

**Approved minutes of the meeting of the Board of Corporation held on Tuesday 13 May 2025
at 6:00pm in the Banqueting Hall Kirkley Hall Campus, and via Teams Conferencing**

Present:

Louise Bradford, Vice Chair -South (via Teams)
Ian Brown
Katie Carnegie, HE Student Governor
Modaser Choudhary
Pamela Dawson (via Teams)
Louise Doyle (via Teams)
Julia Fox
Chris Jones (from item 59)
Abigail Wampamba Nassuna, FE Student Governor
Susan Pollard, Staff Governor
Ian Ritchey (via Teams)
Alison Shaw, Vice Chair –North
Darren Sterling (via Teams)
James Stuart, Chair

In Attendance:

David Howells, Chief Financial Officer
Toni Rhodes, Deputy Chief Executive
Sonya Anderson, Campus Principal Sunderland College (City)
Mike Chapman, Campus Principal Sunderland College (Bede)
Lee Lister, Campus Principal Northumberland College (Kirkley)
Vikkie Morton, Vice Principal Student Life and Stronger Communities
Iain Nixon, Vice Principal Partnerships and Business Solutions
Judith Quinn, Campus Principal Northumberland College (Ashington)
Naomi Robson, Vice Principal, Corporate Services (via Teams)
Christine Stretesky, Head of Corporate Governance and Policy

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and shared the good news that FE Student Governor Abigail Wampamba Nassuna has been shortlisted for a Student of the Year award sponsored by Unloc.

Bd/24-25/56 Apologies and consent for absence, attendance and declarations of interest

Apologies were received from Lyndsey O’Leary and Ellen Thinnesen. The Attendance Report was received and noted.

There were no declarations of interest made.

Bd/24-25/57 Minutes of previous meeting held on 18 March 2025 and Matters Arising

The Board agreed the regular minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2025 with one minor amendment to page 3, minute 42 which contains duplication.

The Board agreed the confidential minutes presented as an accurate record of the meeting held on 18 March 2025 with these minutes being maintained separately.

The Action Log was reviewed and noted. There were no matters arising.

Bd/24-25/58 Acknowledgements and Committee Recommendations

The Head of Corporate Governance and Policy (HCGP) advised that there had been no requests for any of the items to be withdrawn for further discussion by the Board. She continued stating this item is intended to share with the full Corporation the use of the Chair's Authority contained in Section 21 of the Standing Orders.

The Board ACKNOLWEDGED the following items approved by the Chair outside of a meeting:

- Approval of the high value contract for Advance Blade Repair in the amount of £2,113,979
- Approval of an increase to the high value contract for Invest in People in the amount of £322,631

Bd/24-25/59 Management Accounts

The Chief Financial Officer (CFO) presented the Management Accounts to 31 March 2025.

The headlines are:

- Actual Educational EBITDA is £4,3903k (10.4%),
- Cash balances are £3.1m (20 cash days), in line with the revised forecast,
- Actual ESFA 16-18 learners enrolled are at approximately 5146 equating to 109% of the funded number of 4730 and 333 above the Curriculum Planning target of 4813,
- Pay costs to date are 64.9% of total income in line with budget forecast and lower than benchmark of 65%,
- Balance sheet has net current liabilities of £3.9m with an adjusted current ratio of 0.85,
- Current Financial Health forecast is 220 points/Good.

Overall, the picture is one similar to the trends being seen in previous months.

Governor Fox, as chair of the Finance Resources and Projects Committee (FRP) shared with the Board these accounts had not been to the committee though there is a consistent theme with these accounts and last month's. She opined the College is doing very well to manage the EBITDA. She noted staff costs coming close to the 65% staff costs limits contained within the previously approved Golden Rules. She noted the income from leasing the Washington Campus was helping given the College has not received the amount of additional funding expected from government.

The Board asked when reporting against the Golden Rules will begin. The CFO stated this would start in the new financial year and they will become a part of reporting contained within the Management Accounts.

Picking up on staff pay costs being at 64.9%, the Board asked how it is being forecasted for the new financial year given the desire to retain and develop staff and the potential for a staff pay award. The CFO discussed the planning being conducted including curriculum planning completed, he would estimate the percentage to reduce in the new year to 64%.

