CONFIRMED

The Corporation of New College Durham

Minutes of the Corporation meeting held on 21 May 2026 Boardroom, New College Durham

Present:
Stephen King (Chair)
Andy Broadbent
Allen Eccles
Matthew Gamsby
Hayley Farrell
Ben Fisher
Helen Golightly
Nigel Harrett
Rhiannon Hiles *(via MS Teams)*
Kathryn McCloghrie
Chris Nicholls
Chris Patterson
Philip Pollard *(via MS Teams)*
Suzanne Slater

Apologies:
Jonathan Hamill
Emily Baxter
Bethany Robson
Mark Gomersall
Colleen Peters
Adele Dowson

In attendance:
Karl Fairley (Deputy Chief Executive)
Alison Maynard (Deputy Principal)
Paul Bradley (Chief Finance Officer)
Andy Stephenson (Vice Principal)
Peter Morrison (Vice Principal)
Rob Grainey (Vice Principal)
Caroline Winter (Head of Governance and Corporation Secretary)
Chloe Freeman (Administrator)

Action

26/32 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. Matthew Gamsby and Hayley Farrell both declared an interest in Paper K1 (Appointment of Student Governors).

The Chair expressed his thanks for governor and Senior Leadership Team participation in the recent Strategic Review and updated that very positive feedback had been received from the external speakers in attendance on the day.

Rhiannon Hiles joined the meeting at 4.02pm.

Meeting attendees were asked to ensure they completed the meeting evaluation circulated after the Strategy Day and those circulated for each committee and Corporation meeting.

Members noted the updated approach to executive summaries and report structure in the current agenda pack, which were being introduced in response to the external governance review findings, and asked that members provide feedback as part of their meeting evaluation to assist further refinement.

The Chair updated members that Emily Baxter had taken the decision to resign from the Corporation at the end of the academic year due to personal commitments, however it was hoped there would be an opportunity to thank Emily in person for her contribution at the July meeting.

Members confirmed that they did not require any further discussion about the starred agenda items K1, K2 and L.

26/33 **Apologies for absence** were received from Jonathan Hamill, Emily Baxter, Bethany Robson, Mark Gomersall, Colleen Peters and Adele Dowson.

26/34 Minutes of previous meeting (Papers A1 & A2)

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 March 2026 (including confidential minutes) were agreed as an accurate record.

26/35 Matters arising not appearing elsewhere on the agenda

26/10 – the emerging risks had been updated to reflect members' comments in the May Corporation meeting.

26/13 – members were updated on the need to map the use of the MUGA and prioritise for NCD students' use in 2026/27 while the sports hall was out of use during the redevelopment works.

26/17 – it was confirmed that the Careers Governor update report would be circulated shortly after the meeting.

<u>Confidential minutes:</u>
26/07a – it was noted that the Search and Governance Committee would consider the potential for an HE Partnerships link governor at the June meeting of the Committee. The options for additional external assurance were being explored and a further update would be provided in the context of the guidance on the new OfS condition E10 on sub-contracting arrangements.

Members noted that a number of issues had been raised in meeting discussions during the spring term with a request for further consideration at the Strategic Review. It was agreed to review the relevant minutes and confirm whether the matters had been addressed as requested. **CW**

26/36 Principal's Report (Paper B)

The Principal briefed members on matters of strategic interest including FE Funding updates relating to pay, teachers pensions, Post-16 National Insurance Funds, the Inclusive Mainstream Fund, Office for Students (OfS) Strategic Priorities Grant and Post-16 capacity funding allocated to Mayoral Strategic Authorities for distribution. Members noted the challenges in budget-setting due to the delay in funding announcements but were assured that the College's financial standing placed it in a strong position moving forward. Members were updated on AoC work to support Colleges in dealing with community cohesion challenges and noted the College's plans to ensure its own arrangements remained responsive to the evolving external context.

