

CHAIR APPROVED

**The Corporation of New College Durham**

**Minutes of the Corporation meeting  
held on 6 November 2025**

**Present:**

Stephen King (Chair)  
Andy Broadbent  
Matthew Gamsby  
Hayley Farrell  
Ben Fisher  
Helen Golightly  
Nigel Harrett  
Rhiannon Hiles  
Kathryn McCloghrie

Bethany Robson  
Suzanne Slater

**Via MS Teams**

Allen Eccles  
Emily Baxter  
Mark Gomersall  
Philip Pollard

**Apologies:**

Chris Patterson  
Jonathan Hamill  
Peter Morrison

**In attendance:**

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

**Action**

**25/115 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 at the meeting. No interests were declared.

**Members confirmed that they did not require any further discussion about the starred agenda items L, M, N1, N2, N3, O and P.**

**25/116 Apologies for absence** were received from Chris Patterson, Jonathan Hamill and Peter Morrison.

**25/117 Minutes of previous meeting (Paper A)**

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2025 were agreed as accurate.

**25/118 Matters arising not appearing elsewhere on the agenda**

25/89 (arising from previous minutes 25/40 and 25/60) – Alison Maynard advised that a discussion was needed with the other Deputy Principals within the Durham Learning Alliance to check

**AM**

updates to the report on the review of local needs, after which it would be ready for circulation.

25/91 – the draft external governance review report was circulated to governors after the previous meeting. The Chair updated on discussions with the external review team from GGI and advised that a revised version of the report was expected the following day.

## **25/119 Principal's Report (Paper B)**

The Principal briefed members on matters of strategic interest including the key headlines from the Post 16 White Paper which had been positively received by the sector, and the Curriculum Assessment Review which had been published the day before the meeting. Members noted that the proposals in these and other policy papers indicated a further four or five years of reform for the FE sector, but that the College was well-placed to meet the opportunities and challenges this would bring. Members were also updated on the Association of Colleges (AoC) and Universities UK (UUK) joint report promoting university and college collaboration and the confirmation of the North East Automotive Alliance (NEAA) as the designated Employer Representative Body (ERB) for the North East region. In relation to Higher Education, members were updated on developments in HE franchising as well as major reforms announced by the Department for Education (DfE) for Higher Education, noting the potential risk to the College in relation to Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs).

From a College perspective, members were updated on the relicensing of the North East Institute of Technology (NEIoT) which was nearing completion and noted that three new partners had been formally approved to join the partnership. Members also noted the appointment of the College's Early Years Curriculum Manager Jen Mallaburn as the national Chair of the AoC Education and Early Years Community of Practice reflecting the strength of the NCD provision, and the College's involvement in the Gatsby Curriculum Reform Group to reduce the number of NEETs in the region. Members were updated on the achievement of 'Maintaining Excellence' in the Better Health at Work Award as well as the outcome of award submissions which had been unsuccessful. Members noted recent events and visits to the College including Sara Davies of Crafter's Companion, the official opening of the new Multi Use Games Area and the Lumiere Launch event. The Principal drew members' attention to the appointments update highlighting that the last senior appointment had been made in March 2025, which demonstrated the current level of stability in the College' senior leadership.

In response to a member's question, Alison Maynard confirmed that it was expected that T Levels would continue alongside the introduction of V Levels, which were being seen as a replacement for BTEC qualifications but that their impact on apprenticeships was still unclear.

*Mark Gomersall joined the meeting at 4.19pm.*

The Principal confirmed that the College was ahead of the game in terms of the various policy papers and announcements and that there would be significant opportunities for these to feed into the new five-year strategy. A separate SEND paper had also been published with but with schools as the main focus. In response to a member's question about whether the change in DWP responsibilities had been positive it was confirmed that the College had not seen any practical changes yet so it was too early to tell. On a positive note, the AoC was continuing to make a significant push around funding for adult skills and apprenticeships and it was also positive that the white paper referenced funding.

