

GATESHEAD COLLEGE

STANDING ORDERS OF THE CORPORATION

1. **INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Nothing in this document is meant to override the provisions of the Instrument and Articles of Government in force from time to time which at all times are to be regarded as the primary sources of guidance.
- 1.2 Where there is any inconsistency between this document and the terms of reference for any committee, the terms of reference shall prevail.
- 1.3 These Standing Orders were last amended on 2 October 2020 in accordance with article 23 of the Articles of Government.
- 1.4 It is the responsibility of the Clerk to interpret the following documents and to advise the Corporation (or if appropriate the Chair) if it appears that the Corporation (or an individual Corporation member) is in breach of the regulations contained within:
 - ◆ Instrument and Articles of Government;
 - ◆ these Standing Orders for the conduct of meetings and related issues;
 - ◆ Code of Conduct for Corporation members; and
 - ◆ any other document relating to the governance of the Corporation
- 1.5 In all matters, one of the Vice Chairs (as agreed between themselves) has the authority to act for the Chair should the Chair be unavailable through absence or incapacity. If the Vice Chairs cannot agree who shall have such authority in any given situation, authority shall be determined by the Corporation.

2. **MEMBERSHIP**

2.1 **Composition of the Corporation**

The composition of the Corporation will be determined by the Corporation, having regard to the Instrument of Government and the advice of Governance Committee. On 9 February 2012 the Corporation re-determined the membership of the Corporation at 18 and the composition as:

Members appointed under the terms of clause 3(1)(a) of the

Instrument & Articles of Government	12
Staff Members	2
Student Members (to include the Sabbatical President of the Students' Union)	3
Principal	1

Corporation members previously appointed under the 'Business', 'Local Authority', 'Community' and 'Co-opted' categories will serve until their current term of appointment ends when any new or re-appointment will be made under the terms of clause 3(1)(a) 'necessary skills' criterion.

2.2 **Appointment and Term of Corporation Members**

Clause 5 of the Instrument of Government shall apply.

The Corporation has adopted the principle that all Corporation members will be required to undertake a Disclosure and Barring Service ("DBS") check. Confirmation of appointment as a Corporation member will therefore be subject to DBS clearance.

The Corporation has not made rules specifying the maximum number of terms a Corporation member may serve.

At the end of each year following their appointment (or as near as possible thereto) and at the end of each term of office for each Corporation member, the Chair, one of the Vice Chairs and the Principal shall review the performance and the contribution to the Corporation of the Corporation member and the outcome of that review shall be taken into consideration when the Corporation decides whether to reappoint the Corporation member (if the Corporation member is willing to be reappointed). Where the Chair reaches the end of their term, their performance and contribution to the Corporation shall be reviewed by the Vice Chairs (as agreed between themselves, or by the Corporation if they cannot agree) and the Principal and the outcome of that review shall be taken into consideration when the Corporation decides whether to reappoint the Chair (if the Chair is willing to be reappointed).

2.2.1 **Staff members**

For as long as there are two staff members, those staff members are to be nominated and elected in accordance with clause 3(4) of the Instrument of Government.

Staff members shall normally be appointed for a period of two years and shall cease to be Corporation members if their employment ceases. Retiring staff members shall be eligible to be re-elected to the Corporation at the end of their term provided they are still employed by the Corporation.

2.2.2 Student members

- ◆ One student member is to be nominated and elected by and from the 16-18 learners.
- ◆ One student member is to be nominated and elected by and from the 19+ Adult/HE learners.

Appointment of the student members will be on an annual basis and will in any event cease when a student member leaves the College, subject to clause 3(2) of the Instrument of Government.

A retiring student member shall be eligible to be re-elected as long as s/he meets the age criteria and continues to be a student at the College, or meets the criteria in clause 3(2) of the Instrument of Government.

The Sabbatical President of the Students' Union, appointed by the processes determined in the Students' Union Constitution, will also serve as a student member. The term of their appointment as a student member will be coterminous with the term of appointment as Sabbatical President.

2.2.3 Corporation members appointed under clause 3(1)(a)

The Corporation will seek to have membership with a wide range of relevant skills and expertise and to have an appropriate balance in terms of gender, age and ethnicity.

The term of office for Corporation members who are appointed or re-appointed under the terms of clause 3(1)(a) ('necessary skills' criterion) shall be for a fixed term not exceeding four years, determined by the Corporation on the advice of the Governance Committee.