Members were pleased to receive an update on the recent announcement of the College as one of 19 new Technical Excellence Colleges and the related allocation of capital and revenue funding, the use of which was to be discussed with the DfE. In response to a member's question about whether the arrangements between the College as lead and its delivery partners would be defined as sub-contracting it was noted that this was one of the matters to test in those discussions. Early developments in staffing to support the Advanced Manufacturing Technical Excellence College (AMTEC) were also noted.

Members were briefed on further developments in relation to regulation of Higher Education and the Principal thanked the members who participated in the recent successful Manufacturing Leaders' Summit. The Principal also thanked members for their attendance and contribution at the April Strategy Day and confirmed that the draft strategies would be circulated to the relevant committees in June for review in advance of July Corporation.

The Chair congratulated Andy Broadbent on being shortlisted as Business Leader of the Year in the forthcoming NECC Business Awards and members noted the short term action plan detailing areas of management focus in the coming months.

Members discussed the financial risks associated with projected demographic growth, noting that there was no guarantee of receiving growth funding above the current allocation. It was confirmed that future budgets would incorporate the full costs of delivery and that prudent assumptions would continue to be applied. This included provision for a pay award which although not guaranteed, was not dependent on additional government funding. Members commented that the College's strong financial position had enabled it to take a measured level of risk, and that detailed scrutiny of budget proposals and associated risks would again be undertaken by the Finance and Resources Committee.

In response to a member's question about the allocation of post 16 capacity funding, the Principal explained the College's steps in preparation for any formal process. Members asked about potential development on the campus and it was noted that the College had a site masterplan, with opportunity for future on-site development, and the potential to bring some provision back onto campus in the event of a drop in demographics. It was also noted that initial TEC proposition focused on demonstrating the College's leadership role, track record and capacity to deliver, rather than seeking specific funding.

An update on VAT confirmed that there were no immediate implications for the College, although changes to energy-related VAT reliefs were anticipated and discussions with the Department for Education are ongoing.

Members noted the update on the external policy and funding landscape and recent College activity and engagement.

26/37 Receipt of Committee minutes and verbal reports from chairs:

Education Quality Curriculum and Students Committee (Papers C1 & C2) - the Chair approved minutes of the meeting held on 19 March 2026 were received. It was noted that a verbal update had been provided to the previous meeting.

26/38 Statement of Purpose (Mission, Vision and Values) (Paper D)

The Board reflected on feedback from the recent strategy day and the Principal summarised that there were no concerns raised regarding the Statement of Purpose. Members discussed strengthening the emphasis on growth and investment in specialist provision, within a broader College offer, and considered how this linked to the Accountability Statement. Members emphasised the College's role in '*enabling'* as well as inspiring learners and suggested the statement reflected driving social, economic, and environmental *'impact'.* It was agreed to make these changes and update the reference to the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority.

In response to a member's question about wider consultation beyond the board, it was confirmed that staff had been working to the current Statement of Purpose over several years and that the College's values were strongly embedded. Staff workshops were however planned to further develop themes arising from the staff survey and would provide an opportunity to test the statement.

Subject to the suggested amendments, members agreed to re-approve the Statement of Purpose.

It was agreed to bring the Statement back to the following meeting with an update from the staff workshops. **AB**

26/39 Strategic Risk Update (Paper E)

Paul Bradley presented Paper E, the Strategic Risk update. Members noted the current risk profile, with key changes since the previous reporting period including the reduction of the external agency staffing risk from high to medium and removal of the low risk relating to the Academy Trust following the College's withdrawal as Sponsor. It was noted that accommodation pressures had increased but remained as a medium risk. Members noted funding reform, cyber threats, Ofsted changes and artificial intelligence as emerging risks.