Members commented that there was potential for DfE to move delivery out to the regions in relation to project and programme implementation and noted that the role of regional DfE representatives currently appeared quite fluid. Members asked about the College's positioning in relation to the NEAA and it was noted that NECA would have oversight of the NEAA.

The Principal updated on discussions with college leads around the proposed ERB collaboration structure and in response to a member's question on developments in respect of Technical Excellence Colleges (TECs) it was noted that details of the forthcoming TECs was still awaited but further information was emerging every day.

Members discussed the recent policy announcements and the need to ensure they remained up to date on key developments. It was agreed to circulate a copy of the white paper to members with the summary provided in the Principal's update as well as a copy of the AoC/UUK report.

CW

#### **25/120 Receipt of Committee minutes and verbal reports from chairs:**

**Audit & Risk Committee (Papers C1 & C2)** – the Chair approved minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2025 were received. The Committee Chair recapped that the Committee had discussed the latest position relating to Oxford Business College following the outcome of the judicial review of the Secretary of State's decision to remove designation from their provision. The Committee received the Internal Audit Review of Apprenticeship Funding and were reassured by the work the team were undertaking to address the recommendations. An update on progress had been requested for a future meeting of the Committee after which Corporation would receive a further update.

*Bethany Robson declared an interest at this point due to her role as Apprentice Team Leader within the College.*

Members asked about the risk of clawback in relation to this funding and it was confirmed that the values involved were immaterial, and so the clawback risk was low.

**Finance & Resources Committee (Papers C3a & C3b)** – the minutes of the meeting held on 8 October 2025 were received. Members noted the Committee had received a further update on the enrolment position and a detailed report on sickness absence. The Committee Chair highlighted the increase in stress and anxiety as a cause of sickness absence and confirmed that members had received strong assurance on the College's continuing support in this area. A detailed update was provided on network security management and the Committee had again received a high level of assurance on the College's mitigation measures. The Committee had discussed the volatility of funding in the context of the draft 2024/25 accounts and the challenge this continued to present in financial forecasting. The Committee Chair updated that following an action from a previous Corporation meeting, the Committee had reviewed the Health and Safety KPIs and received further details of the College's response to breaches recorded the previous year. The Committee were assured that the College was on top of the issues and that no further action was required.

In response to a member's question on whether the reports of stress and anxiety were work or home related, Karl Fairley explained that it was a mix of both. Where the cause was attributed to work the College would look at reasonable adjustments to support the individual and if the concerns were related to circumstances at home the College would explore what additional support could be provided, including the in-house counselling service and referral to the internal occupational health nurse. It was noted that mental health was currently the biggest challenge in staff wellbeing and that this was consistent with the position for students. In response to a member's question Alison Maynard explained the arrangements to deal with students where a member of teaching staff was absent with sickness. It was confirmed that a student would never be sent home in this scenario and from a safeguarding perspective that students would always be supervised in the classroom. In response to a further question Alison confirmed that as well as having arrangements for 16-18 year old students it was also good practice for all students including over 18s.

**Search & Governance Committee (Paper C4)** the minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2025 were received. The Committee Chair advised that this had been a shorter meeting following the comprehensive review of committee membership in September. The Committee had reviewed skills gaps with a focus on finance and cyber security/ICT and the Chair updated that a panel of the Committee were interviewing a potential new governor the following day. Members reviewed the Corporation's core governance documents, which were on the current meeting agenda and noted that whilst most of the changes were effectively

updating and tidying up, that there was one substantive change around the voting rights of student governors under 18. The Committee had also considered the review of compliance with the AoC Code, the Governor Training and Development Plan, both of which were on the current agenda and agreed some minor adjustments to the Chair's performance review process to reflect new guidance.

