Derwentside College

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATION BOARD HELD IN THE BOARD ROOM ON TUESDAY 15th JULY 2025 AT 5.30 PM

Governors	Type	Initials	Attendance	Apologies
David Allsop	Independent (Chair)	DA	X	-
Chris Todd	Principal and CEO	CT	X	-
Carl Bozeate	Independent	CB	X	-
Guy Brown	Independent	GB	X	-
Sarah Jones	Independent	SJ	X	-
Matthew Taylor	Independent	MT	X	-
Mark Short	Independent	MS	-	X
David McHugh	Independent	DM	X	-
Stuart Corbridge	Independent	SC	X	-
Andrew Hayday	Independent	AH	X	-
Helen Brennan	Staff Governor	HB	X	-
Nicola Dixon	Staff Governor	ND	-	X
Bill Fullen	Independent	BF	X	-
Monika Nangia	Independent	MN	-	X
Joanne Race	Independent	JR	X	-

Attendees	Type	Initials	Attendance	Apologies
Susan Errington	Deputy Principal	SE	X	-
Tina Hannant	Vice Principal – Finance & Resources	TH	-	A
Rachel Holmes	Director of Human Resources	RH	X	-
Nicola Scheel	Curriculum Leader – Hair, Beauty & Catering	NS	X	-

Observers	Type	Initials	Attendance	Apologies
Mark Smith	Independent	MS	X	-

Clerk	Type	Initials	Attendance	Apologies
Elaine Gaines	Head of Governance	EG	X	

Welcome

The Chair welcomed all attendees to the final meeting of the academic year. A warm welcome was extended to Mark Smith; present to observe the meeting with a view to joining the Board. The Chair welcomed Nicola Scheel, attending to deliver a short presentation to Governors regarding the recent educational visit to Japan.

The Chair invited Nicola Scheel to deliver her presentation.

NS delivered her presentation and invited questions from Governors – none were raised.

NS left the meeting at 5.55 pm.

1. **Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest**

Apologies were received from ND, MS and MN. There were no declarations of interest.

The Board agreed that the meeting was quorate.

2. Minutes of Previous Meetings and Matters Arising

2.1. **Minutes – Corporation**

Governors **reviewed** the minutes of the meeting held on the 11th March 2025.

The following correction was requested by MT:

- on page 13 *MT stated that it falls within our Risk Appetite*. MT noted the expression was his personal risk appetite rather than corporate risk appetite.

Subject to the amendment above, the Board **approved** the minutes of the meeting held on the 11th March 2025.

2.1a **Board Strategy Away Day – Approval of the Accountability Agreement 2025-26**

The minutes of the Approval of the Accountability Agreement were **approved**.

2.2. **Minutes – Search & Governance Committee**

The Search & Governance Committee Chair provided a verbal update to Governors, regarding the meeting held on the 22nd May 2025, noting that during the annual appraisal process ND expressed her view to join a sub-committee and it was agreed the appropriate committee for her to join is the Quality & Standards Committee.

Questions were invited – none were raised.

The Board **received** the minutes of the Search & Governance Committee held on the 22nd May 2025.

As recommended by the Search & Governance Committee the Board **confirmed** the appointment of Mr Andrew Hayday following the successful completion of the probationary period.

As recommended by the Search & Governance Committee the Board **approved** the following appointments:

- Mr Andrew Hayday to the role of Chair of the Finance & Resources Committee.
- Mr Mark Smith to the role of Independent Governor on the Corporation Board for a four-year term.
- Ms Nicola Dixon onto the Quality & Standards Committee
- Ms Keira Rendell to the role of Student Governor (co-opted to the Quality & Standards Committee). Governors noted that Nicola Dixon will mentor Keira Rendell.

Following the endorsement by the Search & Governance Committee the Board **received and approved** the following documents:

- Board Assurance Framework and Action Plan 2025-26
- Corporation Business Cycle 2025-26

2.3. **Minutes – Quality & Standards Committee**

The Quality & Standards Committee Chair provided a verbal update to Governors regarding the meeting held on the 8th July 2025. The following points were noted:

Achievement Rates – The Committee was informed that the college is on track to exceed its strategic apprenticeship achievement target of 65%. A significant improvement was noted in Health and Social Care, with an anticipated achievement rate of 67%, up from the previous year. Positive trends were also reported across classroom provision, with predicted improvements in 16-18 achievement. While it is still early to assess outcomes in adult provision due to ongoing enrolments to Sector-Based Work Academies, early indicators suggest a stronger overall performance compared to last year.