2.3 **Eligibility**

The appointment or continued membership of a Corporation member shall be subject to the restrictions imposed by clauses 8 and 10 of the Instrument of Government and to DBS clearance.

2.4 **Attendance**

Clause 10(2)(b) of the Instrument of Government shall apply.

Corporation members have been appointed to serve on the Corporation in the expectation that they will be able to participate fully in the work of the Corporation and the life of the College. It is appreciated, of course, that all Corporation members have other demands on their time and thus there may be occasions when it is not possible to attend a meeting.

The Corporation has set a target of 70% attendance both for individual Corporation members and overall. The Clerk shall keep a record of attendance.

If any Corporation member has failed to attend for three consecutive meetings of the Corporation, this shall be brought to the attention of the Chair who shall discuss the non-attendance with the Corporation member concerned. The reasons for the non-attendance will be reported to the Corporation.

2.5 **Expenses**

Corporation members may be reimbursed for expenses properly incurred in attendance at meetings and in the performance of other duties. These expenses are claimed under procedures issued by the Finance Department from time to time and approved by the Corporation. Guidance notes and claim forms are available from the Clerk. A summary of expenses paid will be reported annually to the Corporation.

Otherwise, Corporation members may only receive payment if authorised by Clause 18 of the Instrument of Government.

3. **CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR**

Clause 6 of the Instrument of Government shall apply.

3.1 **Appointment of the Chair and Vice Chairs**

In order for the Corporation members to consider the appointment of the Chair or one or more of the Vice Chairs, the relevant appointments must be included as an item on the agenda of the relevant Corporation meeting.

Another Corporation member nominated by the Corporation, who is not a candidate for the post(s) in question, shall normally take the chair when the issue of appointments is being considered.

The Principal, staff members and student members are not eligible for appointment as Chair or Vice Chair, but may take part in appointment decisions.

Each nomination for the post of Chair and each nomination for a post of Vice Chair must be supported by a proposer and seconder, neither of whom shall be a nominee for the relevant post. Each appointment shall be by a resolution of the Corporation made through normal voting procedures.

When appointing the Chair and/or one or more Vice Chairs, the Corporation shall specify their terms of office.

Appointment as Chair or Vice Chair shall automatically expire on termination of membership of the Corporation for whatever reason.

3.2 **Removal of Chair or Vice Chair**

In order for the Corporation Members to consider the removal of the Chair or one or more of the Vice Chairs, the relevant removal(s) must be included as a specific item on the agenda of the relevant Corporation

meeting. Any such proposal shall be by a resolution of the Corporation made through normal voting procedures.

4. **CONDUCT OF MEETINGS OF THE CORPORATION**

Clauses 12 to 16 of the Instrument of Government shall apply.

4.1 **Quorum**

The rules on the quorum apply not only at the start of a meeting, but also at any point during the meeting when the numbers present change as a result of Corporation members arriving late, leaving early or declaring an interest. The Clerk shall keep a note of attendance, including any changes, which take place during the meeting. If a meeting becomes inquorate the Clerk shall immediately inform the Chair.

An inquorate meeting shall be terminated by the Chair, however it is possible to continue discussions on an informal basis. It is then open to the Chair to call a special meeting to undertake the remaining business, or to defer consideration to the next ordinary meeting.

To avoid difficulties arising from inquorate meetings, Corporation members are expected to notify the Clerk well in advance of a meeting if they are unable to be present.

4.2 **Calling of Meetings**

Where a special meeting of the Corporation is called at the request in writing of any five Corporation members, such a request must be made to the Clerk.

A calendar of meetings of the Corporation and of all committees is agreed by the Corporation and published at the commencement of each academic year.

4.3 **Agendas**

The agenda for meetings of the Corporation shall be forwarded as a paper copy or in electronic format as an attachment to an email sent on behalf of the Clerk or via the use of a secure 'Dropbox' folder or by other electronic means.

Agendas shall clearly indicate the items to be discussed at the meeting and the reports shall clearly indicate the purpose and, where appropriate the financial implications of the recommendations. All papers to be considered by the Corporation shall normally be forwarded to Corporation members with the agenda, and in any event, no later than 48 hours before the meeting is to take place, unless there are exceptional circumstances or reasons of confidentiality make it necessary to circulate papers later than that time.

