

The Corporation of New College Durham

**Minutes of the Search and Governance meeting
held on 23 June 2026
Online via MS Teams**

Present:

Stephen King (Chair)
Andy Broadbent

Ben Fisher
Helen Golightly

Apologies:

Emily Baxter

In attendance:

Caroline Winter, Head of Governance and Corporation Secretary
Chloe Freeman, Governance Support Officer

Action

26/14 Chair's introduction and starred items

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, highlighting that this was the first meeting for Helen Golightly since her appointment to the Committee. The Chair thanked all attendees for their flexibility in rearranging the postponed meeting.

Members were reminded to declare interests in any item of business to be considered at the meeting. No interests were declared.

26/15 Apologies for absence were received from Emily Baxter.

26/16 Minutes of previous meeting (Papers A1 & A2)

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 February 2026 (including confidential minutes) were agreed as an accurate record.

26/17 Matters arising not appearing elsewhere on the agenda

26/04 – details of the National Cyber Security Centre online training for board members were circulated to the Committee after the last meeting. It was agreed that the information should be circulated to the members of the Finance and Resources Committee with the request that they complete the training as a priority, but that this would also be made available to all governors via the Governor SharePoint site.

CW

26/06

- It was noted that the application for reappointment of Chris Patterson would be considered later on the agenda
- It was confirmed that Allen Eccles had agreed to join the Finance and Resources Committee as a co-opted member for six months on the expiry of his term as a Corporation member
- The Chair had contacted Women in Tech in relation to governor recruitment but no response had been received to date

- Corporation approved the appointment of Helen Golightly to the Search and Governance Committee at the 21 May meeting
- Members discussed governor participation in meetings and the development activities previously undertaken to strengthen constructive challenge. The Vice Chair reported that he had spoken with a number of governors following the previous meeting about the importance of constructive challenge, and it was noted that subsequent meetings had demonstrated improved discussion and debate. Members also noted that the Chair's annual 121 meetings with governors provided a further opportunity to discuss with individual governors. It was suggested that, where time permitted, meetings could conclude with a short period of collective reflection and that the topic could also be explored in more depth at a future Strategy Day.

**CW /
SK**

26/07 – the Governance Development Plan was amended to reflect the Committee's comments before approval by Corporation.

26/18 Governor attendance – update (Paper B)

Members reviewed the Governor attendance statistics for the year to date and noted that whilst Committee and overall attendance had declined since Term 1, Corporation attendance had remained stable and all measures continued to exceed the 75% target.

Members reviewed individual governor attendance and noted that four governors' attendance was below the target. Members commented that attendance levels were generally good and did not give cause for concern. Members considered the demands on staff governors in their substantive roles whilst emphasising the importance of supporting their participation. The Principal agreed to explore current arrangements for staff governors to ensure appropriate support and release arrangements were in place. In response to a member's question about communication of Corporation activity to wider staff, it was confirmed that regular updates from the Principal and the Senior Leadership Team which updated on key areas of Corporation business were circulated to all staff. Members recognised that whilst staff and student governors did not act as representatives with a formal mandate, they could provide useful assurance by helping to triangulate Board discussions with wider staff and student perspectives.

AB

Members noted the attendance position and agreed that attendance and any necessary support measures should be discussed with individual governors as part of the end of year 121 meetings with the Chair.

26/19 Review of Members' terms of office, board succession planning and committee composition (Paper C)

The Committee reviewed members' terms of office and current committee composition and noted the impact of the terms expiring

in the coming months. It was noted that appointments would be required to the Audit and Risk Committee and the Remuneration Committee as two Corporation members stepped down from their roles. Members also noted the need to identify a new Chair for the Remuneration Committee, and the Chair agreed to approach potential candidates

SK

Members discussed committee capacity, particularly within the Education, Quality and Curriculum Standards Committee, noting that increasing regulatory requirements, including those relating to higher education franchising and wider FE reforms, were placing additional pressure on meeting agendas and limiting time for strategic discussion. It was agreed that options to address this, including extending meetings, incorporating a short break, or establishing a sub-committee to create additional capacity should be explored further. The Chair agreed to discuss this further with the Committee Chair before bringing an update to Corporation.

SK

Members received an update on governor recruitment and noted that the recruitment materials had been refreshed and were appended to the report. **It was confirmed that recruitment would focus on candidates with expertise in finance, cyber security and digital innovation.** Members also noted the proposed advertising approach, which included a combination of general recruitment platforms and targeted sector-specific channels.

Members agreed the revised recruitment timetable following the postponement of the meeting, with advertising to take place during July and August, followed by shortlisting and interviews in September. It was agreed that interviews would, if possible, be held alongside the September Search and Governance Committee meeting, with the usual three-member interview panel appointed according to availability. **Members confirmed their support for proceeding with the governor recruitment campaign as proposed.**

26/20 Review of application for Governor reappointment (Paper D)

Members noted that Chris Patterson's term of office was due to expire on 15 September 2026 after serving four years, and that in line with the reappointment procedure Chris had put himself forward for reappointment.

In making a recommendation for reappointment, the Committee considers a number of factors including: overall skills mix of the board; individual attendance at meetings and other College events; individual contribution at meetings; board diversity; committee membership; length of service; succession planning; and consideration of other suitable candidates. The Committee reviewed Chris's updated application form which detailed his skill set, and commented on his strong attendance record, his

strong engagement with training and development activities, his individual contribution as a member of a number of different committees as both a member and a committee chair, and his early impact as Safeguarding Governor.

