

CHAIR APPROVED

The Corporation of New College Durham

**Minutes of the Corporation meeting
held on 26 March 2026
Boardroom, New College Durham**

Present:

Ben Fisher (Vice Chair)
Andy Broadbent
Emily Baxter
Allen Eccles
Matthew Gamsby
Hayley Farrell
Helen Golightly
Jonathan Hamill (*via MS
Teams*)

Nigel Harrett (*via MS
Teams*)
Kathryn McCloghrie (*via
MS Teams*)
Chris Nicholls
Chris Patterson
Bethany Robson
Suzanne Slater (*via MS
Teams*)

Apologies:

Stephen King
Mark Gomersall
Rhiannon Hiles
Philip Pollard
Rob Graine

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)
Peter Morrison (Vice Principal)
Bob Metcalf (Executive Director, Finance and Corporate Services)
Caroline Winter (Head of Governance and Corporation Secretary)
Chloe Freeman (Administrator)

Action

26/01 Chair's introduction and starred items

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting including those joining online.

Members were reminded to declare their interests in any item of business to be discussed at the meeting. The following interest was noted:

- Suzanne Slater - Paper M (Appointment of SEND Governor)

Suzanne Slater joined the meeting at 4.01pm.

Members confirmed that they did not require any further discussion about the starred agenda items M, N, O1, O2, O3, P, Q, R1, R2, S and T.

26/02 Apologies for absence were received from Stephen King, Mark Gomersall, Rhiannon Hiles, Philip Pollard and Rob Graine.

26/03 Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 December 2025 (including confidential minutes) were agreed as an accurate record.

26/04 Matters arising not appearing elsewhere on the agenda

25/157 & 25/172b - the typing errors in the Financial indicator tables within the circulated reports had been clarified and would be corrected in future reports.

26/05 Principal's Report (Paper B)

The Principal briefed members on matters of strategic interest including a range of policy and funding announcements covering qualification reform, SEND developments, Technical Excellence Colleges (TECs), and further funding changes and advised that the Education Quality, Curriculum and Students Committee had received a detailed update on qualification reforms. It was noted that many college leaders across the sector were disappointed with both the timing and clarity of announcements, highlighting in particular the 0.55% increase in FE funding due to growth in the sector being underestimated.

Kathryn McCloghrie joined the meeting at 4.06pm.

Members were updated on the withdrawal of 16 apprenticeship standards, which would impact the College and noted the College's significant role in the development of one of the newly announced apprenticeship units.

Hayley Farrell joined the meeting at 4.11pm.

An update was provided on the College's bid for Technical Excellence College status, supported by NECA, which would enhance the College's profile and align with ongoing work with the Institute of Technology and Lockheed Martin. Members were also updated on the emerging SEND reforms and the emphasis on mainstream alongside specialist provision, the potential for capital funding from the NECA CTEC allocation to support phase 2 of the Construction Centre of Excellence and new financial budgeting requirements from the Department for Education.

From a College perspective, members were updated on the successful completion of the College's sponsorship of New College Durham Academies Trust, rebranded as Connect Multi Academy Trust, and a planned celebration event, as well as noting recent events and visits to the College including the forthcoming Manufacturing Leaders' Summit and senior staffing developments.

Jonathan Hamill declared an interest at this point in the meeting due to his involvement in the Manufacturing Leaders' Summit as both a governor and in a work capacity.

The Principal updated on the successful Open University validation outcome, which resulted in five commendations, four minor conditions, and one recommendation. Members noted the areas of management focus for the coming months detailed in the report.

Members queried the impact of the 0.55% funding increase, noting that this was below the College's planning assumptions and emphasised the need for a strong response from the Association of Colleges' (AoC) in making sector representations on both funding and the proposed reforms. Members emphasised the importance of diversifying income streams and welcomed the opportunity for further discussion as part of the forthcoming annual strategic review.

Members considered the implications of changes to bootcamps, apprenticeships and T Levels, and challenged how the College could further develop its work with employers to mitigate these risks, including potential expansion of existing programmes. The challenge regarding employers' capacity to invest in training given wider economic pressures was noted and members discussed the use of levy funding and the need for its greater retention within the FE sector. Members highlighted increasing pressures relating to NEET and SEND as key emerging risks and the Principal acknowledged the challenges arising from the timing and uncertainty of national announcements in the context of current budget setting.

