Derwentside College

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATION BOARD
HELD IN THE BOARD ROOM ON
TUESDAY 14th OCTOBER 2025 AT 5.00 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	-
Nicola Dixon	Staff Governor	ND	-	X
Julie Eddy	Staff Governor	JE	X	-
Bill Fullen	Independent	BF	X	-
Monika Nangia	Independent	MN	-	X
Joanne Race	Independent	JR	X	-
Mark Smith	Independent	MS	X	-

Attendees	Type	Initials	Attendance	Apologies
Susan Errington	Deputy Principal	SE	X	-
Tina Hannant	Vice Principal – Finance & Resources	TH	X	-
Rachel Holmes	Director of Human Resources	RH	X	-
Alex Muir	Assistant Principal – Curriculum	AM	X	-

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

Welcome

The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming all attendees to the first meeting of the 2025-26 academic year. A special welcome was extended to Julie Eddy, who was elected to the role of Curriculum Staff Governor following the outcome of a recent Ballot. Introductions were made and the Chair then invited SE to deliver the spotlight presentation to Governors regarding the New Ofsted Inspection Framework.

Following the presentation SE invited questions and discussion followed, the following points were noted:

- Leadership & Governance is central to inspection outcomes i.e. how leaders are driving improvement and supporting wellbeing.
- Learning Walks – Listening to Leaders and seeing as many learners as possible during inspection would be a key priority for Ofsted.
- Case Sampling is new introduction, moving away from Deep Dives.
- Live evidence is preferred.
- To be graded STRONG providers must achieve across all areas of the criteria (secure fit model, as opposed to a best fit model).

- In addition to the Strategic Plan, our Accountability Agreement, SAR and QIP are key documents.

The Head of Governance will ensure the presentation slides are available in the SharePoint folder for Governors following the meeting.

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

Apologies were received from CB, DM, ND and MN. All Senior Postholders (CT, SE, TH and EG) declared an interest in item 2.5.

The Board agreed that the meeting was quorate.

2. **Minutes of Previous Meetings and Matters Arising**

2.1. **Minutes – Corporation**

Governors **reviewed and approved** the minutes of the meeting held on the 15th July 2025.

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

The Search & Governance Committee Chair provided a verbal update to Governors, regarding the meeting held on the 16th September 2025, noting the meetings held with a prospective Governor (Ms Nadine Baister).

The Board **received** the minutes of the Search & Governance Committee held on the 16th September 2025.

As recommended by the Search & Governance Committee the Board **confirmed** the appointment of Ms Nadine Baister as a co-opted member of the Quality & Standards Committee.

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

- Annual Report of the Search & Governance Committee for the 2024-25 academic year.
- Instrument & Articles of Government
- Standing Orders
- Scheme of Delegation
- Governor Code of Conduct
- External Board Review Action Plan

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

The Chair of the Quality & Standards Committee provided a verbal update to Governors regarding the meeting held on the 6th October 2025. GB reported that the Committee had reviewed the revised Terms of Reference, which are now closely aligned with the new Inspection Framework and incorporate a strengthened focus on Inclusion. Additionally, GB noted that the Committee received a spotlight session led by the newly appointed Heads of Department, who each shared their professional background, outlined their aspirations and described their intended contributions to the strategic and operational development of the College.

Questions were invited – none were raised.

The Board **received** the minutes of the Quality & Standards Committee held on Monday 6th October 2025.

Following the endorsement by the Quality & Standards Committee the Board **received and approved** the following documents:

- Annual Report of the Quality & Standards Committee for the 2024-25 academic year.
- Terms of Reference for the Curriculum, Quality & Inclusion Committee
- Self-Assessment Report 2024-25
- Quality Improvement Plan
- Ofsted Readiness Plan

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

The Finance & Resources Committee Chair provided a verbal overview to Governors regarding the meeting held on Tuesday 23rd September 2025, noting the Committee received a spotlight session led by the Head of Estates & Facilities regarding Capital Projects.

Questions/comments were invited.

SJ inquired whether the Insurance Broker had provided any indication regarding the future trajectory of the insurance premium. In response, TH informed Governors this would depend on the absence of further insurance claims and would also be influenced by conditions in the insurance market at the time of renewal.

No further questions/comments were made.

The Board **received** the minutes of the Finance & Resources Committee held on Tuesday 23rd September 2025.