## **25/121 Equality Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report (Paper D)**

*Karen Milne joined the meeting at 4.35pm.*

Karen Milne presented Paper D, the Annual Report on equality diversity and inclusion. It was noted that the report highlighted the distance travelled by the College and detailed all the work undertaken to embed equality diversity and inclusion across the organisation. Karen reported that the College had achieved the Inclusive Employer Standard and drew attention to the recommendation seeking to re-brand terminology in this context. Karen advised that during the work to achieve the new standard, colleagues had considered the question of what equality and diversity meant to the organisation and felt that a rebrand to a culture of 'Belonging and Inclusion' would sum up the culture at NCD. Members reviewed the key objectives for 2025/26 detailed in the report and Karen confirmed that the College had achieved the SHINE advanced standard since writing the action plan.

Members discussed the proposal to rebrand and commented that the language of 'belonging' was a strong demonstration of inclusion and felt more effective and holistic in approach. In response to a question on how widely this terminology was now used, Karen confirmed that the proposed change had been discussed with the consultant assessing the Inclusive Employer Standard and they confirmed that many organisations were now using this language as well as featuring in the new Ofsted inspection framework. Karen advised that there would be a separate detailed action plan to progress recommendations from the Inclusive Employer Standard. Members' attention was drawn to the benchmarking tables in the report which demonstrated above average competency in most of the standard's 'pillars' in comparison with the education sector.

Corporation **agreed** to:

- confirm their support for rebranding of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion to "Belonging and Inclusion".
- note the feedback on progress made against the agreed objectives for 2024/25
- the proposed objectives for 2025/26 (Appendix A).

The Chair thanked Karen for the update and commented on the large amount of work undertaken across the College in this area. It was recognised that there was still more to do, and this had also

been identified in the governance review. A small group of governors would be convened in the coming months to look at how Corporation could provide further support to the College on their journey.

### **25/122 Academic Performance 2024/25 (Paper E)**

Alison Maynard presented Paper E, which updated on three areas outstanding from the detailed full-year report to the previous Corporation meeting.

Members were briefed on the impact of the updated DfE Qualification Achievement Rate rules on the overall, regulated and non-regulated achievement rates, which had strengthened an already outstanding position for the College. Alison advised that this would stand the College in good stead to validate the Self-Assessment report as outstanding, and this would be translated into the new inspection framework.

Members commented that the College had achieved a fantastic set of results and highlighted maths in particular. In response to a member's question on how the significant improvement in the functional skills achievement rate in maths had been achieved, Alison explained the role of the Steering Group, the focused support of one of the Vice Principals, fortnightly discussions on Teaching and Learning and an overall back to basics approach. It had been a significant collective effort to turn performance around over a six-month period and whilst some staff had left the College others had responded to the support to improve. It was recognised that the key challenge now was to maintain consistency.

Members asked about staff response to the new Ofsted inspection framework and noted that the focus was on leaders, processes, policies, and how the College supports inclusion students. A review was being undertaken to check the evidence against the 'expected standard' as well as working through the strong and exceptional criteria. Alison advised that the College needed to celebrate and shout about its achievements and encourage its stakeholders to do the same. Alison confirmed that Vice Principals, Heads of School and Curriculum Managers were being supported in working through the new framework. The risks for colleges that were selected early in the inspection schedule being assessed against 2023/24 data were highlighted and the College's proposals to counter this with current validated data were noted.

The Chair thanked all staff for their work at a time of so much activity for the College.

### **25/123 Enrolment Update 2025/26 (Paper F)**

Alison Maynard presented Paper F, which provided an update on the recruitment position to 24 October 2025.

Members reviewed the enrolments across Further Education, T Levels, Adult Education, Apprenticeships and Higher Education and the Chair highlighted the impact of recruitment on the College's future planning needs. Members commented on the excellent work of the school engagement team and its impact on FE recruitment and asked about the potential for an equivalent to support HE recruitment. Alison advised that there was a dedicated member of the HE team, but with a focus on promoting progression from A Levels into HE. The approach would be kept under review and members noted that the recent work with the external consultant advising on HE recruitment was progressing and that the College was also learning from its partners' approach to recruitment.

