

The Corporation of New College Durham

**Minutes of the Education Quality, Curriculum and Students
meeting held on 19 June 2025**

Present:

Suzanne Slater (Chair) Mark Gomersall
Helen Golightly Hailie Warren
Kathryn McCloghrie

Apologies:

Andy Broadbent
Emily Baxter
Rhiannon Hiles
Ross Markwell
Davey Benson
Beatrix Murray-English

In attendance:

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

Action

25/18 Chair's introduction and starred items

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

The Chair advised that this would have been the last meeting for Beatrix Murray-English as her term of office was due to expire on 30 June 2025. It was also noted that this was the last EQCS meeting for Hailie Warren as her term of office was also due to expire on 30 June. The Chair asked that the Committee's thanks be placed on record for the contribution of both student governors over the last year.

Members confirmed they did not require any further discussion about the starred agenda Paper J.

Kathryn McCloghrie joined the meeting at 4.02pm.

25/19 Apologies for absence were received from Andy Broadbent, Emily Baxter, Rhiannon Hiles, Ross Markwell and Beatrix Murray-English.

25/20 Minutes of previous meeting (Papers A1 & A2)

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2025 (including confidential minutes) were agreed as accurate.

25/21 Matters arising not appearing elsewhere on the agenda

There were no follow up actions from the previous meeting.

25/22 Update on HE Quality Development Plan 2024/25 (Paper B)

Peter Morrison presented Paper B, the HE Quality Development Plan update. Members noted progress on full and part time HE enrolments following significant progression activity either side of the Christmas break and Peter highlighted the impact and key takeaways from the recently commissioned market research project. Peter updated on continuation and completion rates, the latest attendance figures at Durham and across the College's HE partners and the HE staff training and development programme.

Mark Gomersall joined the meeting at 4.10pm.

In response to a member's question about the predicted end of year completion rate for the London School of Commerce, Suzanne Crane advised that the current figure was unlikely to change at the end of year point as all students had been through the assessment board. Whilst there was a potential that the figure could increase slightly in future as students that had failed some modules went on to complete their foundation degrees, this would not be confirmed until the following April.

Members asked why students were accepting offers earlier this year and Peter advised that internal progression activity had been brought forward to plant seeds with students at a very early stage through taster masterclasses, with a view to encouraging students to make a decision at an earlier point in time.

25/23 Curriculum & Quality Monitoring report (HE) (Paper C)

Julie Coverley presented Paper C, the HE Curriculum and Quality monitoring report. Members were updated on improved response rates to both the national student survey and on-programme survey, the new integrated quality system proposed by the Office for Students (OfS) to improve student outcomes and experiences, approval of the College's action plan for implementation of the OfS condition E6 on sexual harassment and misconduct, feedback from HE teaching observations, the proposals for delivery of Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) as a higher quality alternative to university programmes, international activities and the Access and Participation Plan (APP).

Members asked for more information on the work to embed the Theory of Change model in APP initiatives and Julie explained that this was intended to provide a formal critical evaluation of improvement activities to meet OfS expectations on the use of evidence-based methodology in evaluations.

Members asked about the reason for the low survey response rate in engineering and for further context on the low scoring questions. Julie explained that the engineering students were predominantly based with one local employer with none of them completing the survey last year. Completion of the surveys was not mandatory but encouraged due to the importance of hearing the student voice. The team had worked very closely with the current year's students, so whilst the numbers remained low the current response was an improvement. The timing of the survey could be an issue in some areas and so the Quality Manager followed up the survey by speaking to students individually to gain feedback, which had suggested some responses were influenced by the louder voices in the room as well as some examples of students misinterpreting the questions.

In response to a member's question about sectors or specific employers that the College was finding it difficult to engage, Julie advised that the digital sector was a particular challenge due to the variation between businesses and their specific needs, making it difficult to understand the wider sector needs.

25/24 Partnership Update (Paper D)

Suzanne Crane presented Paper D, which updated on the College's HE partnerships. Suzanne advised that there had been some significant changes since the previous meeting and briefed members on developments arising from the Secretary of State's decision to withdraw designation for all new and continuing students with Oxford Business College (OBC). Members were updated on the actions taken to implement the student protection plan including the timeline of those transferring to CECOS and the work with the Student Loans Company to ensure loans were transferred for ongoing study and minimising the impact on individual students.