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

- Annual Report of the Finance & Resources Committee for the 2024-25 academic year
- Fees & Charges Policy
- Financial Support for Learners Policy
- Environment & Sustainability Policy
- Climate Action Plan
- Terms of Reference for the Finance, Resources and Projects Committee.

At 6pm all Senior Postholders (CT, SE, TH and EG) including AM left the meeting whilst agenda item 2.5 was taken.

2.5. **Minutes – Remuneration Committee**

The Remuneration Committee Chair provided a verbal update regarding the meeting held on Thursday 25th September 2025. This item was minuted by RHo.

The Committee received the details of the appraisals for all senior postholders (CT, SE, TH and EG), together with recommendations on senior postholder pay as set out in her report at 2.5c. It was noted that the Remuneration Committee had endorsed the proposals and that all costs had been budgeted for.

[Redacted – sensitive / confidential].

The Corporation Chair reminded Governors that these were proposals from the Remuneration Committee but ultimately, decisions on senior postholders pay remain with the Board.

Discussion ensued regarding the impact on the pay gap in the College and the multiplier for CEO pay against the median in the College and Governors were satisfied that this proposal remains within the acceptable range. Governors were assured that consideration had been given to the comparative data from the AoC's Senior Pay Survey and that the total package for senior postholders had been considered. Board members were satisfied that the proposals were within the remit of the College's Policy, within the bounds of Managing Public Money and met with the AoC's Senior Postholder Remuneration Code.

The Committee received the finalised KPI's for the senior postholders and noted they may be subject to change in line with the new Strategic Plan.

The Board **received** the minutes of the Remuneration Committee held on the 25th September 2025.

Following the endorsement by the Remuneration Committee, Governors **received and approved** the following documents:

- Annual Report of the Remuneration Committee for the 2024-25 academic year
- Senior Postholder Remuneration Policy
- Report from the Remuneration Committee Chair summarising Senior Postholder Remuneration
- Senior Postholder KPIs for the 2025-26 academic year.

At 6.15 pm all Senior Postholders and AM were invited to rejoin the meeting.

The Corporation Chair informed the Senior Postholders that following the recommendation of the Remuneration Committee, the Board had approved their remuneration. On behalf of the Board, DA expressed sincere thanks for their contributions throughout the past academic year.

3. Strategy & Direction

3.1. Corporation Chair's Report

DA provided a verbal update to Governors regarding meetings and events he has attended since his last update to the Board on 15th July 2025. He noted that he attended 16 meetings, including one external meeting - the AoC Chairs and Vice-Chairs Q&A session. DA shared insights from this session, highlighting discussions around college funding and the AoC proposal that Colleges should pay a 4% pay award.

DA also reported on a meeting with the Senior Independent Governor, which he found valuable, and his ongoing weekly meetings with CT, where a range of topics are discussed, some of which are included on the agenda for this meeting. Additionally, DA he has held meetings with a prospective governor.

Questions were invited – none were raised.

The Board:

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

3.2. **Annual Report on Performance**

The Board received and noted the Annual Report on Performance for the academic year 2024-25, which provided a comprehensive review of the College's progress against its Strategic Plan, priorities, aims, and key performance indicators (KPIs). The report marks the conclusion of the current Strategic Plan 'Our Journey to Outstanding 2026' and sets the context for the new Strategic Plan presented for approval. Key highlights included:

- Strategic Aims Progress: Of the 18 strategic aims, 11 were assessed as having made significant progress and 7 reasonable progress. Notable achievements were seen in leadership and governance, curriculum quality, and stakeholder engagement.
- Performance Indicators: The College maintained a 'GOOD' DfE financial health rating, with strong EBITDA and cash reserves. Apprenticeship achievement rates rose to 67%, placing the College in the top 5% nationally. Employer satisfaction remained high at 95.4%, and predicted achievement rates for EPYP and Adult Education were 89% and 88% respectively.
- Risk Management: The Strategic Risk Register indicated improved financial risk scores and stable leadership risks. Cybersecurity and regulatory changes remain areas requiring continued focus.

Questions/comments were invited.

MT referred to the Performance Dashboard at item 3.2b of the report noting the apprenticeships starts funding was close to target, then dipped, he asked for clarity regarding this. In response, CT cited the changes introduced by the DfE in February 2025 regarding English & Maths for adult apprentices noting this had impacted apprenticeship income.