Members considered whether controls and assurance over higher education partnerships would remain effective as activity, regulation and partnerships increased. It was noted that the matter had been examined in detail, and that the principal concern may be concentration risk rather than weaknesses in assurance. Members suggested that the position was reviewed further following the forthcoming discussions with the DfE. Members also queried the assurance level assigned to the Prevent Duty risk, emphasising that changes in the national terrorism threat level are outside the College's control. Members further highlighted that the College had appropriate training, processes and statutory compliance arrangements in place, and Paul confirmed that the rating was related to the third line of assurance. It was noted that the Safeguarding Steering Group had reviewed the position prior to the recent change in threat level. Members commented that while the current controls were appropriate the situation could become more volatile and should remain subject to ongoing review. Members commented that the discussion had been useful as the Audit and Risk Committee were approaching planning for the internal audit work programme for the next year.

Corporation members agreed to note:

- The current Strategic Risk Register and Risk Profile
- The movement in risks since the previous reporting period
- The emerging risks/issues and opportunities being monitored by management

26/40 Curriculum and Quality Monitoring Report (FE, Apprenticeships and HE) (Paper F)

Alison Maynard presented Paper F which updated on quality and performance across the curriculum during term two and up to May 2026.

The Board noted the publication of the National Achievement Rates in March and welcomed New College Durham's continued strong performance both regionally and nationally, including being jointly ranked highest in the region for 16–18 achievement rates. Members also received updates on FE in-year retention, predicted achievement rate for apprenticeships, teaching learning and assessment, staff development and coaching, student feedback, the recent Open University Institutional Review and new OfS requirements.

Matthew Gamsby left the meeting at 5.04pm.

Members asked about the level of staff coaching and development and Alison explained that the College made significant investment in staff development at all levels. Coaching support was provided through the Quality team, including dedicated coaches working on both a one-to-one and group basis. External coaching was available for senior leaders, and the College was exploring extending this provision to Heads of School and Curriculum Managers.

In response to a member's question about the College's response to the current changes to apprenticeships Alison confirmed that the impact was less on NCD than for some other providers and that the College had been involved in the development of the battery apprenticeship unit. The College was currently assessing the implications of the wider changes as well as working with employers on accelerated apprenticeships.

Matthew Gamsby rejoined the meeting at 5.07pm.

Members highlighted the recent announcement that T Level students may undertake industry placements at home and expressed concern around the quality of the placement and impact on interpersonal skills. It was noted that further updates on these developments would be provided to the EQCS Committee.

In response to a member's question Alison explained he use of the fitness to study process emphasising that rather than being disciplinary in nature it was used here barriers such as illness, injury or other significant circumstances prevent a student from fully engaging with all elements of their programme, with a range of options considered to support the student to continue in their studies and outcomes tracked. In response to a further question Alison explained how the process and support differed slightly in HE.

Corporation agreed to:

- receive the report;
- scrutinise curriculum and quality performance across FE, Apprenticeships and HE provision; and
- note the contents of the report.

26/41 Strategic KPI update - Corporate Services (G1)

Karl Fairley presented Paper G1, which updated on progress against the Corporate Services Strategic KPIs for 2025/26, to 31 March 2026.

Members noted continued strong performance across finance, estates and ICT, with all key indicators meeting or exceeding target, including the College's Outstanding financial health rating and successful retention of key accreditations. The only KPI not achieving target related to a reportable health and safety incident involving a student injury. Members noted the investigation outcome and mitigations identified and shared with appropriate staff. Members were assured that all other HR indicators remained positive, with staff turnover, sickness absence, vacancies and the gender pay gap all performing better than target levels.

Members highlighted the low staff turnover, noting that while staff retention is generally positive, it can sometimes reduce the flow of new ideas, perspectives and experience into an organisation. Assurance was provided that the College's recruitment and probation processes maintained high standards of staff competence, while ongoing support and development opportunities helped staff continue to improve their practice.

Corporation agreed to:

- note the progress made against the Corporate Services Strategic KPIs as at 31 March 2026;
- acknowledge the strong overall performance across Finance, Estates, ICT and most HR measures; and
- confirm that appropriate assurance has been received, subject to continued monitoring of the health and safety actions arising from SKPIHR5.

It was agreed to re-order the agenda to consider the Corporate Services reports while the Deputy Chief Executive was in attendance.