Members noted the update on the external policy and funding landscape, recent College activity and engagement and the potential strategic implications for the College.

26/06 Receipt of Committee minutes and verbal reports from chairs:

Finance & Resources Committee (Papers C1a & C1b) – the Chair approved minutes of the meeting held on 11 February 2026 were received. The Committee Chair reported that a number of key items discussed were also covered on the Corporation agenda. There had been a useful discussion on the external funding landscape, including the challenges and risks relating to skills Bootcamps going forward. Gender pay reporting continued to show a reduction, and members had a positive discussion on direction of travel. The Committee received good levels of assurance in relation to IT investment in infrastructure, alongside an interesting discussion on artificial intelligence. The update on Estates highlighted a significant level of activity, including ongoing modernisation of the estate in addition to major capital projects.

Search & Governance Committee (Papers C2a & C2b) – the Chair approved minutes of the meeting held on 16 February 2026 were received. The Committee discussed attendance, as well as the quality of participation in meetings, and considered how best to support all members to contribute effectively. Consideration of the

potential co-option of members with expertise in finance, cyber security and digital was explored, to ensure the appropriate balance of skills on relevant committees. Papers on the Academy Sponsorship Committee and Governance Development Plan were considered and were part of the current meeting agenda. The Committee reviewed succession planning and received assurance that appropriate plans were in place for the Senior Leadership Team and the senior structure below. An update was provided on the proposals for the forthcoming Strategic Review in April.

Audit & Risk Committee (Papers C3a & C3b) – the Chair approved minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2026 were received. The Committee Chair advised that there had been detailed discussions on risk management, including consideration of risk appetite and how this was understood and applied. A comprehensive paper on HE partnerships was discussed, covering Teaching Excellence Framework risks, third-party supply chain risks, concentration risks, and the associated financial benefits. The DfE audit outcome relating to funding assurance was noted positively, with congratulations extended to the staff involved. Members emphasised the rapidly changing external environment, including unforeseen global events, which highlighted the limitations of horizon scanning.

Education Quality Curriculum and Students Committee – 19 March 2026 - Members received a verbal update from the meeting held on 19 March 2026. It was noted that a number of the reports considered at the meeting were part of the current agenda. The Committee received a presentation on qualification reform, which in light of its significant impact would require close monitoring. Positive updates were received in relation to the HE curriculum and it was noted that the HE partnerships report would be discussed later in the meeting. Papers that were also included in the current meeting pack covered anticipated changes to Ofsted arrangements, SEND developments, and changes to how achievement and progress are measured, highlighting the importance of robust data management. Members were updated on employer engagement activity and a broad discussion took place on inclusion and how this could be embedded as a whole-college approach. Members commented that given the volume of current activity affecting the College, care was needed to ensure that all committees remained focused within their specific remit.

26/07 HE Partnership Risks (Paper D)

This item is recorded confidentially under confidential minute 26/07a.

26/08 Governance Development Plan (Paper E1)

Caroline Winter presented Paper E1, the draft Governance Development Plan (GDP), which incorporated recommendations from the external governance review and proposed actions to take

them forward. It was noted that the plan had been reviewed at the February meeting of the Search and Governance Committee and recommended to Corporation for approval.

Members noted the review confirmed that the Corporation had strong governance arrangements, while identifying some areas for further improvement. It was noted that some of the actions in the GDP involved work that was underway or already planned and being progressed in addition a small number of actions brought forward from the previous year's plan, the latest review against the AoC code of good governance, or that represented good practice observed elsewhere.

Corporation approved the Governance Development Plan 2025/26.

26/09 Committee Structure - Academy Sponsorship Committee (Paper E2)

Caroline Winter presented Paper E2, which sought approval to dissolve the Academy Sponsorship Committee following the College's withdrawal as Principal Sponsor of New College Durham Academies Trust.

Members noted that the Committee was established to oversee the College's role in sponsoring academies and to advise Corporation on sponsorship matters. Following completion of the process to withdraw from the sponsorship arrangement in January 2026, the Search and Governance Committee reviewed the position and recommended that the Committee was formally dissolved.

Corporation approved the dissolution of the Academy Sponsorship Committee and noted that the Corporation's Terms of Reference document would be updated to reflect the change.