No other questions/comments were raised.

The Board **received the Annual Report on Performance 2024-25 and:**

- **Noted** the College's performance against the strategic plan in 2024-25, including the KPIs and considered the key issues, risks and implications presented within the report.
- **Noted** that this represents the conclusion of the existing Strategic Plan 'Our journey to Outstanding 2026.

3.3. **Principal & CEO Report**

The Board received and noted the Principal and CEO's report, which provided a comprehensive update on internal developments, sector-wide changes, and strategic risks impacting the College. Key highlights include:

- Leadership Stability: The Board noted the completion of senior leadership appointments, supporting the embedding of stability and accountability across the leadership team.
- Sector Developments: The Board acknowledged emerging risks linked to national pay bargaining, devolution of funding, and changes in government structures. These developments have implications for autonomy, financial planning, and curriculum delivery. CT informed Governors the College for North-East England group will be hosting a discussion in January 2026 regarding Devolution, with members from Scottish Colleges invited to participate.
- Ofsted Readiness: The Board supported preparations for early inspection under the revised Education Inspection Framework, with emphasis on Inclusion and learner outcomes.
- Stakeholder Engagement: The College continues to play a leading role in regional partnerships, including the Colleges for North-East England Group, NECA 'Home for Real Opportunity' Advisory Board, and the Durham Learning Alliance.

Questions/comments were invited.

DA referred to the appointment of CT as Chair of the Colleges for North-East England group, noting that this represents a significant external achievement for a small college; he expressed his view that the College are fortunate to have a fantastic Principal & CEO. The Board **agreed**.

SC referred to paragraph 3.1 of the Principal's report (Politics – Machinery of Government) noting that FE providers need clarity on how this shift may impact delivery contracts, funding flows and performance metrics. He sought CT's view on this matter. In response, CT highlighted that the change may be positive, with an increased emphasis on NEETs and worklessness driven by DWP. The Colleges for North East England Group had been working on a NEETs proposal, to provide some additional funding to support these learners to enrol at their local College. A meeting was due to take place in November with NECA and the DWP to advance this proposal. CT also highlighted that Susan Errington had been working with the Durham Learning Alliance locally, to address the NEET challenge with Local Authority colleagues.

CT went on to highlight some challenges regionally with the absence of an AoC Regional Director. The previous postholder had been absent from work for quite some time and had left his post some months ago. This had led to some capacity issues in managing regional stakeholders and in taking forward key issues on behalf of the North East Colleges. CT would be pursuing this with David Hughes (CEO) of AoC.

SJ referred to the Technical Excellence Colleges initiative and noted the appointment of [Redacted – commercially sensitive] to progress design work in support of the proposed new Construction Skills Academy. In response CT confirmed the Executive Team holds delegated authority to appoint architects and that progress updates will be reported through the Finance, Resources & Projects Committee. DA emphasised the importance of the College being well-positioned to attract capital funding when it becomes available, highlighting the need for a 'shovel ready' project. DA also noted that he and CT remain in close contact on such matters. CT added a 'Plan B' option is also being explored, with a more modest capital ask.

The Board **received** the Principal & CEO Report and:

- **Noted** the completion of senior leadership appointments and support the further embedding of stability and accountability across the leadership team.
- **Acknowledged** the emerging risks linked to sector-wide pay bargaining, devolution, and funding reform, ensuring continued Board oversight of strategic and financial planning.
- **Supported** preparations for early inspection under the new Ofsted EIF, recognising the emphasis on Inclusion and learner outcomes.

3.4. **Strategic Plan 2025-31**

Before this item was taken DA informed Governors that CT and his Team have worked hard to advance the development of the New Strategic Plan earlier than the original planned deadline of December 2025. DA invited CT to deliver his presentation to the Board, reflecting on five years of strategic progress.

The Board received and considered the report and supporting presentation delivered by CT outlining the proposed Strategic Plan for the period 2025-2031, along with the associated Implementation Plan (Appendix 3.4b). The report and supporting presentation outlined the College's refreshed Mission, Vision, and strategic priorities, which include Leadership, Governance and People; Curriculum; Learners; Partnerships; and Resources and Investment.

Governors noted that the Plan has been developed through a robust consultation process involving staff, learners, governors, employers, and partners, and was underpinned by comprehensive SWOT and PESTLE analyses. The Strategy aims to ensure educational excellence, financial sustainability, and responsiveness to national and regional developments, including the Post-16 Skills Strategy and the North-East Local Skills Improvement Plan. The Board further noted the inclusion of a phased implementation framework.