No papers shall be tabled for consideration at the meeting itself which have not been circulated in advance otherwise than with the consent of

the Chair and subject to such papers being circulated to Corporation members who are not in attendance.

Any Corporation member may request that an item be included on the agenda of a Corporation meeting; items should normally be submitted to the Clerk at least 10 working days before the date of the meeting. The Clerk shall notify the Chair and the Principal of any items proposed through this route before the agenda is finalised. The Chair shall make the final decision as to the inclusion or otherwise of any item on the agenda.

4.4 **Order of Business**

Business shall be dealt with in the order in which it is set out in the agenda, unless the meeting decides otherwise.

Any matters which Corporation members may wish to raise under the 'Other Business' item on the agenda must be raised at the beginning of the meeting and receive the approval of the Chair for consideration. Such items would normally be restricted to urgent matters, or matters of great and immediate importance.

4.5 **Declaration of Personal /Other Interest**

The expectations of the Corporation with regard to the declaration of interests by Corporation members are set out in the Gateshead College Code of Conduct for Corporation Members which is available from the Clerk.

4.6 **Debate**

All Corporation members are entitled to speak on any item on the agenda, subject to restrictions imposed by a declaration of interest or withdrawal or exclusion identified in the Instrument of Government.

All parties will recognise that Corporation members must take a personal view on each matter received by the Corporation and to contribute to debates accordingly.

Once a matter has been considered by the Corporation each and every Corporation member is expected to be bound by the collective decision of the Corporation whatever the personal view of a Corporation member on the issue.

Corporation members may decide to limit individual contributions to the debate to a specified time span, in which case such restriction shall apply equally to all Corporation members save the Chair of the meeting.

Subject to the above, debate will be subject to overall control of the Chair of the meeting, whose decision shall be final.

4.7 **Voting**

It is often the case that all Corporation members present are clearly unanimous in their view on the matter under consideration and in these

circumstances it may not be necessary for a decision to be taken by formal vote. The Chair will normally ask the meeting, at the conclusion of a discussion, for its agreement to the proposal in question. There would only be a call for a vote either if there was a clear expression of dissent or if it were a matter of particular significance (for example, approval of the annual budget or accounts).

Should a Corporation member request a vote on a particular issue, this must be agreed by the meeting. If a formal vote is taken, the number voting for, against or abstaining shall be recorded in the minutes.

The normal way of voting is by a show of hands. It is for the meeting to decide the circumstances in which a secret ballot shall be held or in which the names of those voting for or against a proposal shall be recorded.

Whether or not a recorded vote has taken place, and even if a decision has been made by secret ballot, a dissenting Corporation member shall have the right to have their disagreement recorded in the minutes, at their request.

4.8 **Disorderly Conduct**

If, at any meeting of the Corporation, any Corporation member, in the opinion of the Chair, misconducts themselves by persistently disregarding the Chair's ruling or by behaving irregularly, improperly or offensively or by wilfully obstructing the business of the Corporation, the Chair shall notify the meeting accordingly. Following notification by the Chair, the Chair or any Corporation member may move that the Corporation member named be not further heard or that the Corporation member named leave the meeting. The motion, if seconded, shall be put and determined without discussion.

4.9 **Reconsideration of Resolutions**

A Resolution cannot be overturned or varied, for instance, simply as part of discussions of matters arising from previous minutes. Not only must the subject matter appear as a substantive item on the agenda, but also the fact that there is a proposal to vary or rescind a previous decision must be indicated.

4.10 **Designation of Open and Closed Items**

Clause 17 of the Instrument of Government shall apply.

In the spirit of openness the majority of papers presented to the Corporation will be designated 'open' and be publicly available.

There may be occasions when some papers, or parts of papers, contain information which, by reason of its nature, the Corporation decides should be dealt with on a confidential basis. It is the responsibility of the Clerk to advise the Chair whether an item is properly dealt with as either open or closed, save that the Chair may request that a particular matter be treated as confidential. In appropriate circumstances, papers or parts of papers

will be published as 'closed – in confidence' and circulation will be limited to Corporation members, the Clerk and the senior post-holders.

A separate closed minute shall be taken in respect of any discussion of such papers and the circulation of closed minutes shall be restricted in the same way as the papers to which they refer.

It shall be the responsibility of the Clerk to arrange for the distribution and safekeeping of any items discussed in closed session.