Members agreed to make a recommendation to Corporation to reappoint Chris Patterson for a further four-year term.

26/21 Governors' Additional Responsibilities – HE Partnerships (Paper E)

Members considered a report setting out options for the establishment of a Higher Education Partnerships Link Governor role and noted that the proposal responded to Corporation's previous request for the Committee to consider whether such a role should be recommended.

Members noted that the proposal responded to the increasing regulatory, financial and reputational risks associated with the College's growing higher education partnership provision, including the introduction of the new OfS Condition E10. It was emphasised that the proposed role would be strategic rather than operational, providing additional oversight and assurance in relation to partnership risks, regulatory developments, student outcomes and the sustainability of the partnership model. Members also noted that the proposed role description mirrored those already in place for the College's existing Link Governor roles.

Members supported the principle of establishing a Higher Education Partnerships Link Governor role and commented that it should be closely aligned to the work of the Education, Quality and Curriculum Standards Committee and the College's risk management framework, reinforcing existing governance arrangements rather than creating a new layer of oversight.

Members considered the options outlined in the report including maintaining current arrangements, establishing a permanent Link Governor role, or introducing the role initially for a two-year period after which its effectiveness and ongoing need would be reviewed.

Members agreed to recommend to Corporation that a Higher Education Partnerships Link Governor role be established for an initial two-year period, subject to review.

26/22 Governance Development Plan Progress Update (Paper F1)

The Committee received an update on progress against the Governance Development Plan approved by Corporation in March. Members noted progress against the agreed actions and that implementation of some actions was behind the usual timetable following a review due to the delay in receiving the final External Governance Review report and the dependency of a number of actions on the completion of the College's new Strategy.

Members noted that early progress had been made in improving the clarity and consistency of meeting papers and in strengthening strategic risk reporting, with the latter due to be considered further by the Audit and Risk Committee. A further progress update would be presented at the September meeting and it was noted that a number of longer-term actions were likely to be carried forward into the 2026/27 Governance Development Plan.

Members noted progress against the Governance Development Plan 2025/26.

26/23 Review of Arrangements for Routine Governance Business (Paper F2)

Members considered a report on the future use of starred agenda items in response to feedback arising from the External Governance Review. It was noted that governor feedback from recent meeting evaluations supported the continued use of an efficient mechanism for routine business, whilst emphasising the need to avoid overuse and maintain opportunities for discussion and challenge.

Members considered the distinction between the current starred item process and a consent agenda and agreed that moving to a consent agenda would retain meeting efficiency whilst providing an explicit and therefore clearer approval process and stronger governance assurance. Members considered and endorsed the proposed examples in the report of items suitable for inclusion within a consent agenda.

Members agreed to recommend to Corporation that the current starred item process be replaced with a consent agenda and that the necessary amendments be made to the Corporation's governance documents.

26/24 Training Update (Paper G)

Members reviewed Paper G, the training update and noted that the Corporation was required to report on governor training and development in the Annual Accounts.

Members discussed future development priorities and agreed that artificial intelligence should be a particular focus. It was suggested that governors would benefit from both AI literacy training and an update on the College's strategic approach to AI, including its use across teaching, learning, student support and corporate services, and the work of the AI Steering Group. Members noted that the Finance and Resources Committee already received updates on AI infrastructure and recent discussions were exploring the potential for a KPI to measure AI adoption and utilisation across the College. It was agreed that a broader strategic update should be brought to

Corporation, supported by a dedicated governor development session.

Members agreed to note the actual and planned training and development activities for 2025/26 and the progress in implementing the Governors Training and Development plan.

26/25 Review of confidential minutes (Paper H)

Members considered Paper H, the review of confidential Corporation business and agreed:

- **Items 1 – 4 (property acquisitions and the HE partnership proposal with Gateway Studios) confidential status to be removed.**
- **Item 5 and 6 (HE Partnership updates and proposes partnership with CECOS) would remain confidential pending a further review when greater clarity on the future direction of national policy on HE partnerships and franchising was available.**

26/26 Proposed Schedule of Business for 2026/27 (Paper I)

Members reviewed and endorsed the proposed Schedule of Business for the Committee for 2026/27.

26/27 Any other business – none

26/28 Date of next meeting: TBC September 2026

26/29 Annual Review of Committee Effectiveness

The Committee considered the results of the 2025/26 Committee Effectiveness Survey and meeting evaluations over the year.

Responses to the meeting evaluations were consistently positive, with members expressing satisfaction with:

- the clarity and quality of committee papers
- committee membership and participation
- the focus of discussions
- the effectiveness of committee chairing.

The annual committee effectiveness questionnaires similarly confirmed that members were satisfied with:

- the Committee's Terms of Reference and skills mix
- members' knowledge and understanding of the Committee's remit
- the training and development provided
- the level of detail in meeting papers
- the accuracy of minutes, follow-up of actions and reporting to Corporation
- consideration of strategic risks
- the balance and use of meeting time.

Members agreed that the Committee had worked effectively throughout the year and that maintaining an appropriate skills mix on the Board had been one of its most important areas of focus.

The Committee endorsed the overall assessment that its effectiveness had been high and raised no additional issues requiring action.