

**Minutes of the meeting of the Board of the Corporation held on Tuesday 3 March 2026 at 6:00pm
in room 1.53-1.57 at HICSA and via Teams Conferencing**

Present:

Louise Bradford, Vice Chair
Ian Brown
Modaser Choudhary (via Teams)
Nick Collins
Pamela Dawson (via Teams)
Louise Doyle (via Teams)
Jessany Dumble, Staff Governor
Lina Ferreccio, FE Student Governor (via Teams)
Julia Fox
Chris Jones
Alexandra Lilley, co-opted Student member
Toni Rhodes, Chief Executive
Ian Ritchey (via Teams)
Alexander Schneider, HE Student Governor
Alison Shaw, Chair
Darren Sterling (via Teams)

In Attendance:

Jan Juillerat, Advance HE (Observer)(via Teams)
David Howells, Chief Financial Officer (left after item 75)
Sonya Anderson, Campus Principal Sunderland College (City and HICSA) (left after item 75)
Mike Chapman, Campus Principal Sunderland College (Bede) (left after item 75)
Lee Lister, Campus Principal Northumberland College (Kirkley Hall) (left after item 75)
Vikkie Morton, Vice Principal Student Life and Stronger Communities (left after item 75)
Judith Quinn, Campus Principal Northumberland College (Ashington) (left after item 75)
Iain Nixon, Vice Principal Partnerships and Business Solutions (left after item 75)
Naomi Robson, Vice Principal Corporate Services (left after item 75)
Emma Cottle, Vice Principal Strategy and Engagement (left after item 75)
Christine Stretesky, Head of Corporate Governance and Policy
Donna Swan, Governance Officer

Bd/25-26/63 EPNE Story of Inclusion

The Vice Principal, Student Life and Stronger Communities (VP-SLSC) presented a short video made by the residential students of Kirkley Hall Campus sharing their experience of life at the College.

Bd/25-26/64 Chair's Welcome

The Chair welcomed Jan Juillerat (Consultant) from Advance HE. Jan will be observing the meeting as part of the External Board Review Advance HE are undertaking. She also welcomed the following new members of the Board to their first meeting: Alexandra Lilley (co-opted Student member), Alexander Schneider (HE Governor), Lina Ferreccio (FE Student Governor) and Nick Collins (previously co-opted member of the Finance Resources and Projects Committee).

The Chair reminded governors that she is keen to review arrangements for Strategy sessions to make the best use of governor time. She asked Governors to share their feedback on what would be the best day of the week, time and format to maximise attendance.

The Chair shared that she had attended the recent funeral of former Governor, Ralph Saelzer, and spoke of his significant contribution to the College and to industry, skills and jobs creation in Sunderland.

Lastly, the Chair referred to the College's recruitment of a new chair which will commence in April 2026. She advised that a number of Governors will be needed to serve on the selection panel and to help shape the recruitment process and materials and asked that those willing to undertake this work make themselves known to her and / or the Head of Corporate Governance and Policy.

Bd/25-26/65 Apologies and consent for absence, attendance and declarations of interest

There were apologies for absence from Governors O'Leary and Stuart.

The Attendance Report was noted.

There were no declarations of interest made.

Bd/25-26/66 Minutes of previous meeting held on 16 December 2025 and Matters Arising

The Board agreed the regular minutes of the meeting held on 16 December 2025.

The Board agreed the confidential minutes presented as an accurate record of the meeting held on 16 December 2025 with these minutes being maintained separately.

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

Bd/25-26/67 Governor Appointments

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Bd/25-26/68 HE Self-Evaluation Document (SED)

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Bd/25-26/69 Strategic Goals: Plan 5-Changemaking Partnerships

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Bd/25-26/70 Budget Update

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Bd/25-26/71 Washington Campus

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Bd/25-26/72 Gender/Race Pay Gap Report

The Vice Principal, Corporate Services (VP-CS) introduced the Gender Pay Gap Report and the Ethnicity Pay Gap Report for 2025. She highlighted the following from her report:

- The preparation and submission of the Gender Pay Gap Report to the Gender Pay Gap Service is an annual statutory requirement. The report will also be published on gov.uk and the College's website by 30 March 2026. The Ethnicity Pay Gap Data Report 2025 is not yet required to satisfy a statutory duty.
- The Gender Pay Gap Report must provide data on six specific calculations with the methodology to be used being prescribed.

The VP-CS summarised the outcomes from the report as follows:

- The mean gender gap has increased marginally by 0.1%, to 7% this year, but remains well below national and sector benchmarks.
- The College still employs more females (61.7%) than males (37.9%) with 0.4% of staff identifying as non-binary.
- Female employees are over represented in lower and lower middle quartiles. Female employees continue to be well represented in upper-middle and upper quartiles.
- The median gender pay gap rose to 16.2% (+3.7%), however the movement has been driven by role distribution across pay quartiles not unequal pay.
- Mean bonus gender pay gap has reduced from -5.9% to -1.5%.
- Median bonus gender pay gap remains at 0% driven by standardised £50 vouchers. Proportion of men receiving a bonus was 86% and the proportion of women was 87.6%.
- Overall, the College is satisfied that the differences are not due to the underpayment of females in roles similar to male colleagues.

The headlines from the Ethnicity Pay Gap were as follows:

- White employees – 79.4%
- Other ethnicities – 4.6% and
- Not specified – 16%.
- The mean ethnicity pay gap is 17% (£2.94 variance in hourly rate) with the median ethnicity pay gap being 20.1%. (£3.24 variance in hourly rate).

