamp and Shared Prosperity Fund income which had now been included, alongside an expected increase in HE partnership income. Paul provided a further verbal update based on the April accounts which indicated a further increase in forecasted surplus due to additional adult delivery and the inclusion of May enrolments from the OBC and CECOS partnerships. Paul confirmed both a healthy balance sheet and cash position. Members welcomed the additional ESF funding but noted this was a one-off position for the current year. In response to a member's question, it was confirmed that the growth funding would not impact 16-18 funding next year and that the College would receive full funding for the current numbers at enrolment.

Members noted the report.

24/38 Cost of Living Pay Award 2023/24 (Paper E2)

This item is recorded confidentially under confidential minute 24/38a.

24/39 Financial Monitoring – Westfirst Limited to 31 March 2024 (Paper E3)

Members received and noted the Westfirst Limited financial reports to 31 March 2024.

24/40 Capital Projects Update (Paper E4)

Paul Bradley presented Paper E4, which updated on the College's major capital projects.

Paul advised that formal discharge of the planning conditions for the Artificial Grass Pitch and Car Park relocation project was expected imminently following email confirmation from the planning authority that all was in order. Paul advised that work was scheduled to start on site on 24 June 2024 with expected completion March 2025. In response to a member's question, Paul confirmed that there would be no reduction in car parking capacity throughout the relocation work.

Members were updated on a 5-week delay to the redevelopment of Promotion House arising from advice surrounding fire protection of the building. Paul advised that the College was working with the developer to resolve the issue and members noted the position with respect to additional costs. Construction itself was progressing well and there was no concern that this would impact on completion to allow teaching from 1 September 2024. Members observed that the building was referred to as the Construction Centre of Excellence in the report and agreed that this should be used in all future reports.

PB

Paul briefed members that a report would be submitted to the next Finance and Resources Committee in June and Corporation in July outlining the business case for the development of a Sixth Form and Sports Building. It was noted that feasibility work considering refurbishment of the building as part of the modernisation strategy had identified the potential to add classrooms through more efficient use of the plant room space. Paul explained that in order to maintain pace of any potential development, a planning application was due to be submitted to the Council which although did not commit the College to development, was intended to avoid any delay that may arise through the planning process if the project progressed. In response to a member's question about communications messages around the proposal, Paul confirmed that College representation at the Parish Council would be arranged to provide an update on the plans alongside other community engagement activity. Paul also emphasised that as the proposed changes would be inward-facing into the College boulevard and would not affect the height of the building, it was hoped this would avoid any potential community concerns. Members highlighted the importance of having the opportunity to discuss the proposed business case in detail at the forthcoming

committee, commenting that this had been a welcome addition to the process for capital projects in recent years.

Members noted the progress on the Artificial Grass Pitch and Car Park Relocation Project and Promotion House, Langley Moor, and noted the submission of the planning application for the proposed Sixth Form and Sports Building Development.

24/41 Annual Review of Safeguarding and Prevent (incorporating Annual Training Refresher) (Paper F)

Karl Fairley delivered a refresher training session on Safeguarding and Prevent. The presentation emphasised the core principle of safeguarding being everyone's responsibility and covered the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) Team, responsibilities of Governors under Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2023, the College's Safeguarding Children and Adults at Risk policy, key considerations for governors in discharging safeguarding obligations, key changes to KCSIE guidance, Prevent and Martyn's Law. Karl advised members of the importance of completing the NCD online safeguarding training module and asked all governors that had not yet completed the module to undertake this as a priority.

All

Andy Stephenson presented Paper F, the Annual Review of Safeguarding and Prevent. Members noted the overview of activity in 2023/24 and were advised that the top three categories of safeguarding concerns in 2023/24 were unchanged from the previous year: mental health, self-harm and suicidal thoughts. Members reviewed progress on curriculum developments, pastoral and support responses to issues identified, staff development activity, the establishment of a DSL Partnership Network, feedback from the student satisfaction survey around students' confidence in the College's processes and feeling safe, the safeguarding and Prevent risk registers and key areas for future development.