Members asked about the number and destination of learners that had withdrawn and Alison confirmed that these were followed up where contact details were available so the College knew where they had gone. The current withdrawal rate was 7%, which was an improvement on 10% the previous year. In response to a member's question about setting a target to further reduce this figure, Rob Grainey advised that keeping the rate between 6-7% would be a significant achievement. The Principal commented that recruitment had exceeded the demographics and fewer students had been lost this year, demonstrating the excellent information advice and guidance (IAG) and strong school engagement and support teams. A significant resource was applied to supporting students at enrolment. Alison updated on the high levels of attendance at the two IAG events held in October and advised that schools were encouraging their students to engage early because the places would go quickly. Members emphasised the need to understand the destinations for each of the students that had withdrawn.

Members noted the College current position and the actions detailed in section 7 of the report resulting from the start of year position.

## **25/124 Annual Report on Risk Management and Key Risks (2024/25) (Paper G1)**

Paul Bradley presented Paper G1, the Annual Report on Risk Management which summarised risk management activity over the previous year.

Paul explained that the report had been considered by the Audit and Risk Committee on 22 September and that the Committee had been keen to develop some of the areas of emerging risk for inclusion on the strategic risk register.

Paul highlighted that the risk management statement and strategy detailed the College's approach to risk management and with a full review of the strategy scheduled for June, welcomed any comments from members.

Members asked if there was an update in respect of the risk relating to Oxford Business College. Paul advised that whilst there was still some correspondence with OBC, it was likely this would be removed from the register following further review.

Members noted the key risks and the annual report.

### **25/125 Financial Monitoring to 30 September 2025 (Paper G2)**

Paul Bradley presented Paper G2, which provided the financial position of the College at 30 September 2025. Members noted the recruitment position as discussed earlier in the meeting and Paul updated that the Department for Education were reviewing all college returns to inform any decision on in year growth funding.

Members noted the T Level position and that provision had been made for potential clawback, which would be assessed as part of the Term 1 update to the next meeting. Paul advised that there had been positive changes to the financial position due to delivery targets being achieved and additional contracts secured which would need to be reflected in the budget, but the position was largely as expected for the current point in the year.

Paul updated that work was ongoing in respect of the pay award and affordability challenge and that this would be brought back to the next meeting for consideration.

Members noted the College's financial position at 30 September 2025.

### **25/126 Financial Benchmarking Data (Paper G3)**

Paul Bradley presented Paper G3, which provided financial benchmarking information from the Association of Colleges and compared the College's financial position to others across the region.

Paul reported that the growing turnover placed NCD as the largest college financially in the region due to the growth in 16-18 provision, HE and HE partnerships. Paul explained that the College wanted to maintain a high EBITDA but this would be impacted by the College's commitment to investment in significant pastoral support that many other colleges were unable to provide as well as investing in its facilities to support high quality delivery. Paul advised that the Medium Term Financial Plan indicated that the College would remain financially outstanding in future years.

In response to a member's question about support for colleges with a weaker financial position Paul confirmed the partnership working through the North East Institute of Technology and Durham Learning Alliance and that the region had a strong Finance Directors group should a college need to draw on support. Paul

emphasised the importance of the College not being subject to any debt in terms of the financial health rating.

Members commented that it had been useful to see the strength of the College's financial position and a staff governor commented that staff found it reassuring that the College was in a strong financial position.

Members noted the financial benchmarking information for 2023/24.

#### **25/127 Capital Projects Update (Paper G4)**

Paul Bradley presented Paper G4, which updated on the College's major capital projects.

Members reviewed the updates and Paul confirmed a report would be brought back to a future meeting to consider plans for the Sports and Music Building, including a revised business case following discussions with curriculum colleagues and the contractor. Rob Grainey updated that the demographics indicated a 9% increase in students in the next three years so that the need for additional rooms would increase. Members noted that the Sports and Music Building was likely to be the quickest and most suitable solution with peak growth anticipated in 2028/29.