Compliments and Complaints – The Committee received an update regarding the many compliments received, noting that small number of complaints were received however, no trends were identified and complaints were managed against the policy effectively.

Self-Assessment – The Committee provided feedback regarding the draft Self-Assessment key judgements noting the strengths and areas for development are very clearly evidence-based.

Quality Assurance – The Committee received a comprehensive update on Quality Assurance activities undertaken during the final half term of the academic year.

Questions were invited – none were raised.

The Board **received** the minutes of the Quality & Standards Committee held on Tuesday 8th July 2025.

Following the endorsement by the Quality & Standards Committee the Board **received and approved** the Careers Strategy.

2.4. **Minutes – Finance & Resources Committee**

The Finance & Resources Committee Chair provided a verbal update to Governors regarding the meeting held on Tuesday 1st July 2025, and drew their attention to the following points:

Management Accounts – The Committee received the month-9 management accounts and the supporting report confirmed that the College continues to operate within the 'GOOD' financial health category. Since the meeting on 1st July, the month-10 management accounts have been circulated to the committee and there were no significant concerns to report since month-9.

The Board **received** the minutes of the Finance & Resources Committee held on Tuesday 1st July 2025.

Following the endorsement by the Finance & Receives Committee, Governors **received and approved** the following documents:

- Annual Budget and Three-Year Financial Plan
- Annual Pay Award Proposal
- Financial Regulations
- Reserves Policy
- Business Continuity Plan
- Pay Determination Framework
- Equality & Diversity Objectives for the 2025-26 academic year.
- Social Value Statement

Financial Regulations - SJ suggested that an extra control was added to allow the Board to waive the financial regulations up to a figure of £500k. CT agreed to pick this up with TH and report back to the Board.

2.5. **Minutes – Audit & Risk Committee**

The nominated Audit & Risk Committee Chair (DM) provided a verbal update regarding the meeting held on Tuesday 24th June 2025.

The Committee received the External Audit Plan, noting the engagement letter as an item to follow. The Committee also received and endorsed the Internal Audit Needs Assessment and Plan 2025/26.

The Board **received** the minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee held on the 24th June 2025.

Following the endorsement by the Audit & Risk Committee, Governors **received and approved** the following documents:

- External Audit Plan
- Internal Audit Plan
- Whistleblowing (Public Interest Disclosure Policy)

2.6. **Minutes – Remuneration Committee**

The Remuneration Committee Chair provided a verbal update regarding the meeting held on Thursday 22nd May 2025. The Committee received the Objectives for all senior postholders (CT, SE, TH and EG), noting the KPIs will be an item for endorsement by the committee in September and an item for approval by the Board in October.

The Board **received** the minutes of the Remuneration Committee held on the 22nd May 2025.

Following the endorsement by the Remuneration Committee, Governors **received and approved** the Senior Postholder Objectives for the 2025-26 academic year.

3. Strategy & Direction

3.1. **Corporation Chair's Report**

The Corporation Chair provided a verbal update to Governors regarding meetings/events that he has attended since his last update to the Board on 11th March 2025. Highlights include:

Annual Strategic Conversation – On 3rd April DA, CT, SE, TH and EG attended the Annual Strategic Conversation with the DfE and FE Commissioner's Team. Discussion items included the College's plans to update the accountability agreement and to continue to respond to local and national skills priorities; progress made by the College in delivering its key priorities and targets for 2024/25 and how this is informing changes to the agreement for 2025/6, the strategic direction that the college and the corporation are taking to ensure the college supports the ambitions of a mission driven Government.

FE Commissioner Events – DA has attended national and regional events – further detail was provided to Governors in the Principal and CEO report.

Communication – DA and CT continue to meet on a weekly basis.

Appraisals – DA has held appraisals with probationary governors and annual appraisals have taken place with established governors.

Delta North – Together with CT and SE, DA has attended two meetings with Delta North, including their Board meeting.

External Board Review – Along with CT and EG, DA attended meetings with the External Board Reviewer.