The Board asked for clarification on whether there are any risks associated with the shifting of funds to alternative providers for bootcamps that may not appear in the RAG ratings in the Management Accounts. The CFO explained from a purely financial sense there is no financial risk because the

shifting to alternative providers does not add anything to the budget/forecast that was not already factored in. He reminded the Board that any sign off on additional bootcamp spend in-year is due to additional income being received. He continued stating senior leaders are working toward a reduction of the use of subcontractors for adult skills. The Vice Principal Partnerships and Business Solutions (VP-PBS) explained the particular contract referred to was part of the North East Combined Authority Wave 5 contract which is now completed from a delivery perspective and, therefore, poses no risk. He continued sharing the contract was of such a high value because the College was working as part of a consortium which is different to our usual way of subcontracting.

Governor Fox shared the discussion at the last FRP meeting around income diversification and the strategy around understanding this. She acknowledged a report will be coming to FRP.

The Board noted Advanced Learner Loans are out of target and queried whether this was being reviewed during the curriculum planning process. The CFO responded that it was and explained how some Advanced Learner Loans were delivered through the free Course for Jobs programme, so these are not lost learners, just a movement between funding streams. The DCE and Campus Principal – City confirmed the regularity in which this is being reviewed and discussed at a senior level within the College. The Board agreed that reporting should reflect the movement of learners with the potential to modify the target to give a clearer picture of underperformance.

AGREED: to note the Management Accounts

Bd/24-25/60 DEIB Framework Report

The Vice Principal Student Life and Stronger Communities (VP-SLSC) delivered the report sharing the purpose of the framework as a mechanism to help the College communicate, review and improve its performance around DEIB. She explained the framework set out a person-centred, values-driven approach to achieving fair access, participation and outcomes for all students and staff which was aligned with the previous strategic plan.

After a review by leaders of each of the seven key areas of the Framework, some areas of strength were identified as:

- Governors and senior leaders are publicly committed to DEIB.
- EDI objectives are integrated into governance activities, policies, benchmarking, and leadership appraisals (PDCs).
- Curriculum planning addresses local community demographics and promotes inclusion.
- Achievement gaps for most student groups have been successfully narrowed.
- Recruitment practices include bias reduction tools.
- Staff satisfaction and engagement (THRIVE survey) are improving year-on-year.
- The College has responded strongly to community unrest (e.g., 2024 riots) with social cohesion initiatives.

The VP-SLSC shared in the College's effort to continuously improve, the following were identified through the exercise as areas needing further development noting the contextual changes in the organisation and externally:

- Workforce Representation.
- Expand systematic capture and use of community stakeholder feedback to influence curriculum and policy decisions.
- Enhance data analysis at a granular level to better identify gaps and measure impact.

- Further reduction of achievement gaps for specific apprentice groups by implementing a new inclusion approach specifically focused on subcontracting partners and apprentices.

The VP-SLSC concluded her report with the suggestion the Framework is not re-implemented in favour of DEIB priorities being embedded within each Changemaking Goal of the College's Strategic Plan 2025-2030.

The Board recognised the report provided a rich sample of evidence on the work that has been done related to DEIB and it provided assurance the College was progressing this area. The Board suggested inclusion of Board diversity within workforce representation.

The Board challenged how student voice could be even more integrated into DEIB work. Those governors in attendance at the Just One More Thing event hosted by EPNE and the Department of Education noted the topic of Community Cohesion which is more than DEIB shared their reflections on the event. Common themes amongst those in attendance included the College showcasing in a humble way the work done post-riots and continuing, the inclusion of community members and staff sharing their lived experience was powerful, and given what is occurring politically the College has a duty to stand by the work it is doing in DEIB and to bring the community together to create a strong sense of belonging. Of particular note was the session delivered by Unloc's Hayden Taylor who laid challenges to the colleges to obtain and receive student voice in a meaningful way. The VP-SLSC shared plans to developing students as community organisers and the College will be working with Unloc. The Chair shared Governance Committee will be discussing how governance needs to change in light of the new strategy at its meeting next week which will help focus the discussion at next week's Strategy Afternoon. This will include how student voice is captured and shared with the Board.