The College had to continue to work hard in this area to shift the demographic which is likely to require a long term effort. Work is also required to ensure the work force reflects our community and to have more staff declaring their ethnicity. The Board was clear that recruitment should be reflective of local communities and that the development of priority actions to achieve this was required. The Board was interested in the intersection between the Gender Pay Gap and the

Ethnicity Pay Gap and noted that the work on inclusion should yield information on progress, impact and so on.

The Board asked about the feedback that was coming through from Exit interviews as it was important to understand the reasons for which people leave the College. The VP-CS referred to a lot of work being undertaken around retention, including looking at the data from Exit interviews. She had been working on having Campus Principals undertake face to face Exit interviews and was considering when the right time was to bring this information to the Board.

The Board asked whether the new People system supported this reporting better than the previous system; the VP-CS replied that it was better than the previous system, but in some areas was not as helpful as she had hoped.

The Board noted that 16% of employees had preferred not to say what their ethnicity was and asked what could be done to address this. The VP-CS advised that a communications campaign, using traditional communication methods such as Staff Bulletins, was planned to encourage employees to provide accurate personal information, including ethnicity and other demographic information. The Bulletins will clearly explain why the data is collected, how it will be used, and the safeguards in place to protect confidentiality.

AGREED: to note the contents of 1) the Gender Pay Gap Report and 2) the Ethnicity Pay Gap Report and authorise the publication of the Gender Pay Gap Report no later than 30 March 2026.

Bd/25-26/73 Board Acknowledgements and Committee Recommendations

The Board acknowledged the following matters that had been approved outside of a meeting:

- Appointment of HE Student Governor (via email 23.01.26),
- Appointment of FE Student Governor (via email 23.01.26),
- Appointment of Co-opted Student member of the Board and Curriculum Quality and Student Experience Committee (via email 23.01.26), and
- Appointment of Mr Nick Collins to Governor with assignment to Finance, Resources and Projects Committee (via email 11.02.26).

Turning to those items that were recommended for approval by the Board by its committees following scrutiny and debate, the Head of Corporate Governance and Policy (HCGP) stated there were no requests for any of the items to be raised for discussion. However, the HE Admissions Policy had been withdrawn and would be re-submitted to the Curriculum Quality and Student Experience Committee following legal advice from the College's solicitors.

On that basis, the Chair asked if all were happy to agree the actions as recommended by the committees.

The following items were approved:

Governance Committee

- Governance Quality Improvement Plan 2025-26
- HE Oversight Committee Terms of Reference,
- HE Oversight Committee membership and Chair as follows:
 - Governor Dawson – Chair,
 - Governor Shaw,

- Governor Doyle,
- Governor Ritchey, and
- The Chief Executive.

Curriculum, Quality and Student Experience

- HE Appeals Policy

Remuneration Committee

- Remuneration Committee Terms of Reference
- Remuneration Committee Annual Report

The Board noted the information report from the Finance, Resources and Projects Committee of the December 2025 Management Accounts and Golden Rules.

The withdrawal of the HE Admissions Policy following the receipt of legal advice was noted. The policy will be re-presented for approval following further scrutiny at the Curriculum, Quality and Student Experience Committee on 19 March 2026.

Bd/25-26/74 Committee Chair Updates

Finance Resources and Projects Committee – 10 February 2026

The Chair of the Committee, Governor Fox, reported that the Committee had had a full agenda and highlighted the following significant items which had been the subject of scrutiny and challenges:

- The Subcontracting Financial Performance Report,
- Student Recruitment (including increased market share),
- IT Update,
- Budget and Golden Rules, and
- Ashington New Build and the costings for the fitting out.

Governance and Search Committee – 26 January 2026

The Chair of the Committee, Governor Shaw, reported the significant work being undertaken with regards to:

- The search process associated with the recruitment of independent Governors to strengthen the Board in key areas,
- Recruitment of the Chair of the Corporation,
- The establishment of the HE Oversight Committee,
- Progress with respect to:
 - The External Board Review and
 - The Governance Quality Improvement Plan.

It was noted that the draft minutes of committees were available for scrutiny by Governors within the Informational Papers (item 80).

Bd/25-26/75 Chief Executive Update

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

At the request of the Chair, staff attendees withdrew from the meeting.

Bd/25-26/76 Chief Executive: Objectives

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Bd/25-26/77 Designated Senior Postholder Performance Reviews

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Bd/25-26/78 Executive Leadership Structure

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Bd/25-26/79 Recruitment and Selection of Head of Corporate Governance and Policy: Update

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Bd/25-26/80 Draft minutes of the Committees

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Bd/25-26/81 Papers from Committees

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Bd/25-26/82 Any Other Business

The Chair advised the Board that this was Christine Stretesky's final meeting as Head of Corporate Governance and Policy prior to her leaving the College. She stated that Christine had been outstanding in her role and thanked her for her considerable contribution to the success of the College. She made an appropriate presentation on behalf of the Governors which was greeted by warm applause.

There were no further items of business.

Bd/25-26/83 Date, time, and venue of the next meeting

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

- Tuesday 12 May 2026 at 6:00pm at Kirkley Hall Campus.

Bd/25-26/84 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.

The Board thanked the Executive Leadership for the way in which the agenda items have been delivered and explained. She also sought that governors communicate any feedback on the conduct of the meeting or suggestions for improvements.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8:30pm.

These minutes were approved by the Board at its meeting held on 12 May 2026 pursuant to minute Bd/25-26/92.