The Corporation shall determine at the end of discussion on an item whether any report considered and/or the minute of discussion (or part thereof) is confidential. Criteria for defining an item as confidential include:

- ◆ sensitive commercial or business information which would be disadvantageous to the College to release;
- ◆ negotiations with trade unions;
- ◆ legal advice; and
- ◆ other sensitive or confidential matters.

Where practicable, the Corporation shall specify a point in the future when the information may be released into the public domain. Wherever possible the Clerk will annotate the document to indicate that the closure is 'until such time as.....' thereby providing an indication of the expected time of publication of the information. Normally this shall not be more than twelve months after the date of the meeting at which the information was considered, with the exception of legal advice which will not be disclosed.

Where it is not possible to make such a specification, the Corporation shall comply with clause 17(4) of the Instrument of Government.

The Clerk will keep a record of those papers and minutes deemed to be confidential which will be reviewed on a regular basis by the Principal and the Chair, for both Corporation meetings and committee meetings (except in relation to confidential papers and minutes to which either individual was not originally a party), who will make a recommendation to the Corporation whether to release the information into the public domain. A list of those items deemed to be no longer confidential will be considered at each meeting of the Corporation so that their release into the public domain can be approved.

Corporation members shall not disclose confidential information to those not entitled to receive such information.

4.11 **Public Access to Agendas and Minutes**

Copies of the approved minutes of the Corporation are to be made available on the Governance pages of the College website.

Copies of the agenda, minutes and papers of each meeting of the Corporation are to be made available during normal business hours in the Library at the Baltic Campus. The only exceptions to this are in the case of minutes and papers deemed by the Corporation to be confidential. Agendas shall be available for inspection as soon as the Corporation members have received them, and before the meeting. Minutes shall be available in draft form after approval by the Chair. Non-confidential papers considered at a meeting shall be made available after the meeting.

4.12 **Suspension of Standing Orders**

Save in relation to any standing order prescribed by the Instrument and Articles of Government, standing orders may be suspended as regards any business at a meeting. Any motion to suspend standing orders shall specify the standing order or standing orders to be suspended.

5. **ACCESS TO CORPORATION MEETINGS**

Clause 16 of the Instrument of Government shall apply.

Corporation members and the Clerk are entitled to attend all meetings of the Corporation subject to clauses 14(5) to 14(10) of the Instrument of Government.

Where the Chair of the Audit Committee is not a Corporation member the Chair of the Audit Committee may be permitted to attend all meetings of the Corporation as an observer at the discretion of the Chair of Governors. It is anticipated that members of staff may be invited to attend part or all of a meeting to assist the Corporation in the consideration of the issues before it.

Any member of the public may request to attend any meeting of the Corporation as an observer, any such attendance to be at the discretion of the Chair, providing that their conduct does not interfere with the operation of the meeting. The presence of such persons, and the point in the meeting at which they left, shall be recorded in the minutes. Other than at the specific invitation of the Corporation, speaking rights shall be confined to Corporation members, the Clerk, senior post-holders and properly co-opted members. Only Corporation members shall have the right to vote.

The Chair shall have the power to ask any observer to withdraw at any point in the meeting.

6. **ACTION BY THE CHAIR**

It may be necessary from time to time for the Chair (or in the Chair's absence either of the Vice Chairs, as agreed between themselves or by the Corporation if agreement cannot be reached), to act on behalf of the Corporation between meetings. The circumstances under which the Chair or a Vice Chair may act will include:

- ◆ matters already considered by the Corporation where a resolution has been passed that the Chair should act on a specific issue on behalf of the Corporation before the next meeting;

- ◆ routine action which would not have merited an agenda item and discussion at a Corporation meeting, for example routine documents;
- ◆ responding to approaches by external organisations; and
- ◆ agreeing to detailed aspects of implementation of matters already agreed by the Corporation.

Action taken by the Chair or a Vice Chair between meetings will be reported to the next meeting of the Corporation.

7. **COMMITTEES OF THE CORPORATION**

7.1 The Corporation has a number of Committees including:

- ◆ People and Remuneration;
- ◆ Audit;
- ◆ Curriculum and Quality Assurance;
- ◆ Finance and General Purposes; and
- ◆ Governance.

The relevant Terms of Reference for each established Committee shall apply to that Committee and the way it conducts itself.