The Board questioned whether there was a risk to missing important things if DEIB is embedded within the new Strategic Goals. The VP-SLSC explained there will be DEIB Objectives and priorities shared and monitored through the DEIB Annual Report and each Changemaking Goal will have KPIs developed related to and linked to DEIB.

The Board AGREED so long as there is a clear DEIB focus within each Changemaking Goals KPIs. will endorse but need a clear focus under each goal.

The next item was taken out of order

Bd/24-25/67a Papers from Committees: OfS Conditions of Registration Compliance Report

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Bd/24-25/61 Strategic Plan: Highlighting the Case for Change

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Bd/24-25/62 EPNE Strategic Roadmap

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Bd/24-25/43 Chair Update

The Chair reported that the focus of his work recently had been around the following:

- Attended the OfS meeting on exploring governance reporting back that the FE colleges in the room seemed on top of financial and governance issues,

- Touched on last week's at the Just One More Thing Event,
- Attended the phot op at the Ashington New Build site and thanked those governors who were able to join him, and
- Getting ready for the Chair-Governor 1:1s.

Bd/24-25/64 Committee Chair Updates

Governor Jones reported on behalf of CQSE Committee stating that a review of the picture of T Levels acceptances will be brought to the next meeting as will be predicted achievement. He noted the discussions the committee has had regarding HE, including monitoring progress toward the DAP application. He shared a Governor Development session is being developed on HE around the language used and how governors can challenge quality and standards.

Governor Fox reported on behalf of FRP Committee noting the committee reviewed the February Management Accounts which were similar to tonight's accounts. She described the discussion around income diversification, the need to move away from subcontracting and the risk profile for overreliance on certain sources of income. She noted the committee received a report on the Health and Wellbeing offer at the College and challenged leaders to ensure best practices are shared across campuses. Finally, the committee received the market share report with focus on Hartlepool Sixth Form and a referral of review of T Levels to CQSE.

Bd/24-25/65 Lead Governor Updates

Governor Dawson reported as Lead for Quality and HE that she has been focused on HE and will be attending two mock validation panels next week which to provide feedback in anticipation of two new courses being validated and marketed.

Governor Doyle reported as Lead for SEND sharing her visit with the Campus Principal – Kirkley Hall and the Associate Principal -SEND and Inclusion visited a workplace in Cramlington to see some supported internships in the workplace. After explaining what supported internships are, she shared the MP for the area joined them on the visit and was very impressed with what she saw including the support the students receive by the College. Noting there are not enough employers who understand or are willing to take on supported interns, she challenged Board members to dig into their networks to see if they can make connections for the College to increase the number of employers willing to take on interns. (ACTION: HCGP to send an email regarding this to members)

The CP-KH shared out of the 4 interns they saw that day 3 are now employed. He echoed the challenge to governors and noted the need to expand in both Northumberland and Sunderland.

The Chair reported as Lead for Safeguarding noting he has not met with the VP-SLSC since the last Board meeting but in their previous meeting discussed issues around male mental health and suicide particularly during the Christmas Holiday. He shared he is questioning whether the College is doing enough in this space. The VP-SLSC shared with the Board the work the College is doing and reminded that as reported in her mid-year Safeguarding report this is a national issue.

Bd/24-25/66 Draft Minutes of the Committees

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Bd/24-25/67b Papers from Committees

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Bd/24-25/68 Any Other Business

There was no further business.

Bd/24-25/69 Date, time, and venue of the next meeting

The Board noted the arrangements for the next meeting as follows:

- Tuesday 24 June 2025 at 6:00pm at Kirkley Hall Campus.

Bd/24-25/70 Meeting Wrap-up

The Chair asked the governors to reflect on whether they have exhibited the College values during the meeting, asking if they have been courageous, authentic, respectful and pitched for excellence. Governor Pollard shared she felt the Board were courageous in the way they reviewed the EPNE Roadmap.

The meeting closed at 8.03pm.

These minutes were approved by the Board of the Corporation at its meeting on 24 June 2025 pursuant to minute Bd/24-25/72.