In response to a member's question about how music provision would be separated to ensure protection from noise while this was relocated, Paul confirmed that locating music appropriately during the development was a priority. Different options were currently being explored to ensure they were suitable and acoustically sound.

Members noted the progress on the Construction Centre of Excellence – Learning Space 2 and the update on the Sports and Music proposed development.

#### **25/128 Update from SEND Governor (Paper H)**

Suzanne Slater presented Paper H, which summarised her termly meeting to discuss the College's SEND provision. Suzanne updated that the meeting had been very positive with a discussion on the new Ofsted toolkit and the focus on students with SEND and Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). Suzanne had provided a list of questions to seek further assurance on this provision and the College's ambitions. An interim meeting was being planned to review the questions before the next termly update.

Suzanne commented that it had been pleasing to see that all SEND learners were flagged in the relevant systems even where they did not have an EHCP and emphasised the need to ensure they achieved in line with their peers. It was noted there had been

a small increase in the number of ECHPs this year and the College was in ongoing dialogue with the Council around High Needs Funding. Karl Fairley confirmed that discussions had been positive and progress was being made.

Suzanne reported that she had met with some of the SEND learners and was reassured that they were happy, had improved and were continuing to progress. The experience had been fantastic and it was clear there was some very good work happening in SEND provision.

Members noted the report and the position for learners with SEND for November 2025.

### **25/129 Skills and Employer Engagement Update (Paper I)**

Alison Maynard presented Paper I, which provided governors with an updated overview of how the College is meeting skills needs.

Members noted the judgement that NCD continues to be judged as meeting a strong standard in addressing local, regional and national skills needs and that the College's continuing collaboration with employers and stakeholders ensured the curriculum was co-designed with a future focus on labour market demand.

Alison briefed members on the College's performance and impact including its significant investment in skills delivery, high achievement rates across FE and apprenticeships, extensive Bootcamp provision, flagship partnership initiatives, community learning initiatives and leadership of the North East Institute of Technology (NEIoT)

*Philip Pollard declared an interest at this point in the meeting due to his role as a Director of Seaham Garden Village Management Company, which was referenced in the update.*

Members discussed the NEIoT's role in engaging with employers and the potential for duplication with the College as an individual provider. Alison highlighted the breadth and diversity of the College's partnerships, some of which had taken years to build and ensured a wide reach across the region.

Members emphasised the importance of the paper and **confirmed** this it provided assurance the College is delivering effectively against its strategic intentions in relation to skills development, employer engagement and regional workforce priorities.

*Emily Baxter left the meeting at 5.44pm.*

### **25/130 Corporate Services 2025/26 Strategic KPI Update (Paper J1)**

Karl Fairley presented Paper J1, which detailed the latest performance against the Corporate Services Strategic KPIs at the start of 2025/26.

Members reviewed the performance tables and noted that all the KPIs were rated green, acknowledging it was an early stage in the year.

Members noted progress on the Corporate Services KPIs for 2025/26.

### **25/131 Quality and Curriculum 2025/26 Strategic KPI Update (Paper J2)**

Alison Maynard presented Paper J2, which detailed the initial 2025/26 position for Further Education, Apprenticeships and Higher Education. Members reviewed the performance measures, which focused primarily on student numbers and attendance.

Alison advised that the final 2024/25 outcomes and updated 2025/26 financial performance measures would be presented to the forthcoming Education Quality Curriculum and Students Committee.

Members noted the Quality and Curriculum KPI position at the end of October 2025.

### **25/132 Annual Report on Sustainability (Paper K)**

Karl Fairley presented Paper K, which updated on progress against the College's Sustainability Strategy.