Members were updated on the London School of Commerce teach-out and noted the latest continuation and completion rates. In relation to CECOS, Suzanne updated on strong enrolment, retention and completion rates, the College's response to a whistleblowing report which was unsubstantiated, and the revised approach to 2025/26 student recruitment levels due to the evolving HE sector context.

Members asked about contingency plans should a decision be made to stop all HE franchising. Suzanne explained that another situation similar to OBC would be challenging and involve consideration of student locations across different partner campuses, however a sector-wide decision to cease all HE franchising would be given time to implement teach out arrangements due to the significant number of students that would be affected across all franchised provision. Members asked how much contingency planning was appropriate in the current circumstances and also what would trigger further activity.

Suzanne confirmed that the College was already considering options as was the sector as a whole and was awaiting further developments in respect of the Department for Education's direction of travel.

Alison Maynard reiterated that the College was making no assumptions that the concerns had passed in respect of HE franchising and was looking at some very radical contingency options, in which timing would be key.

Members asked about the level of confidence there was that the transfer of all the relevant students would be completed by the 1 September deadline and the implications if they were not. Suzanne confirmed all transfers would be complete by the deadline and explained both the timelines for the transfer of different cohorts and also the arrangements for September 2024 students that had finished their programmes with OBC and were eligible to progress via CECOS into the next year.

Members commented on the significant challenge in current circumstances, that it was comforting that the DfE appeared to grasp the scale of the challenge and that the College was doing all it could to mitigate the situation. Members asked that their thanks be conveyed to the HE team for their efforts under significant pressure.

25/25 Academic Board minutes (Paper E)

Members received Paper E and noted the content of the Academic Board minutes of the meeting on 10 April 2025.

25/26 Update on 2024/25 Strategic KPIs and proposed KPIs and targets for 2025/26 (Education & Training, Apprenticeships and Higher Education) (Paper F)

Andy Stephenson presented Paper F, which updated on progress against the Quality and Curriculum KPIs for 2024/25 and proposed targets for the 2025/26 academic year.

2024/25 Performance update

Members were updated on the latest performance against targets for retention, attendance, and predicted achievement for further education and apprenticeships and achievement in adult education. Members also noted the HE performance position on retention, continuation, completion and student satisfaction for Durham and partner provision.

Members sought clarification of the reference to attendance being below 'sector norms' in the report. Andy confirmed that this related to historical norms as both schools and the College were experiencing lower normal attendance levels post covid. Members were interested to observe that whilst attendance had declined achievement was improving which would not usually be expected

and asked if there was any insight on the position. Andy advised that when this had been examined, whilst a number of factors were involved, the support provided to students who were not attending was key. In these cases the College would intervene to pick up students not in class and support engagement and flexible learning to help them to achieve. The assessment strategy had evolved with only traditional GCSE and A level course assessments taking place at the end of the year, where other programmes involved more front-loaded assessment as well as the availability of shorter courses. Andy also explained that the emphasis on the quality of the teaching and learning experience was key in driving attendance to present a powerful draw to students in the provision of engaging lessons and key skills. Improved attendance could be seen at all levels however there remained a decline in Term 3, which was the focus of a dedicated steering group to monitor and understand the issues impacting in Term 3.

Proposed targets for 2025/26

Andy updated members on the proposed targets for 2025/26, some of which had been revised. Members reviewed the assumptions detailed in the report and noted the measures where the targets had been amended. Members asked about the level of confidence in the proposed Ofsted grade and Alison advised that the significant improvement in maths would be key. There was also a clear understanding of the attendance position and substantial evidence to convey a strong story to inspectors. Whilst there would always be areas that were not outstanding, most were phenomenal and it was felt that the timing was right to pursue the highest grade. Data would be a greater feature following the years impacted by covid and the College's trajectory within the top ten per cent demonstrated a much stronger position. It was important for the College to convey confidence in its approach and outlook, and this was supported by the data.

Members felt this was an exciting time for the College and that the performance improvements demonstrated the journey, dedication and determination to move towards outstanding. Whilst there were minor areas where improvement was required there had been a significant improvement over the last 18 months and governors felt proud to be part of the College.