Questions/comments were invited.

GB expressed his view that the Plan was a good document, he asked CT to explain the external engagement undertaken as part of the development of the Strategic Plan. In response, CT reported that he had met with key partners and gathered feedback via several stakeholder surveys, and that NECA had reviewed the document and provided complimentary feedback.

GB asked whether the Delivery Plans would include measurable business outcomes. In response, CT explained the Strategic Plan will be underpinned by individual Strategic Delivery Plans, each developed collaboratively with Committee Chairs. These documents will include deliverables and KPIs, which Committees will determine and monitor going forward.

DA added that during the development process, Task Group meetings had taken place and he thanked all participants for their contributions.

No other comments/questions were raised.

The Board **approved** the Strategic Plan 2025-2031 and **endorsed** the Implementation Plan.

At 6.54 pm the Chair suggested a brief pause in the proceedings to allow Governors a short comfort break. The meeting resumed at 7pm and DA invited AM to present his report.

4. Curriculum Quality & Learning

4.1. Safeguarding

The Board received the Safeguarding Update report, which provided assurance over the College's safeguarding framework for the 2024-25 academic year and an overview of the current position for 2025-26. The report included updates to legislation and College policy, particularly in relation to the 2025 Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSiE) guidance and highlighted strengthened expectations around online safety and staff conduct.

The Board noted the formal endorsement of the updated Safeguarding Policy and Procedure at the College Safeguarding Committee on 24th September 2025, and the inclusion of enhanced measures for contractor and visitor oversight. The Board reviewed the Safeguarding Dashboard and Board Assurance Framework Action Plan for 2024-25, which evidenced strong compliance in staff and governor training, safer recruitment practices, and proactive incident management.

Early assurance for 2025-26 was also noted, including active monitoring systems, trained Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs), and progress against key priorities such as curriculum development and filtering system reviews. The Board acknowledged the strategic importance of safeguarding and its alignment with the College's mission, vision, and strategic priorities. Governors were reminded of their role in maintaining oversight and accountability, particularly in preparation for external scrutiny and legislative developments such as Martyn's Law.

AM invited comments/questions.

The Safeguarding Lead Governor (BF) informed governors that at the Safeguarding Committee meeting held on 24th September, the Committee undertook a detailed review of the Safeguarding Policy and Procedure. He reminded governors that Safeguarding is a collective responsibility of the entire Board. AM reported the external facilitator is not available to deliver the in-person Safeguarding Training at the December Board meeting, alternative arrangements are currently being explored to ensure the training is delivered in a timely manner. A discussion followed.

The Board **delegated authority** to the Safeguarding Lead Governor and the Head of Governance to work with the Assistant Principal – Curriculum to identify appropriate Safeguarding Training for governors.

The Board **received** the Safeguarding report and

- **Noted** the key legislative and Derwentside College policy and procedure updates from September 2025.
- **Noted** the Safeguarding Dashboard and Action Plan from 2024-25.
- **Reviewed** the Safeguarding Board Assurance Framework for 2025-26, the Safeguarding Dashboard 2025-26 and the Safeguarding Action Plan 2025-26.

4.2. **Enrolment Update (Education Programmes for Young People)**

The Board received the Enrolment Update detailing the enrolment position for Education Programmes for Young People provision as of 30th September 2025 and noted a decrease of 20 learners compared to the same point in 2024, with 367 learners enrolled in 2025-26. This reduction was attributed to static Year 11 demographics, increased retention efforts by feeder schools, and changes to curriculum offer aligned with strategic planning. Growth was noted in Construction and Engineering (up 9 learners), and in Beauty Therapy, Catering and Hospitality (up 8 learners), while Care, Education & Digital saw a decrease of 8 learners. Foundation Learning enrolment declined as anticipated during curriculum planning, enabling strategic resource reallocation.

The Board noted the external factors impacting recruitment, including competitive sixth-form incentives from local schools and lower than expected T-Level enrolments due to unmet entry requirements. The College response includes offering alternative programmes and strengthening outreach and engagement with feeder schools.

Governors noted that the Deputy Principal and Assistant Principal – Curriculum had met with their counterparts from the three other Durham Colleges to discuss enrolment trends. All Colleges reported similar patterns, including a reduction in Level 3 provision and an increased demand for lower-level courses, with some instances of growth in Foundation Learning.