Members reviewed the update on key sustainability measures including energy utilisation, travel, carbon emissions, waste and sustainable procurement. The College's performance against external benchmarks was noted and members considered the key risks and opportunities detailed in the report.

Members discussed the request for the board to reaffirm its commitment to environmental sustainability and asked if active governor support in this area was needed. Karl advised that the College was trying to embed sustainable practice wherever possible and that in the context of potential changes in local or national policy it was key that this was underpinned by a firm commitment from the board. Members felt the College was probably contributing more on this agenda than others in the sector and Karl highlighted the work with employers referenced earlier in the meeting and the significant related growth in the curriculum on green skills. The potential for establishing a link governor for sustainability was discussed and whilst the further demand this would place on governor time was acknowledged, members

commented that if there was an important issue that aligned with the College's strategy then it should be considered. Karl suggested that as the College was reviewing its key strategies over the next year, an expansion to the green skills and enabling strategies was likely and with more specific objectives. Reviewing whether there was a need for a sustainability link governor at that time could be considered as part of a revised strategy.

Members commended the breadth of cross-college activity in the report and commented that the College should be shouting more about its actions and achievements in this area.

**Members agreed to:**

- re-affirm their commitment to sustainability and notably the College's commitment to support the achievement of Net zero by 2050
- note the development and key indicators reflected in the report.

**25/133 Financial Monitoring – Westfirst Limited to 30 September 2025 (Paper L)**

Members received Paper L and noted the Westfirst Limited financial reports to 30 September 2025.

It was noted that Westfirst was starting to receive income as a result of lettings of the Multi Use Games Area and that a further update would be provided to the next Finance and Resources Committee.

**25/134 Annual Safeguarding Report – Schools Update (Paper M)**

Members received Paper M, which supplemented the Annual Review of Safeguarding and Prevent considered earlier in the year. The Schools Update provided a narrative detailing how Safeguarding and Prevent is embedded within each school across the College.

Members noted the contents of Annex A in the context of the Annual Safeguarding Report to Governors.

**25/135 Review of Instrument and Articles of Government, Standing Orders, Committee Terms of Reference, Code of Conduct and Conflicts of Interest Policy (Paper N1)**

Members received Paper N1, the recommendation from the Search and Governance Committee to approve proposed changes to the Corporation's core governance documents.

A full review of each document had been undertaken and a number of changes were proposed. The majority of changes were to provide further clarity and consistency across documents, reflect established procedure and practice within the Corporation's

operating arrangements, update language and terminology and provide additional guidance to existing procedures. A key substantive change was to remove the restrictions on voting rights of student governors under the age of 18 in line with guidance issued by the FE Commissioner.

Members **approved** the revised:

- a) Instrument & Articles of Government
- b) Standing Orders
- c) Committee Terms of Reference
- d) Code of Conduct
- e) Conflict of Interests Policy

#### **25/136 Governor Training & Development Plan 2025/26 (Paper N2)**

Members received Paper N2, the refreshed Governor Training and Development Plan 2025/26 recommended by the Search and Governance Committee.

Members **approved** the refreshed Governor Training and Development Plan as presented.

#### **25/137 Review of AoC Code of Good Governance 2024/25 (Paper N3)**

Members received Paper N3, which presented the outcome of the annual review of compliance with the AoC Further Education Code of Good Governance.

Members **agreed to endorse the Search and Governance Committee's finding that the College's arrangements complied** with the AoC Further Education Code of Good Governance in 2024/25.

#### **25/138 Strategic Risk Register Update (Paper O)**

Members received and noted Paper O, the Strategic Risk Register Update.

#### **25/139 Use of the College Seal (Paper P)**

Members noted the application of the College Seal to a Grant Funding Agreement with the North East Mayoral Combined Authority relating to the Aspiring to Make Change Project, which was signed by the Chair and Principal on behalf of Corporation and recorded in the Corporation Register of Seals.

#### **25/140 Any other urgent business - none**

**Date of next meeting:** 11 December 2025