In response to a member's question about the response to substance misuse and knives on College premises, Andy explained the process of referral to the College's Safeguarding Team. In cases of substance misuse, the initial focus was from a health and education perspective however referral to the police would take place where necessary. Whilst incidences of knives on campus were minimal, there had been an increase and the College's disciplinary policy and search practices had been strengthened this year with a zero-tolerance approach. The College was working to educate its students on these issues and students had welcomed the drugs dog exercise earlier in the term as helpful and reassuring, whilst sending a strong message to students and staff.

Members discussed the importance of ensuring a clear and consistent message across the College and commended both the role of personal development sessions in helping to address the

underlying issues and the College's approach to communications and videos covering these issues. Members discussed the challenges in identifying and dealing with dab pens and noted that CCTV remained critical in tackling this and other and security issues. Members observed that the timing of increased numbers of concerns in September suggested that the College was inheriting a range of embedded issues at the time young people were leaving the information and support provided at school. Karl advised that the College was working with Durham County Council on the potential for data sharing to help tackle these concerns.

Members noted the report.

24/42 Update from Safeguarding Governor (Paper G)

Davey Benson presented Paper G, which summarised his termly meeting with the Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs).

Davey acknowledged that the previous discussion covered much of the content in his report so would focus on other areas considered. Members noted the change in recording metrics from percentages to numbers in the MyConcern system, which would improve visibility on the level of reported concerns. Davey explained that the College's proactive and preventative approach to addressing the key concerns raised was helping young people to feel confident in reporting issues and gave a strong message that they would be supported. Davey also confirmed that this was substantiated with what he was hearing on the ground.

Davey reported that DSLs were proactive and keen to learn from best practice and had discussed some approaches shared from the Army Cadet Force covering one-to-one discussions, young person's passports and reinforcing culture and expected behaviours. Davey updated on a discussion around the forthcoming 'Martyn's Law' and the action the College was taking in response to the new legislation.

Davey confirmed he could give strong assurance that safeguarding was being robustly managed in the College.

Joyce Drummond-Hill left the meeting at 5.33pm.

The Chair thanked Davey, Karl and Andy for their reports and presentation commenting that it had been helpful for governors to understand both the challenges and response, and had been a very useful discussion.

24/43 Curriculum & Quality Monitoring Report (Paper H)

Adele Dowson presented Paper H, which provided an overview of curriculum and quality activities up to May 2024.

Members noted progress on Further Education and Apprenticeships including the latest prediction exercise which had been positive, but also the measures to address concerns identified in some curriculum areas. Continuous progress had been made in enhancing teaching, learning and assessment despite staffing challenges and external disruptive factors. In relation to higher education, members noted the positive early indications from new HE partnership provision. Members highlighted the issues identified in the report in relation maths, functional skills and engineering and emphasised the need to discuss these areas in detail at the forthcoming Further Education Quality Curriculum and Students (FEQCS) Committee. Adele confirmed that plans were in place to address these concerns and more detail would be provided at the Committee.

Members highlighted the latest completion rates for the London School of Commerce and commented that this reinforced the decision taken at the previous meeting in relation to non-renewal of the contract.

Members noted the curriculum and quality performance across Further Education, Apprenticeships and Higher Education.

24/44 Sub-contracting arrangements/fees policy 2024/25 (Paper I)

Members reviewed Paper I, which updated on the changes in the College's Sub-contracting Fees and Charges Policy for the next academic year.

The report confirmed that a review of the policy had been carried out with key staff within the College with input from the ESFA, and that additions had been made to reflect the inclusion of additional funding sources to include DWP, DfE, the Shared Prosperity Fund which replaced ESF and the creation of NEMCA as a Mayoral Combined Authority.

Members **approved** the Policy for the 2024-25 academic year.

24/45 Skills and Employer engagement update (Verbal update)

Colleen Peters provided a verbal update in relation to skills and employer engagement.

Members noted progress in relation to the two recently awarded Bootcamp contracts with 300 learners enrolled to date and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, with a key element of funding being used to support workforce redundancy in the local area.