The Corporation has in place arrangements for a range of panels, committees and appeals committees required as part of the College's Disciplinary Procedures and Grievance Procedures for senior post-holders which were approved by the Corporation in April 2017.

Reference is made in Paragraph 10 of these Standing Orders to the arrangements for a Special Committee of the Corporation.

The Corporation also has in place arrangements for an Appeals Committee to hear appeals against dismissal by staff other than senior post-holders and for an Appeals Committee to hear appeals against redundancy.

7.2 **Public access to agendas and minutes**

Copies of the agenda, minutes and papers of each Committee meeting are to be made available during normal business hours in the Library at the Baltic Campus. The only exceptions to this are in the case of minutes and papers deemed by the Corporation to be confidential. Agendas shall be available for inspection as soon as the Committee Members have received them, and before the Committee meeting. Minutes shall be available in draft form after approval by the Chair of the Committee. Non-confidential papers considered at a meeting shall be made available after the meeting.

7.3 **Chairs of Committees**

Except where the terms of reference of a Committee specify who shall be Chair of that Committee or who shall have the right to appoint the Chair of that Committee, the appointment of Chairs of Committees shall be made by the Corporation upon the advice of the Governance Committee.

Any proposal to remove the Chair of a Committee from office must be the subject of a specific agenda item at a meeting of the Corporation and shall be voted on by the corporation under the normal voting procedure.

7.4 **External Committee members**

Subject to article 10(1) of the Articles of Government, from time to time the Corporation may wish to include external committee members in the membership of a Committee for a defined period for a specific purpose. On such occasions, the Corporation will seek the advice of the Governance Committee.

8. **PROPRIETY OF CORPORATION ACTION**

Should the Principal in their role as Accounting Officer, or the Clerk, consider that the Corporation or its Committees are acting inappropriately or beyond their powers then:

- ◆ the Principal or the Clerk will advise the meeting of their view of the matter, and this view shall be provided in writing for so long as this is a requirement of the Skills Funding Agency Financial Memorandum or any other document from time to time;
- ◆ the meeting will attempt to resolve the possible difficulty through discussion;
- ◆ if a resolution satisfactory to all parties cannot be obtained, the meeting shall defer any decisions on the issue to allow the Principal or the Clerk to seek advice from an appropriate external source (e.g. College Auditors, AoC, College legal advisers, DBIS, ESFA). Where the difficulty has arisen in a Committee meeting, the matter will be referred to the next meeting of the Corporation;
- ◆ the response and advice of the external body will be reported to the next meeting of the Corporation, when a decision on the matter will be taken. An urgent meeting may be called by the Chair for this purpose, where appropriate;
- ◆ if, upon consideration of the issue and the advice given, the Principal or the Clerk, remains of the opinion that the Corporation is acting inappropriately or beyond its powers, then the Principal or the Clerk is authorised to inform the ESFA in writing, with a copy to the Chair and Principal or Clerk as appropriate; and
- ◆ in accordance with the principles set out in the College's Public Interest Disclosure Procedure any action taken in good faith by the Principal or the Clerk will not be grounds for disciplinary action.

9. **APPOINTMENT OF SENIOR POST-HOLDERS**

The executive team for the time being includes:

- ◆ the Principal,
- ◆ the Deputy Principal: Operations/Finance Director
- ◆ the Deputy Principal: Curriculum and Quality and
- ◆ the Clerk

and/or such other posts as the Corporation shall from time to time decide.

10. **SPECIAL COMMITTEE**

Senior post-holders may be dismissed following consideration of the case for dismissal by a Special Committee of the Corporation.

The Special Committee shall consist of at least 3 Corporation members. The Chair, the Vice-Chairs, the Principal and the staff and student members shall not be eligible for membership of the Special Committee. The Corporation has agreed rules specifying procedures for the conduct of the Special Committee, as set out in the Disciplinary Procedures for senior post-holders, approved by the Corporation in April 2017, a copy of which is available from the Clerk.

11. **FREEDOM OF SPEECH**

The Corporation upholds the principle of the freedom of speech and affirms its commitment to the same.

The Corporation shall take such steps as are reasonably practicable to ensure that freedom of speech within the law is secured for the College's students and employees and for visiting speakers. In particular, as far as reasonably practicable, use of the College's premises shall not be denied to any individual or body of persons on grounds connected with the beliefs or views of that individual or any member of that body, or with the policy and objectives of that body. When upholding that principle, the Corporation shall also ensure it has due regard to its other legal obligations.