Self-Assessment Task Group – In April, DA attended the Leadership and Governance Task Group along with GB and EG, contributing to discussions that informed the draft Self-Assessment document presented to the Quality & Standards Committee.

Annual Chamber Dinner – In May DA, CT and SE hosted a table for employers at the Annual North East Chamber of Commerce Dinner. Since then discussions have been ongoing regarding [Redacted – commercially sensitive].

FE Commissioner Event (Sunderland College) – DA registered to attend the FE Commissioner event in May, however, due to an unforeseen circumstance was unable to attend, and GB attended on his behalf. Key messages from the event are:

- Do colleges understand the diversity of the communities that we serve?
- Do governors understand the profile of their learners?

Questions were invited – none were raised.

The Board:

- **Received and noted** the content of the verbal report from the Corporation Chair.

3.2. **Principal & CEO Report**

The Board received a detailed update from the Principal and CEO, highlighting key strategic developments, recent leadership changes, and ongoing stakeholder engagement activities. A central focus has been the development of the new Strategic Plan, which reflects input from both governors and stakeholders. The draft version of the Strategic Plan will be available on SharePoint, and governors are encouraged to review and provide feedback. The Corporation Chair extended his appreciation to the Leadership team for their work producing high-quality documentation to support the Task Group's work on the Strategic Plan.

Significant leadership restructuring has taken place, including new appointments and internal promotions, aimed at enhancing long-term organisational capacity. However, recent staff survey results have highlighted the need to improve internal communication and staff morale. In response, a series of actions are being implemented, including strengthened internal communications and increased leadership visibility.

The Board received an update on the College's continued efforts to enhance its regional and national profile. Key initiatives include the application to join the North East Institute of Technology, participation in the Technical Excellence Colleges initiative, and leadership of the Colleges for North East England Group. [Redacted – commercially sensitive].

Questions/comments were invited.

BF enquired about the timescales associated with the regional bids. In response SE confirmed that the submission deadline is 4th July. Successful bidders are expected to begin their discussions with the DfE in September. CT added that should the College be successful, the Board will be informed and the Finance & Resources Committee will assume responsibility for the ongoing oversight of the project.

[Redacted – Confidential].

SJ asked whether the College is aware of how many of the affected staff are members of a Trade Union. In response, RH confirmed that the College does not hold data on Trade Union membership. The number of staff impacted by the Real Living Wage issue is 25 with eight staff directly involved in the Collective Dispute. SE added that during the ACAS meeting held in January, the College proposed that the offer be put to union members; however, this proposal was rejected by the Trade Unions.
No other questions/comments were raised.

SC referred to section 2.4 (Staff Survey) of the Principal's report, noting the decline in comparison to the previous year. He asked CT to elaborate on the emerging themes related to staff absence, unfilled vacancies, and concerns arising from recent leadership changes. SC also requested an update on any pressures reflected in the month-10 management accounts.

In response CT explained that the majority of staff dissatisfaction stemmed from recent leadership changes and ongoing teacher absences. He highlighted the challenges of securing high-quality short-term cover in a small college setting, noting that long-term staff absences had influenced the feedback in the recent staff survey. SE confirmed that a staff cover plan is in place and agreed with the Curriculum Leaders; adding while agency cover had been sourced, in some instances, the quality of teaching did not meet the College's expected standards.

[Redacted – Confidential].

MT inquired whether the long-term staff absences had been resolved or if they represented a more fluid and ongoing situation. In response, RH confirmed that absences are closely monitored and no concerning trends have been identified; citing planned surgery and two instances of death in service.

No other questions/comments were raised.
The Board **noted** the executive summary and content of the report including identified risks.

3.3. **Strategic Monitoring and Performance**
The Board received an update on the College's performance against its strategic priorities, aims, and key performance indicators for 2024-25. Significant progress has been made across all three strategic priority areas: Leadership & Governance, Curriculum & Quality, and Engagement; with 11 of 18 strategic aims showing significant progress and the remainder showing reasonable progress. Key achievements include strengthened leadership structures, enhanced governance, curriculum development aligned to skills needs, and improved stakeholder engagement.