Members noted the curriculum and quality performance at the end of May 2025 and **approved the proposed KPI targets for 2025/26.**

25/27 Curriculum Planning Update (Paper G)

Alison Maynard presented Paper G, which provided an overview of the curriculum planning process for the academic year 2025/26.

Alison explained that the College had a very robust curriculum planning process with Vice Principals being supported by the Director of Funding and Curriculum Planning, and that the length of

the paper illustrated the breadth and depth of the College's provision.

Members were briefed on the overall College position, 16-19 provision, adult skills, higher education and apprenticeships and Alison explained where there had been changes to funding estimates since the report had been circulated. Alison advised that conversations were taking place with the three other Durham colleges, Durham County Council and the DfE to plan arrangements for the College becoming oversubscribed and ensure that support and advice was available to individuals unable to secure a place. Members asked what would happen to students unable to enrol on the course they wanted to progress their career. Alison confirmed that the College would provide information advice and guidance and signpost students to the other Durham colleges based on their postcode, as well as engaging with Durham Works to assist in finding places. As further places became available due to students dropping out, other students would be engaged to take the place. Alison confirmed the significant rise in applications this year but advised that some students such as those studying A levels would often apply to multiple institutions and there were also individuals that had applied but would not turn up in September. Alison emphasised that the College would not let individuals down but may need to refer some on to alternative routes.

25/28 Update on FE Quality Development Plan 2024/25 (Paper H)

Alison Maynard presented Paper H, the FE Quality Development Plan update.

Members were updated on the Areas for Improvement including the significant improvement in Level 1 maths, which was now above the National Achievement Rate following a wide range of measures implemented by the maths steering group. Work was continuing on implementing attendance strategies, which remained a key challenge.

In Areas for Development, Alison commended the College's CPD offer but advised that Vice Principals were working with Heads of School and Curriculum Managers to increase staff engagement with Quality Enhanced Learning.

Members offered congratulations on the phenomenal progress made on maths achievement, recalling previous difficult conversations due to the significant challenge faced. Members also commented that there was a clear commitment to addressing the attendance challenge and that current levels were not accepted, with every possible mitigation being progressed.

Alison updated that the maths SAR grade was due to be re-evaluated the following week and that in response to a challenge from the Senior Leadership Team on the timing, it was felt that the momentum existed to justify reviewing this now due to the

significant progress made by staff that had been under significant pressure and would enable them to see how far the position had moved. An update on the outcome of the validation could be provided at the July Corporation meeting.

AM

25/29 Curriculum & Quality monitoring (FE) – discussion report (Paper I)

Adele Dowson presented Paper I, the Curriculum and Quality Monitoring Report. Adele updated on the emerging themes around attendance and the new Ofsted inspection framework, enhanced learning and employer engagement.

25/30 Curriculum and Quality Monitoring (FE) – information report (Paper J)

Members received the Curriculum and Quality Monitoring information report, which updated on the Learner Support Fund and Student Discipline in Term 2 of 2024/25.

25/31 FE/HE Student Forum feedback – Overview of issues raised and progress update (Paper K)

Hailie Warren presented Paper K, the FE and HE Student Forum feedback. Members reviewed the summary of issues raised and progress in addressing them and asked whether feedback from the College's HE partners was also available. Suzanne Crane explained that the College regularly held student voice events at partner locations and had received considerable feedback from the recent visit to OBC. A member of the HE team was visiting OBC transfer students in July to understand how the move to CECOS was progressing. HE partners also held their own forum meetings with the minutes provided to the College in addition to undertaking student surveys. The issues raised were similar to those at the Durham campus including complimentary feedback on teaching staff and various day to day issues such as catering facilities.

Hailie thanked governors and staff for the support she had received during her tenure as Student Union President and members thanked Hailie for the thorough updates provided over the year and wished her well for the future.

25/32 Review of Proposed Schedule of Business for 2025/26 (Paper L)

Members reviewed and endorsed the proposed Schedule of Business for 2025/26.

25/33 Any other business

The Chair advised that she was unable to attend the Corporation meeting and asked members to consider whether they would be able to provide feedback from the Committee in her absence. It

was agreed that the Head of Governance would follow up with the individual members that had indicated a willingness to provide the update.

25/34 Date of next meeting: 20 November 2025