The Corporation shall issue a code of practice, in line with the Education (No 2) Act 1986 setting out the procedures to be followed in organising meetings and other activities to be held on College premises (or which are supported, endorsed, funded or organised by the College at external venues) and the conduct accordingly required, and may also issue further statements as deemed necessary or appropriate to information or guidance on this topic.

12. **APPLICATION OF THE SEAL**

Any use of the Seal will be reported to the next meeting of the Corporation.

13. **AMENDMENTS TO THE STANDING ORDERS**

The Clerk will keep the provisions of this document under review and will suggest to Governance Committee improvements/amendments to meet changing circumstances.

Corporation members may wish to suggest to the Clerk improvements/amendments to this document. Points raised will be the subject of a report to the next meeting of Governance Committee so that a recommendation can be made to the Corporation.

Any amendments to the text of this document will require the approval of the Corporation unless they are covered directly or indirectly by statute, in which case such changes will be enacted without further delay and reported to the next meeting of the Corporation.

14. **COMPLAINTS**

A complaint against the Corporation or a Corporation member shall be addressed to the Clerk who shall deal with the matter as appropriate. The response to such a complaint will include details of the arrangements for pursuing the matter with an independent body. A complaint against the Clerk shall be forwarded to the Chair. A copy of the complaints procedure is attached to this Code.

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE – Corporation and Governance

1 Aims and Objectives

Definitions

In this Complaints Procedure references to “We” are to the College and references to “You” are to an individual bringing or appealing a complaint under this Complaints Procedure.

Aims and Objectives

1.1 We aim to operate in accordance with the high standards of governance to which the College is subject and ensure compliance by the members of the Corporation with their legal duties and responsibilities. However, we recognise that sometimes problems may be identified in the way the College operates.

1.2 This complaints procedure provides a mechanism for complaints received from individuals and organisations relating to such matters to be considered and dealt with fairly and impartially.

1.3 This procedure is intended to resolve issues in a timely and proportionate manner. However, we recognise that situations may arise where following the stages and timeframes set out in this procedure would not be appropriate or practicable in the circumstances. Where the College determines this to be the case, we therefore reserve the right, acting reasonably, to deal with a complaint outside of this procedure. Where we decide it is necessary in the circumstances to deal with a complaint outside of this procedure, we will nevertheless be mindful of the complainant's need for a fair hearing.

2 Scope

2.1 A complaint against the Corporation, a Corporation member (including the Principal if the complaint relates to their role as a Corporation member) or the Clerk may be made by any individual or organisation, whether made by an internal or external individuals/organisation, in relation to their or their dealings with the College.

2.2 Complaints made under the Corporation Complaints Procedure must relate to:

- the performance by the Corporation, a Corporation member or the Clerk of the functions respectively allocated to them under the Articles of Government of the College; and/or
- the exercise by the Corporation of its powers;
- any other alleged breach or non-observance of the duties of the Corporation, Corporation members or the Clerk under the Instrument or Articles of Government of the College, its Code of Conduct for Corporation members or the ESFA Financial Memorandum; and/or
- the behaviour of any Corporation member.

2.3 The following complaints will normally fall outside the scope of this Complaints Procedure:

- Complaints concerning the College's provision of teaching, learning support and other services.
- Complaints received from staff members and other third party workers relating to a grievance to the extent that the complaint does not fall within one of the categories set out in paragraph 2.2. This would normally be dealt with under the College's relevant complaints procedures.
- Public interest disclosures, dealt with by the College's public interest disclosure procedure for whistleblowing.

2.4 However, the Corporation can in its discretion also consider a complaint that the Management of the College has not satisfactorily investigated a complaint under another complaints procedure.

2.5 We will not consider complaints which are vexatious, unreasonable or malicious in nature and may take disciplinary (if applicable) and/or other action against individuals who make such complaints if it is appropriate to do so.

2.6 Where an individual makes more than one complaint against the College under this procedure, the Clerk will have the discretion to appoint the same Investigating Officer to consider all such complaints and deal with them concurrently under this procedure (where a complaint is made against the Clerk, the Chair shall have such discretion).