Performance indicators reflect strong financial health, high employer satisfaction (95.4%), and strong apprenticeship achievement rates (63.9%). While staff and learner satisfaction dipped slightly due to leadership transitions and staff absences, results remain above national averages. The Strategic Risk Register shows improvement in several areas, including leadership succession and estates management, though financial risks related to funding changes and policy shifts remain high. Mitigation strategies are in place, and the

College continues to monitor and adapt to emerging risks, ensuring alignment with its long-term strategic goals.

Questions/comments were invited.

BF acknowledged that the College is currently navigating a transitional period, which presents an opportunity to shape a more positive narrative. He noted that communication is an area that can always be strengthened and asked how the College ensures clear communication both from the top down and the bottom up, avoiding a 'middle sponge' effect. In response, CT referenced the recent Leadership Development event held on Monday 7th July, which included a focus on communication; noting the atmosphere and mood of the leadership team was positive. He also highlighted several ongoing initiatives aimed at improving internal communication, including planned virtual staff briefings, termly EPYP briefings, regular Executive Team bulletins, and the Staff Voice Group.

Addressing challenges within middle management, CT acknowledged that recent changes, staff movement, and vacancies have at times created a communication vacuum. However, he expressed confidence that newly appointed leaders will bring renewed energy and a fresh approach. He also emphasised the importance of staff being informed about the information they are entitled to, citing regular staff meetings as a key mechanism for this

BF suggested a mid-year 'pulse-survey'. CT agreed to take this forward.

JR observed that key problem areas have been addressed and the College are now well-positioned to build on this progress; and emphasised the importance of reinforcing communication as part of the performance objectives for relevant staff. JR agreed with BF's suggestion of a 'pulse-survey'.

SC thanked CT for his report, acknowledging the progress made against the KPIs and the updates provided in the Risk Register. He then asked CT to outline his current thinking on the development of the College's Strategic Plan. In response CT confirmed that the Strategic Plan is currently being developed; each of the five strategic priorities will be underpinned by a corresponding delivery plan. Additionally, existing strategy documents will be reviewed to ensure alignment with the new Strategic Plan.

The Board **received** and the Strategic Monitoring and Performance Report and:

- **Noted** the positive progress being made towards the delivery of our strategic priorities and aims and considered this in the context of our strategic risks.

3.4. **[Redacted – commercially sensitive] Proposal**
[Redacted – commercially sensitive]

4. Curriculum Quality & Learning

4.1. Curriculum Plan

The Board received the proposed Curriculum Plan for 2025-26, which outlined the College's apprenticeship offer, adult education delivery, and full-time programme provision. The report outlined the College's approach to delivering a responsive, high-quality Curriculum Plan aligned with national, regional, and local priorities. The report was structured around the three core curriculum areas

Apprenticeships - SE reported the current offer has been reviewed and remains robust, with no Standards proposed for removal. Two new Standards are being introduced:

- Level 4 Engineering Manufacturing Technician
- Level 2 Administration Assistant

Appendix 1 of the report highlights funding uplifts for four Standards, notably:
- Senior Healthcare Support Worker: £5,000 to £9,000
- Floorlayer: £13,000 to £17,000

Forecasts indicate 1,020 new apprenticeship starts, with anticipated growth in Childcare and Engineering, aligning with the College's financial projections.

SE paused for comments/questions – none were raised.

Adult Education - Despite significant changes to the educational landscape, the College is on track to meet its income targets for the year. The Assistant Principal - Curriculum and his team have successfully delivered the £1.8 million NECA contract, alongside delivery within the Tees Valley. For 2025–26, curriculum plans with the North East Combined Authority (NECA) will continue across four key strands:
- Sector-Based Work Academies
- Employer Upskilling
- Online Flexible Learning
- Classroom and Community Learning

The largest area of provision remains the Academies. The College has also expanded its blended learning offer to further support Employer Upskilling and Online Flexible Learning. Adult Provision continues to align closely with NECA and TVCA priorities, supporting both employment and progression outcomes.

SE paused and invited comments/questions.

GB provided assurance that the Quality & Standards Committee received a comprehensive update well aligned with the national Skills Agenda.

No further questions were raised.

Education Programmes for Young People (EPYP) - The College has continued to see growth in this area, with overall achievement rates rising and remaining well above the national average. Programmes are well aligned with both local and national skills priorities.
For 2025-26, structural changes include the removal of the 6-week Occupational Studies programme and a shift towards increased delivery of GCSE English and maths. These changes aim to increase the number of learners in higher funding bands and further improve learner outcomes.