The Business Development and Sales Team were continuing to work in a very challenging environment and were currently focusing on building new and strengthening existing relationships in the Tees Valley area. Colleen updated on programmes focused on high unemployment and low skills and sector specific programmes

in early years and teaching assistant academies. These were working well in supporting people that had never worked or been out of employment for a long period.

Other updates were provided in relation to apprenticeships delivery which had seen significant growth in learner numbers and the number of apprenticeship standards over the last two to three years. Members noted some positive examples with individual employers including the successful recruitment campaign for the National Battery Training Academy. In response to a member's question about unsuccessful apprentice applicants, Colleen confirmed that there was now a large pool of potential apprentices and that the College supported referral to other opportunities where possible. A further update on new employers working with the College would be provided at the FEQCS Committee meeting in June.

Members were pleased to note the very positive progress and thanked Colleen for the update.

24/46 Appointment of Student Governors (Paper J1)

Caroline Winter presented Paper J1, which confirmed that Hailie Warren had been elected to serve as Student Union President for the 2024/25 academic year.

Members noted that arrangements were being progressed to appoint a second student governor and a report would be submitted to the next Corporation meeting in July.

Members appointed Hailie Warren as Student Governor for the 2024/25 academic year until 30 June 2025.

24/47 Committee Composition (Paper J2)

Members **approved** the proposed Committee Composition which included the following change:

- Jonathan Hamill to join the Audit and Risk Committee.

24/48 Strategic Monitoring - 2023/24 Strategic KPI update (Papers K1 & K2)

Adele Dowson, Peter Morrison and Karl Fairley presented Papers K1 and K2, which updated on progress against the 2023/24 Strategic KPIs.

Further Education and Apprenticeships Members noted the latest updates on College KPIs for retention, achievement and attendance. In relation to 16-19 education and training Adele highlighted areas of concern in relation to functional skills and attendance and the measures being implemented to improve performance. In response to a member's question about potential reasons for the below target levels of student satisfaction, Andy

Stephenson advised that it was possible to identify concerns being expressed in some areas that had seen staffing challenges and turnover causing disruption. In these instances the quality team would step in to provide additional support. It was noted that the picture was largely positive and members acknowledged the limitations of this KPI but were encouraged that the team were aware of where concerns needed to be addressed. Members raised queries for clarification on the issues covered by the survey and also that the attendance figures were cumulative, acknowledging the challenge in improving the year-end figure.

Higher Education Peter explained that the KPIs for HE would be split down to provide a clear understanding of individual partner performance. Members were updated on the Student Loan action plan and the latest performance in relation to continuation, completion and retention rates for Durham students. Peter updated on recruitment and advised that work was ongoing to share in best practice approaches with partners with a strong record in recruitment.

Peter updated on HE partnership performance in relation to recruitment levels and continuation rates and confirmed that the HE team were working closely with all partners. Early assurance had been received from CECOS around student withdrawals as well as levels of student engagement. Members welcomed confirmation that a meeting was scheduled with the LSC that week to discuss the teach out arrangements and ensure positive outcomes for the affected students.

Corporate Services Members noted the latest performance across the Strategic KPIs for Estates and Facilities, Finance and Procurement, Human Resources and ICT.

Members welcomed the dashboard approach in performance reporting and commented on the importance of the opportunity to challenge the reports in detail during committee discussions.

Members noted the latest performance against the agreed Strategic KPIs.

24/49 Students Union Report (Paper L)

Adele Dowson presented Paper L, the Students Union report, in the absence of Alice Tomlinson. Members noted updates on a range of activities including responding to the new duties on Students' Unions in relation to Freedom of Speech, recent music and performing arts shows, an accessible tennis initiative following a successful bid for equipment and a range of events as part of Mental Health Awareness Week.

Members noted this was the last report from Alice as the current Students' Union President and thanked her for her work over the last year.

24/50 Any other urgent business – none.

24/51 Date of next meeting: 4 July 2024

Signed.....Date.....