26/10 Strategic Risk Update (Paper F)

Paul Bradley introduced the Strategic Risk Update, advising that the updated format followed the recent governance review and represented an interim phase in further development of the regular report. Members noted the updated strategic risk profile including an update on the OBC position, where legal proceedings continued to be monitored. Paul outlined proposed changes to the risk management approach and summarised the emerging risks, issues and opportunities, and next steps.

Members supported the overall direction of travel and commented that the risk environment remained fluid with further discussion required to refine the approach. Members highlighted that high-scoring risks were not always the most strategically significant and Paul emphasised the importance of identifying those risks which would have the greatest impact on delivery of the College's

strategy. It was suggested that the forthcoming strategy away day would provide a valuable opportunity to further develop this approach and to clearly distinguish between strategic and operational risks. Members also highlighted the need to consider interdependencies between risks, including where multiple risks share common causes or consequences, such as changes in government policy. The potential for disruption arising from multiple concurrent risks, including impacts on staff and estates and the importance of identifying cross-cutting mitigations was discussed, with governors referencing the “bow tie” model of risk analysis.

Members highlighted emerging risks relating to rising fuel costs, supply chain pressures and the potential impact on staff and students, including affordability of travel. Paul confirmed these would be reflected within the emerging risks. It was noted that electric vehicle charging at the College was provided at cost on site and that energy costs had been partially mitigated through fixed gas and electricity contracts for the period 2027 to 2029.

PB

Members noted:

- The current Strategic Risk Register and Risk Profile
- The movement in risk relating to the Oxford Business College Judicial Review
- The improvements being implemented to strengthen the College’s Risk Management Framework.
- The emerging risks/issues and opportunities that are being monitored.

26/11 Students’ Union Report (Paper G)

Matthew Gamsby presented the Students’ Union Report. Members were updated on the continued expansion of the enrichment programme, with participation reaching a record 367 students in January. Targeted initiatives to support student wellbeing such as the Young Men’s Mental Health Group and half-term sports sessions were well attended. The Students’ Union was focused on delivering culturally diverse and engaging events including themed celebrations, sustainability activities, and health-focused initiatives. Ongoing promotion of activities through Personal Development sessions aimed to maximise student engagement.

Feedback from student forums was positive overall, particularly in relation to teaching quality, assessment clarity and staff expertise. Concerns regarding timetabling and aspects of the Personal Development programme were being addressed. Members noted the continued provision of student support and benefits, including access to wellbeing and financial support initiatives and Matthew emphasised that governors were welcome to attend Students’ Union events.

Members noted the report.

26/12 Financial Monitoring to 31 January 2026 (Paper H1)

Paul Bradley presented Paper H1, the financial monitoring report and highlighted the change to a more strategic format. Paul reported that the College's financial position remained strong, with a forecast surplus, robust cash position, and strong reserves. Partnership performance had exceeded expectations, although challenges remained in relation to Bootcamps. Members noted the factors outlined in the report that would impact the setting of next year's budget and Paul emphasised the need for active management in 2026/27 to maintain the College's financial sustainability.

Members welcomed the new reporting format, highlighting the focus on risks, key changes, actions and supporting detail. In response to a member's question regarding the delivery timeline for the additional Bootcamp contract it was confirmed that the contract had been secured within the past three to four weeks and that delivery was progressing at pace to meet the 31 March 2026 deadline.

Members noted the forecasted year-end financial position at 31 January 2026.

26/13 Westfirst Financial Monitoring to 31 January 2026 (Paper H2)

Paul Bradley presented Paper H2, the Westfirst Financial Monitoring Report.

Paul reported that performance was encouraging, with a modest profit driven primarily by Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) income. Whilst weekday utilisation was strong, weekend utilisation remained lower and presented a clear opportunity for growth. The College was in discussions to position the facility as a potential central venue for local football leagues, which could generate additional income. Members reviewed the balance sheet position and Paul advised that the original business case benefits were beginning to materialise. There remained further headroom to grow commercial activity, and overall performance was positive.