26/42 Annual Review of Safeguarding and Prevent (Paper H)

Karl Fairley and Andy Stephenson presented Paper H, the Annual Review of Safeguarding and Prevent.

Karl advised that safeguarding activity continued to be shaped by legislative requirements and the latest Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) guidance. Members received assurance that safeguarding arrangements were underpinned by strong leadership, robust systems, a well-embedded safeguarding culture and had received positive external assurance from Ofsted that safeguarding was effective. Karl drew attention to the high level of safeguarding and mental health needs being supported across the College and explained that many issues reflected in the data were historical but were now being appropriately identified and managed. Karl highlighted the additional governance oversight through the work undertaken by the Safeguarding Link Governor in providing challenge and assurance. Karl advised that a further safeguarding update would be brought forward following publication of the updated KCSIE guidance.

The Chair invited observations on the report from Chris Patterson as Safeguarding Governor. Chris thanked the wider safeguarding team for their work and asserted that the College continued to benefit from strong safeguarding arrangements, including effective systems, leadership, culture and use of data. The increasing complexity of safeguarding risks was noted, particularly rising mental health concerns and incidents of sexual violence and harassment, which required ongoing monitoring. The College's proactive approach to emerging Prevent-related risks was also highlighted. Looking ahead, members noted the importance of continued scrutiny, whole-college engagement with safeguarding, and sustained investment in student support and partnership working.

Members welcomed the comprehensive report but noted the concerning nature of the safeguarding issues highlighted. Members were pleased to note the significant support available to students through the College, particularly for those who may not seek help elsewhere.

Members highlighted the increasing complexity of safeguarding risks and welcomed the College's proactive approach to developing specialist expertise, staff training and support services in response to emerging needs. Karl provided assurance regarding the College's close partnership working with external agencies, and its role as a key point of early intervention for students needing support. Members also noted that many students are identified as requiring safeguarding support before commencing their studies, reinforcing the importance of continued investment in staff capability and support provision.

Karl Fairley left the meeting at 5.30pm.

26/43 Strategic KPI update - Quality and Curriculum (G2)

Alison Maynard presented Paper G2, which updated on the Quality and Curriculum key performance indicators. Members noted current performance in relation to retention, attendance, predicted achievement in relation to FE and apprenticeships and retention continuation and completion measures in HE and partnership provision. Alison reported on mitigating actions to target areas of risk including functional skills, vulnerable learner retention and attendance and legacy issues from historical HE partnership arrangements.

Corporation agreed to:
- receive the report;
- scrutinise progress against the 2025/26 Curriculum and Quality Strategic KPIs; and
- note the positive progress being made across Further Education, Apprenticeships and Higher Education provision.

26/44 Students' Union Report (Paper I)

Matthew Gamsby presented the Student's Union Report which updated on developments and activities since the previous meeting.

Members noted that student engagement had continued through a range of consultation activities ding participation by Higher Education students in the Office for Students' 2025–2030 strategy consultation and the Open University validation process. Positive feedback was highlighted from Higher Education students on teaching, learning and assessment support for students.

Members also received updates on the Students' Union relocation, the impact of building works on enrichment activities, plans to maintain student engagement through alternative provision and involvement and support for upcoming prospective student events.

In response to a member's question, Matthew confirmed that the redevelopment of the sports facilities was welcomed by students despite the short-term challenges of the refurbishment.

Members noted the report.

26/45 Financial Monitoring to 31 March 2026 (Paper J1)

Paul Bradley presented Paper J1, which detailed the financial position of the College at 31 March 2026.

Paul confirmed that the College had maintained a strong in year financial position and highlighted the medium term structural risk resulting from adult funding changes. Members noted the forecasted surplus and that a number of contract bids were outstanding.

Members welcomed the College's strong financial position and noted that many colleges would not be able to provide similar assurance. Positive performance within CECOS and the contribution of the Business Development Unit in securing contracts were recognised. Members commented that inflationary pressures should continue to be monitored and emphasised that the College's prudent approach to financial management remained appropriate.

