

Agenda No: 04



MEETING OF THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS – MAIN MINUTES

Wednesday 2 July 2025 – 4.00pm to 6.00pm

Governors	Type	Initials	Attendance	Apologies
Michael Williams	Chair / Independent	MWi	X	
David Alexander	Principal / CEO	DA	X	
Martin Hedley	Vice Chair / Independent	MH	X	
Aneela Ali	Vice Chair / Independent	AA	X^	
David Brind	Independent	DB		X
Lisa Crichton-Jones	Independent	LCJ	X^*	
Carol Davenport	Independent	CD	X	
Martin Gannon	Independent	MG		X
Darren Curry	Independent	DCu		X
Eamon Toland	Independent	ET	X*	
Maria Craig	Independent	MC	X*	
Peter Francis	Independent	PF	X	
Katy Malia	Staff Governor (Teaching)	KM	X	
Dan Wallace	Staff Governor (Support)	DW	X	
Dan Green	Student Governor (16-18)	DG	X	
Milly Wall	Student Governor (19+)	MWa		X
Clerk				
Nicola Taylor	Director of Governance & Compliance	NT	X	
Attendees				
Chris Toon	Deputy Principal: Curriculum and Quality	CT	X	
Sarah Judson	Deputy Principal: Finance and Resources	SJ	X	
Ivan Jepson	Director of Business Development and Innovation	IJ	X	
Nadine Hudspeth	Director of Brand and Learner Experience	NH	X	
Vicki Casey	Director of People & OD	VC	X	
Deni Chambers	Director of Curriculum & Skills	DCh	X	
Dr Kate Webb	External – The KWP Ltd	KW	X^*	
Leanne Aldred	Student Engagement Manager	LA	X^	

*Attended via Teams / ^Attended for part of the meeting.

3441 1. Chair's welcome, apologies, conflicts of interest

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed the attendees. LA and four Course Representatives had joined the meeting for Item 2. Introductions took place.

Apologies had been received from DB, DC, MG and MWa. **The Board agreed that the meeting was quorate.**

There were no additional conflicts of interests noted. Members were reminded to declare any conflicts which arose during the meeting. It was agreed members would remain in the meeting when their appointment to committees / roles would be discussed.

3442 2. Learner Voice

Four course representatives attended the meeting to share their experiences as learners over the past academic year. They provided the following feedback:

- Serving as a course representative significantly boosted their confidence.
- They had opportunities to participate in additional College events, such as with Loud Speaker (external provider) and the College's Community Conversation, both of which were described as positive and enriching experiences.
- Learners observed tangible changes and actions taken in response to the feedback they and their peers had provided.
- Course representatives played a key role in bridging communication between learners and College leaders / governors.
- Feedback highlighted varied learner perspectives and areas for improvement across the different campuses.

The learners noted that being a Course Representative was a great opportunity which they were grateful for.

The Board queried the following:

- How could the College improve the Course Representative model for new learners joining – the learners fed back that the process to join as a course representative was clear and supportive. Course representatives were positively supported by the Learner Engagement Manager. The opportunity to be a course representative was advertised well. Course representatives felt listened to and an important part of the college. A support network had been built across course representatives however this was more campus specific and therefore this could be widened / utilised further.
- How the role had improved learner skills – the learners fed back that being a course representative improved skills such as confidence, communication and public speaking. The learners suggested that before being a course representative they wouldn't have felt confident enough to meet with the Board / speak in a boardroom setting.

AA joined the meeting.

- Learners' understanding of the role of the Board – the learners fed back that the role of the Board might not be understood across learners. The Chair noted the Board's role in seeking assurance of staff and learner voice to triangulate reporting from senior leaders and the continued focus on learners being at the heart of decision making.

The learners **asked** what the College were planning on doing differently / more of in 2025/2026 and it was confirmed that there was planned to be a focus on seeking learner voice across all provision types (such as apprentices, HE learners) and there was an aspiration to further evolve the course representative framework, co-creating solutions and outcomes with learners.

The Board **thanked** the learners for their feedback and contributions.

The Board noted the report.

LA and the course representatives left the meeting.

3443 3. Minutes of previous meetings

- A) The Board **reviewed** the main minutes of the meeting held on 2 April 2025 and **agreed** that they were a true and accurate record of the meeting.
- B) The Board **reviewed** the confidential minutes of the meeting held on 2 April 2025 and **agreed** that they were a true and accurate record of the meeting.
- C) The Board **reviewed** the notes of the Board Spring Strategy Day on 3 April 2025 and **agreed** that they were a true and accurate record.

The minutes were approved.

3444 4. Matters Arising and Action Log

The action log was presented; there were four actions marked as ongoing, and all other actions had been completed or closed.

The Board noted the report.

3445 5. Chair's Report

The Chair provided a verbal update highlighting the exceptional work of the College and how this was recognised. The Chair noted the number of key visitors attending the College in recent and coming weeks, including the Secretary of State for Education, and noted the work of all staff to support these. The Chair reiterated the importance of the College continuing to play a leading role in influencing the sector and region.