Members were supportive of the work to engage with local sports teams to maximise weekend usage and it was acknowledged that while the increased footfall on site was difficult to quantify, it had been very positive. Members commented that whilst it was positive that the facility was performing well commercially, it remained a College asset. In response to a question about usage during core college hours and charging arrangements Paul confirmed that a charge-back arrangement was not currently in place. Paul explained potential changes to operating hours that would further increase weekday usage. In response to a member's question, it was confirmed that an online booking system for the MUGA was in place, although it was agreed that this may benefit from further promotion. A suggestion was made to explore opportunities to

support Framwellgate School as a local partner during its current construction activity through use of the facility. The Principal confirmed that this would be considered, although the College's own curriculum use would need to be taken into account.

**PB /
AB**

Members noted the Westfirst Limited Financial reports to 31 January 2026.

26/14 Sports and Music Building Redevelopment Proposal (Paper H3)

This item is recorded confidentially under confidential minute 26/14a.

26/15 Update from Safeguarding Governor (Paper I)

Chris Patterson presented Paper I, which updated on his recent meetings as Safeguarding Governor. Chris advised that he had observed strong and proactive safeguarding practices across the College and received good assurance on the systems in place, the support provided to vulnerable learners, and the consistent application of safeguarding processes.

It was noted that overall safeguarding concerns remained high, with mental health continuing to be the most common issue. Emerging areas of concern, including homelessness, were also noted. Chris updated on key developments including the introduction of a new student support threshold document and revised monitoring arrangements, with 55 learners identified in the first round. An event for home-educated students had taken place, with further events planned. Chris highlighted forthcoming changes to Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE), particularly in relation to inclusion and child-on-child harm. The importance of maintaining a strong focus on inclusion was emphasised, recognising the challenges faced by young people.

Chris updated on his recent visit to Advice Support Careers (ASC) and highlighted the professionalism and commitment of the counselling and safeguarding teams, noting that much of their work was not visible unless major issues arose. Chris was keen to remind members that income generated through HE partnerships contributed to funding essential pastoral support, in addition to the higher profile capital investment. Karl Fairley echoed members' thanks to staff for their continued commitment to safeguarding, and the consistently high standard of work undertaken.

Members raised the importance of ensuring that College facilities remained accessible during periods of wider hardship and it was confirmed that contingency arrangements, including temporary shower provision, would be provided during the redevelopment of the sports and music building.

Members welcomed the assurance provided by the report that appropriate arrangements are in place for safeguarding and that the College is meeting its statutory duties and continuing to maintain its culture of safeguarding.

26/16 Update from SEND Governor (Paper J)

Suzanne Slater presented Paper J, her termly update as SEND Governor.

Members were updated on staffing changes, with assurance provided that continuity of provision was being maintained during the period of recruitment to replace the Head of Learning Support. Members noted the developments to strengthen the College's approach to communicating to student-facing staff information relating to inclusion and barriers to learning which affected individual students.

Suzanne highlighted developments in teaching, learning and assessment (TLA) and continuing professional development (CPD), including the increasing use of data to inform practice and the plan to introduce SEND-focused TLA tools. It was noted that work was underway with an external partner to review inclusive practice across five key themes, although this work was at an early stage. Members were briefed on in-year activity including key engagement events, such as support for electively home-educated students and the annual SEND Support Open Day, which showcased the College's available support.

Members noted that forthcoming SEND reforms may significantly increase administrative requirements and would require close monitoring as further detail emerged. A proposal to strengthen oversight in this area through the introduction of a data-led contextual report was discussed, to inform termly discussions and provide a clearer view of impact over time. It had also been agreed to involve Suzanne as SEND Governor in TLA review activities.

Members noted the assurance provided that appropriate arrangements are in place to support learners with SEND and that the College is meeting its statutory duties and continuing to develop inclusive practice.

26/17 Update from Careers Education and Guidance Governor (Verbal)

Helen Golightly provided a verbal update from her termly meeting as Careers Education and Guidance Governor, confirming that as the meeting took place only a few days earlier, a written report would be circulated separately.

**HG /
CW**

Members were informed that NECA had contacted all North East colleges regarding a pilot initiative to support data sharing between secondary schools and colleges, with a focus on understanding

learner career journeys and transitions. It was noted that a limited amount of resource would be made available to support this work. Helen updated on activities in National Careers Week, during which Unloc delivered workshops for students focused on employability skills, the College hosted business visits, guest speakers, and supported student engagement with primary schools to support classroom activity. It was confirmed that evaluation of these activities was underway.