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

26/46 Westfirst Financial Monitoring to 31 March 2026 (Paper J2)

Paul Bradley presented Paper J2, which updated on the financial performance and balance sheet position of Westfirst Limited to 31 March 2026.

Members noted the profits and net assets for the period which reflected early positive performance of the Multi Use Games Area (MUGA). Paul highlighted the lag in administration and support recharges, which were expected to increase during the year and the potential impact on profitability. The hidden income benefit in relation to the marketing impact of the MUGA in attracting students and those using the facilities was also highlighted. Members acknowledged that the wider civic impact had been a key factor in the Corporation's decision to proceed with the MUGA.

Members agreed to note:

- The Profit and Loss Account for Westfirst Limited to 31 March 2026
- The Balance Sheet position and net asset position of Westfirst Limited
- The ongoing monitoring arrangements relating to the financial performance of the company.

26/47 Capital Projects Update (Paper J3)

Paul Bradley presented Paper J3, which updated members on progress against the College's two major capital projects. Members noted the key milestones detailed in the report and Paul highlighted the very positive performance of contractor.

The Principal reminded members that the business case approved in December for the Construction Centre of Excellence (CCoE) had been based on the level of reserves available at that time. Since then, additional CTEC funding had been announced, and a business case was being submitted in support of further funding for the project.

In response to a member's question about tracking of the drawdown of contingency funding, Paul confirmed this was closely monitored and that opportunities for efficiencies and savings were actively pursued by the project team. The importance of capturing lessons learned in this respect for future projects was emphasised and the Principal emphasised the importance of strong project management and governance, particularly in the context of challenges recently experienced by other colleges within the sector.

Members noted:

- Progress on the Construction Centre of Excellence – Learning Space 2
- The current position of the Sports and Music Building Redevelopment project

26/48 Sub-contracting arrangements/fees policy 2026/27 (Paper J4)

Alison Maynard presented Paper J4, which detailed the College's approach to subcontracted provision. Alison briefed members on the updates to the Policy, which focused on priority sectors and subcontracting that delivered clear progression into employment or higher-level learning.

In response to a member's question, Alison agreed to confirm any feedback received from sub-contractors on the policy.

AM

Members noted the policy's alignment with the College's Subcontracting Strategy and its strengthened focus on quality, accountability and impact, ensuring that all subcontracted provision delivers clear value for learners, employers and the regional economy.

Members approved the Subcontracting (Fees and Charges) Policy for the 2026–27 academic year.

26/49 Skills and Employer Engagement Update (Verbal update)

Alison Maynard provided a short verbal update on recent skills and employer engagement activity, including a bid to the North East Mayoral Strategic authority focused on early years provision, family learning and green jobs, which had received exceptional feedback. Members also noted that the College submitted two speculative bids to the Oxford programme, securing additional funding for projects relating to construction and green skills with work already underway to mobilise a sub-contractor to support delivery. Members were updated on further funding bids submitted with outcomes expected mid-June, and it was noted that preparatory work was underway in respect of the AMTEC.

Members noted the verbal update.

26/50 Appointment of Student Governors (Paper K1)

Members received Paper K1 which confirmed the election of Matthew Gamsby as Student Union President and Hayley Farrell as second student governor following elections held from 11 to 15 May 2026.
Corporation appointed Matthew Gamsby and Hayley Farrell as Student Governors for the 2026/27 academic year, until 30 June 2027.

26/51 Committee Composition (Paper K2)

Members received Paper K2 and **agreed to appoint Helen Golightly to the Search and Governance Committee.**

26/52 Use of the Corporation Seal (Paper L)

Members received and noted Paper L, which detailed the application of the College Seal to:

- Variation of Funding Agreement with the North East Mayoral Combined Authority: Economic Inactivity Trailblazer – Aspiring to Make Change
- Variation of Contract with the Tees Valley Combined Authority: Wave 6 Skills Bootcamps (Additional Funding)

26/53 Any other urgent business - none

26/54 Date of next meeting: 2 July 2026