2.7 A complaint brought under this procedure will not be considered if it is a complaint relating to a business decision taken by the Corporation or any member of College staff which it or s/he was validly entitled to make and acted properly in making. It is not the purpose of this procedure to provide individuals with a power to review or substitute decisions validly made by the Corporation or its staff in the usual operation of the business of the College.

2.8 Anonymous complaints

2.8.1 We do not encourage anonymous complaints and will not normally consider complaints made anonymously. Proper investigation of a complaint by the College or may be impossible when we are unable to obtain further information from the complainant. In particular it makes it difficult to establish that the complaint is credible. Therefore when an anonymous complaint is made, and there is insufficient evidence or information for the College to properly investigate it, we will conclude that the complaint does not warrant further investigation.

2.8.2 Where an anonymous complaint does contain sufficient information to enable the College to investigate it and the College concludes that in the circumstances it is appropriate to do so, the College will consider the complaint in writing, in accordance with the written procedure set out below following the timings set out below to as great a degree as possible, save that no written response will be provided to the complainant unless the complainant chooses to waive their anonymity allowing them

to be provided with a written response. Unless the subject-matter of the anonymous complaint is deemed by the College to be confidential, the decision reached in any anonymous complaints considered under this Procedure will be available from the Clerk of the Corporation on request.

2.8.3 No appeal against the decision will be possible unless the complainant chooses to waive their right to anonymity and make an appeal in accordance with this procedure.

2.8.4 A record of the decision reached in any anonymous complaints considered under this Procedure will be held by the Clerk of the Corporation. Any anonymous complaint investigated under this Procedure will be treated confidentially, unless the disclosure of the subject matter is deemed necessary by the College.

2.9 Where in this Complaints Procedure reference is made to providing information in writing, alternative formats (eg large print, Braille, audio form or other languages) may be permitted where we consider it reasonable to do so.

3 Procedure

3.1 Written procedure

3.1.1 All complaints should be made in writing and addressed to the following (save where the complaint is in relation to the Clerk in which case it should be addressed to the Chair):

The Clerk
Gateshead College
Baltic Campus
Quarryfield Road
Gateshead
NE8 3BE

3.1.2 You will be expected to state clearly the nature of and grounds for the complaint and if appropriate provide copies of any related documentation. You should also state the remedy you are seeking. It is not possible to seek the disciplining of a member staff or the removal of a member or the Clerk since these are decisions which can only be made by the Principal of the College and the Corporation respectively in accordance with the Instrument and Articles of Government of the College.

3.1.3 The Clerk (or Chair where the complaint is in relation to the Clerk) will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 7 working days and refer the complaint to the Chair (or Vice Chair if the complaint involves the Chair), who shall appoint a panel of two board members to review the complaint in accordance with this procedure, provided that they have not been involved in the matters subject to the complaint and are more senior than any individuals to which the complaint involves.

3.1.4 Such person(s) shall:

- consider the complaint and, if necessary in order to determine disputed issues of fact, interview you and those subject of the complaint.* They may

refer issues to the Corporation's auditors (external and/or internal) or other independent advisers as they consider appropriate.

- produce a written report of their findings in relation to the complaint, usually within 28 days of the complaint being referred to them.
- following completion of the report, provide you with a written response to your complaint, as detailed at paragraph 3.1.5 below.
- provide the report to the Corporation for consideration at its next scheduled meeting. Where the complaint relates to one or more specified Corporation members or the Clerk, those persons shall withdraw and take no part in the discussion. Where matters are sensitive or confidential, the subject matter of the complaint may be withheld and the identity of the complainant and/or the person against whom the complaint is made may be kept confidential.

3.1.5 The written response shall summarise whether the panel find the complaint substantiated in whole or part, confirmation of the decision reached in relation to the complaint, with a summary of reasons and confirmation of what (if any) remedy should be granted to you. The response shall also set out the way in which you may appeal this decision if you are unhappy with the outcome reached.

* All interviewees will be entitled to be accompanied by a 'friend' who may not be a professional legal adviser. Although this complaints procedure cannot in itself result in sanctions against a member of staff, one possible outcome is that college management might initiate disciplinary procedures under which staff would be entitled to be accompanied. The arrangements for interviewees to be accompanied will therefore follow the principles of the College's established disciplinary procedures.

3.2 Appeal

3.2.1 If you are unhappy with the decision reached under the written procedure, you may appeal within 10 working days of receipt of the written response, providing clear written evidence of why you do not think that the matter has been dealt with adequately under the written procedure.