Members noted that the College was leading a collaborative project on financial inclusion, including the development of a prospectus to support students' understanding of finance, benefits, the impact of progressing into further education and work to connect 16–18 year olds with Child Trust Funds. Additional activity included partnership work with a charity to provide clothing and work experience opportunities for students as well as interview support. Training programmes on financial guidance were being developed and Helen updated that the College had participated in a peer review, the outcome of which would be reported soon.

Members noted the verbal update.

26/18 External Accreditations, Awards and Benchmarking (Paper L)

Andy Broadbent presented Paper L, which summarised the College's external accreditations, awards and benchmarking activity. Members noted that the information had been categorised against statutory requirements in addition to awards and areas of external recognition where these were important to the College's core business. It was also noted that the accreditations and awards referenced were reflected across the range of Corporation and Committee reports each year. Andy explained that the paper asked the board to consider whether it was satisfied with the current approach.

Members commented that the list was extensive and queried whether it could be refined to focus on those areas that provide the greatest assurance and value. It was confirmed that the College had already moved away from accreditations that did not continue to add value, such as Investors in People, and that all accreditations were subject to ongoing annual review. Members commented that accreditations could also be a tool to support growth, particularly where they are prerequisites for funding bids or partnerships. Members noted recent successes, including the SHINE award granted by NECA, alongside the value of national recognition such as Beacon Awards.

Members agreed that the range of accreditations and awards held and benchmarking information used provided adequate assurance of the College's performance and quality.

26/19 Appointment of SEND Governor (Paper M)

Members received Paper M and **agreed to re-appoint** Suzanne Slater as SEND Governor for a further two-year period until 31 March 2028, subject to her term of office.

26/20 Revised Internal Audit Plan 2025/26 (Paper N)

Members received Paper N, which proposed an update to the Internal Audit Plan for 2025/26 as recommended by the Audit and Risk Committee.

Members approved the proposed change to the Internal Audit Plan 2025/26.

26/21 Financial Regulations and Procedures (Paper O1)

Members received Paper O1 which presented the annual update of the College's Financial Regulations and Financial Procedures, which were recommended for approval by the Finance and Resources Committee.

Members approved the revised Financial Regulations and Financial Procedures.

26/22 Capital Developments Update (Paper O2)

Members received Paper O2, which updated on the College's major capital projects.

Members noted the progress made on the Construction Centre of Excellence – Learning Space 2 and the update on the current position of the Sports and Music Building Redevelopment.

26/23 External Funding Update (Paper O3)

Members received Paper O3, which updated on the College's externally funded provision for the 2025/26 academic year focusing on projects with a contract value in excess of £250,000.

Members noted:

- the continued success in securing external funding to support a large volume of learners
- the projects with a value in excess of £250k and
- the ongoing and emerging challenges associated with the increasingly volatile external funding environment going forward.

26/24 Accountability Agreement – Update (Paper P)

Members received Paper P, which provided a mid-year update on progress against the objectives in the 2025/26 Accountability Agreement.

Members noted the Accountability Agreement mid-year update.

26/25 FE, Apprenticeships and HE Curriculum Updates (Paper Q)

Members received Paper Q, which provided updates in relation to Further Education, Apprenticeships and Higher Education, as considered by the Education Quality Curriculum and Students Committee.

Members noted the updates.

26/26 Strategic KPI Update - Corporate Services (Paper R1)

Members received and noted Paper R1, which updated on progress to 31 January 2026 against the Corporate Services Strategic Key Performance Indicators for 2025/26.

26/27 Strategic KPI Update - Quality and Curriculum (Paper R2)

Members received and noted Paper R2, which updated on progress made against the Curriculum and Quality Strategic Key Performance Indicators for 2025/26.

26/28 Annual Information Management and Governance Report (Paper S)

Members received and noted Paper S, which provided an overview of how the College had managed its statutory and operational responsibilities relating to information governance during the year.

26/29 Use of the College Seal (Paper T)

Members received and noted Paper T, which detailed the application of the College Seal to the build contract for construction works to the Construction Centre of Excellence (Promotion House, Learning Space 2).

26/30 Any other urgent business – none.

26/31 Date of next meeting: 21 May 2026