SE invited comments/questions – none were raised.

The Board **received** the Curriculum Plan report and **approved**:
- The proposed Apprenticeship offer of 36 Standards to commence from the 2025-26 academic year.
- The proposed outlined delivery plan across our Adult Education Contracts.
- The continuation of our Full-Time programme provision in the areas identified.

5. Any Other Items of Urgent Business

- **Letter from the DfE : Derwentside College Financial Statements Review(2023-24)**
  Governors received the Department for Education Letter (dated 28th April 2025) regarding the Financial Statements Review - 2023-24, noting the DfE conclusion that the college's financial

health grade for 2023-24, based on the outturn forecast, was GOOD; and the DfE have reviewed the college's audited financial statements, external auditor's management letter and the annual report of the audit committee and they have not identified any significant financial control concerns from this review.

- **Helen Brennan** - DA informed Governors that Helen will be stepping down from the Board at the end of this academic year and reducing her working hours from full-time to part-time; therefore, this was her last Board meeting DA thanked Helen for the valuable contribution that she has made during her term of office.

The meeting closed at 7.15 pm.

Board Meetings

Actions Arising

Date: 14th July 2025

Minute Ref	Action	Responsible Officer	Status & Deadline
2.4	***Financial Regulations*** - SJ suggested that an extra control was added to allow the Board to waive the financial regulations up to a figure of £500k. CT agreed to pick this up with TH and report back to the Board.	VP – Finance & Resources- End of July 2025	**Complete**
3.4	[Redacted – commercially sensitive]	AP – Curriculum (September 2025 and March 2026)	**In progress**

Date: 11th March 2025

Minute Ref	Action	Responsible Officer	Status & Deadline
2.1	***Safeguarding*** – Training re: protections from Sexual Harassment. CT will link with JR	Principal – March 2025	**Complete** Training has been delivered to the Wider Leadership Team and a risk assessment is under development.
3.2	***Student Governor*** – Utilising the Learner Voice network to draw up interest in the Student Governor role will be explored.	Head of Governance - May 2025	**Complete** A new plan is under development to recruit student governors.
3.2	***Board Strategy Day*** – The draft agenda will be circulated.	Head of Governance – March 2025	**Complete** Strategy day complete.
4.1	***Chair Report*** – This will be a standing agenda item for future meetings	Head of Governance - May 2025	**Complete** Included on the agenda.
4.1	***Strategic Plan Review*** - The membership of the Strategic Planning Task Group will be expanded to include Committee Chairs	Principal	**Complete** A further meeting of the Task Group took place on the 2 July 2025.
4.1	***Chairs Group*** – A Chair's Group will convene two to three times a year to discuss key risks and opportunities facing the College and the sector in an informal setting.	Corporation Chair	**In progress** – The Strategy Task Group has been formed and meetings have taken place.

Date: 10th December 2024

Minute Ref	Action	Responsible Officer	Status & Deadline
3.1	***Skills Strategy*** – A Skills Strategy will be developed and presented to the Board. A small task group would be convened to support this, made up of Quality and Standards governors.	Principal / Deputy Principal October 2025	**In progress** Work will commence over the summer.

3.2	***Delta North*** – Options 2 and 3 will be pursued and the final proposal submitted to the Board for approval.	Principal March 2025	***Complete*** Final report presented to Board – 15 July 2025.
3.3	***Ofsted Readiness Plan*** – An inspection readiness plan will be developed with the Quality & Standards Committee and progress reported to the Board once complete.	Deputy Principal October 2025	**In progress** Quality and Standards Committee appointed to lead this work. October Q&S Committee will consider a first draft.
4.1	***Curriculum Review and Gap Analysis*** –The findings and recommendations will be presented to the Board early in the New Year.	Principal March 2025 / Away Day (June)	***Complete*** This was a focus at the Strategy Away Day.
6	***Student Governor role*** – Student Governors were invited to observe the Quality & Standards Committee, however due to personal/work commitments were unable to attend.	Head of Governance December 2024	***Complete*** Student Governor recruitment remains a focus and will feature within the Governance development plan arising from the external review.