AM invited comments/questions.

DA asked whether any deterioration was being observed in our relationship with feeder schools. In response, AM reported that the College continues to engage with learners through Open Evenings and school Parents' Evenings. SE confirmed that relationships with local school schools remain positive; however, noted that feeder schools are increasingly focussed on retaining their Year 11 learners and encouraging progression into their own sixth-form acknowledging that sixth-form provision may not be suitable for every learner.

AM also reported recruitment to the first cohort for Delta North provision is positive.

AH asked whether the slight dip in recruitment was within budget tolerance. In response, AM advised that he is awaiting a detailed report, which will include funding band information. CT reminded Governors that 16-19 provision is 'plan-led' and noted that there is significant unfunded funding growth this year, due to the lagged funding methodology and changes implemented relating to funding bands / community learning provision.

JE noted that in previous years, there has been an influx of enrolments during October. She added that, a number of learners with Educational Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) have not secured a place at either sixth-forms or other colleges.

No further comments were raised.

The Board:

- **Received** the Enrolment Update (Education Programmes for Young People) report and
- **Noted** the position of 16-18 recruitment in line with one of the College's key strategic objectives of continuing to grow provision across Education Programmes for Young People as outlined within the Annual Accountability Agreement for 2025-26.

5. Policy for Review

- **Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy**
  Following the two-week policy review window and the endorsement by the Safeguarding Committee, Governors **approved** the following documents:
  - Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy
  - Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Procedure.

6. Any Other Items of Urgent Business

- Board Meetings – The Corporation Chair reminded Governors of the Board **decision** that Board Meetings are exclusively in-person meetings. Governors **agreed,** noting that some Committee meetings may take place online.
- Joint Meeting of the Finance, Resources & Projects and the Audit & Risk Committee – To ensure quoracy, Governors of both Committees were reminded check their diaries and notify the Head of Governance ASAP if they are not able to attend this meeting.
- Governor Engagement – Governors were reminded, that if they haven't already done so, to notify the Head of Governance regarding the engagement opportunities they would like to attend.
- Governor Diversity Form – In response to the action identified in the External Board Review Report, the Search & Governance Committee have endorsed the Governor Diversity Form. This will be circulated by the Head of Governance to all Governors for completion.
- New Governor Badges – As part of the new Access Control measures, Governors will need to swipe their badge to enter the building. Communication will follow in due course via the Executive Bulletin.
- Mark Short – On behalf of the Board, DA expressed his thanks to Mark Short for his valuable contribution during his term of office and presented him with a small gift. In response, MS thanked DA for his stewardship as Chair and acknowledged the positive working relationship with the Executive Team. He noted that, as an employer, apprentices have enrolled at the College and confirmed this will continue. MS wished the College well for the future.

The meeting closed at 7.25pm.

Board Meetings

Actions Arising

Date: 14th October 2025

Minute Ref	Action	Responsible Officer	Status & Deadline
4.1	***Governor Safeguarding Training*** - The Board **delegated authority** to the Safeguarding Lead Governor and the Head of Governance to work with the Assistant Principal – Curriculum to identify appropriate Safeguarding Training for governors.	Head of Governance, AP – Curriculum and the Governor Safeguarding Lead – December 2025	**Complete**
6	***Joint Meeting of the Finance, Resources & Projects and the Audit & Risk Committee*** – To ensure quoracy, Governors of both Committees were reminded check their diaries and notify the Head of Governance if they are not able to attend this meeting.	Governors – 20th October 2025	**Complete**
6	***Governor Engagement*** – Governors were reminded, that if they haven't already done so, to notify the Head of Governance regarding the engagement opportunities they would like to attend	Governors – November 2025	**In progress** – Some Governors have attended the Engagement opportunities available

Date: 14th July 2025

Minute Ref	Action	Responsible Officer	Status & Deadline
3.4	***Delta North*** – Update reports will be presented to the Finance & Resources Committee during 2025-26 with escalation to the Board where appropriate.	AP – Curriculum (September 2025 and March 2026)	**In progress –** First report presented to F&R Committee 23/09/2025. Concluded by March 2026.

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 March 2026	**In progress** – This will be an item for endorsement by the Curriculum, Quality & Inclusion Committee in February 2026.
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	**Complete**