3.2.2 The appeal should be directed to the Clerk (or Chair where the complaint is in relation to the Clerk), who shall acknowledge your appeal within 7 working days of receipt of your appeal request. The Clerk shall forward the appeal request to the Chair (or Vice Chair, if the complaint relates to the Chair), who shall establish a panel of three Corporation members including the Chair or Vice Chair (as applicable). This panel will consider the complaint and the decision reached under the written procedure, along with the reasons provided for the appeal request. They may request additional information from you to consider the appeal if they determine that this is necessary in the circumstances.

3.2.3 The panel will take steps to review the appeal in such manner as it thinks fit in the circumstances. It will (via the Clerk) provide you with a written response as soon as possible following the conclusion of their investigation. The written response will confirm the decision of the panel in relation to the complaint, with summary reasons for its decision.

3.2.4 The response will also include details of any statutory options you have pursuing the matter with any relevant external body or regulator.

3.2.5 The panel will provide an update to the Corporation as necessary at its next scheduled meeting following the outcome of the appeal. Where the complaint relates to one or more specified Corporation members or the Clerk, those persons shall withdraw and take no part in the discussion. Where matters are sensitive or confidential, the subject matter of the complaint may be withheld and the identity of the complainant and/or the person against whom the complaint is made may be kept confidential.

3.3 Further Determination

Provided that the Corporation has followed this procedure and has taken such steps as are reasonable in the circumstances to identify evidence that is relevant to the complaint, there will be no right for the complainant to seek to have the complaint reinvestigated in any circumstances. Likewise, any subsequent dealings or correspondence with any third party relating to the complaint shall not create grounds for the complaint to be reconsidered, provided that this procedure has been properly followed (unless the College is legally required to reconsider any matter relating to this complaint by law or by any regulatory body acting within its powers).

3.4 Timescales

The College will provide an estimation of the timescales involved at each stage of the process. The College will try to the best of its ability to adhere to the timescales set out in this Procedure. However, in exceptional circumstances resolving a complaint under this procedure may take longer than envisaged. Where this is the case, we will endeavour to update you in a timely manner of any delays and the reason(s) for such delays, if appropriate.

3.5 Monitoring & Review

3.5.1 All complaints received and considered under this procedure, including the nature of the complaint (but not confidential details) and data relating to the College's Equality Policy, will be notified to the Director of Student Services by the Clerk. The Clerk will log the complaints on a confidential database and produce a monthly report, summarising a log of all complaints received under this complaints procedure. This report will be provided to the Principal and Chair for consideration and review, save that where a complaint received under this or any other procedure relates to the Principal or the Chair, details of such complaints will be provided to the Vice Chair.

3.5.2 On an annual basis, a summary of the total number of complaints received by the College will be presented to the Board of the Corporation and any trends or matters of concern will be considered by the Board as appropriate. In addition, concerns regarding equality will be directed to and reviewed by the Equality Steering Group as necessary.

3.5.3 All records and data relating to complaints kept by the College or the Clerk in the complaints log and elsewhere will be kept and stored in accordance with applicable data protection principles, and will be retained for at least three years following the conclusion or resolution of the complaint.

3.5.4 This procedure will be reviewed by the Clerk or an individual appointed by the Clerk to carry out the review. The procedure will be reviewed to assess whether it remains appropriate in the circumstances, in light of the nature of complaints received and the procedure's ability to resolve them in a satisfactory manner. The review will identify any areas where the procedure no longer deals adequately with complaints received and the Clerk will consider and propose any amendments to the procedure as required.

3.6 Information and Data

3.6.1 Whilst any complaint is being considered under this Complaints Procedure, you must not publish, discuss, or otherwise refer to the complaint or its subject matter on any form of media, including social media, or encourage or facilitate any third party to do so. Any contravention of this restriction may impact on the ability of the Corporation to investigate the matter independently and in accordance with this Procedure. This may result in the individual considering the complaint to conclude that the Corporation is no longer able to investigate the complaint in an independent way. Such disclosures of information may also be regarded by the Corporation as an example of vexatious or malicious practice.

3.6.2 Any personal data held by the College or the Corporation during the course of or as a result of any activity under this Complaints Procedure will be held in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998, or any legislation replacing this Act that may subsequently come into force in England and Wales.