The Board noted the report.

3446 6. Principal's Report

6.1. Main Report

DA presented the report, providing updates from across the College and the wider landscape. DA specifically highlighted the following:

- An outcome letter had been received following the recent DfE Annual Strategic Conversation, specifically noting the strength of governance and overall performance of the College.
- The 2025 College Pay Award had been accepted by trade unions and implemented.
- Anticipated recruitment for 2025/2026 estimated an approx. 500 additional 16-18 learners. Staffing resource had been considered in light of this with staff recruitment undertaken at an early stage. Classroom resource had also been considered and the College were looking to lease additional office space to enable the creation of additional

classrooms at the Baltic campus. The lease of additional space required Board approval as per the College's Financial Regulations. The cost of this had been included within the proposed budget for 2025/2026. IJ was leading the project of office / classroom moves.

The Board approved the leasing of additional office space to allow the creation of additional classrooms to accommodate learner number growth.

The Board queried the source of additional learners. CT explained that new learners were anticipated across all curriculum areas and levels. However, since colleges across the north east were reporting over-recruitment and sixth forms did not appear to be under-recruiting, it was suggested that the demographic data might be inaccurate and that the 16-18 demographic was a key driver.

LCJ joined the meeting.

- There had been a significant increase in examinations, with the increase in 16-19 full time learner numbers being a key factor. There had been 16,000 exam candidates during the academic year, which was a 14% increase on the previous year. Over 2,000 candidates had an exam access arrangement, which was an increase of 34% on the previous year.
- The first meeting of the new Gateshead Strategic Partnership (GSP) group had taken place in June. The partnership would be coordinated and supported by Gateshead Council.
- The report also included a range of success stories from relating to staff, learners and community engagement.

DA provided a verbal update of some headline figures of the learner End of Year survey. The Board noted the positivity and strength of the results.

The Board fed back on the report, noting it was insightful and contained a helpful level of detail.

The report was noted.

6.2. Board KPI Update Report

DA presented the report for information, providing the latest update against the Board agreed KPIs and targets for 2024/2025.

The report was noted.

3447 7. Board Strategy Day Follow-up

KW joined the meeting.

MW and DA presented the report, noting that the College strategy had been in place since July 2022 and the Board had agreed there should be a review of this, to ensure its currency, which was ongoing

Poverty

In terms of the College's aim to tackle poverty, this had been a key area of focus throughout the academic year, and a research project had been started with Rocket Science, including 12 peer researchers which were College learners. Thanks were noted to PF and CD for their contributions regarding the research proposal and review of submissions who would continue to be involved as the work progressed.

Employment Edge for Everyone

Following the April Board Strategy Day, a document had been created setting out the College's ethos of Employment Edge, and how this was for all learners; Employment Edge for Everyone. This took themes from the presentation of a Trauma Informed approach and aligned these to the College's current values and ethos. ET had expressed an interest in being involved in this at a Board level, and the Board **approved** the appointment of ET as a Link Governor for this role.

The Board queried and discussed the following:

- The implications of Employment Edge for Everyone on policies, culture and approach – it was agreed that all implications would need to be considered as this was taken forward.
- The need for a further Board discussion, to consider how the Employment Edge for Everyone culture would be at Board level and to understand how the Board would oversee this. It was noted that a Board values session was included as part of the Board Development Plan, and this would take place in the new academic year. This would help ensure the culture and values needed to support this were embedded at Board level, with the ability to demonstrate values-based decision making.

Strategy Review

KW provided an overview of feedback received from partners as part of one-to-one conversations, setting out the following:

- Conversations had been held with 22 partners to date, with some discussions ongoing.
- These discussions built on engagement that began during the initial development of the College's current strategy agreed in July 2022 and reflected the College's continued commitment to incorporating external perspectives into its strategic refresh.
- Feedback was positive. Partners consistently highlighted the College's proactive and inclusive approach and commended the leadership team's openness and responsiveness.
- Conversations began by exploring partners' priorities and how the College could support them, ensuring alignment from the outset.

The following themes emerged from the conversations:

1. Regional Leadership & Influence

- There was a strong appetite for the College to further strengthen its external presence and leadership role across the region.
- Stakeholders wanted to see deeper engagement through platforms such as Colleges North East, NECA, and the Gateshead Strategic Partnership, with their being presence and profile locally, regionally and nationally.

2. Evolving the Employment Edge Brand

- The College was encouraged to refresh and build upon its "Employment Edge" brand, with a continued focus on inclusivity and tackling poverty.
- There was support for evolving the brand to reflect emerging skills needs, particularly in AI, digital, and real-world readiness.

3. Innovation as a Strategic Priority

- Whilst the College was seen as innovative, partners felt this was not sufficiently reflected in the current strategy.
- There was a call to embed innovation more explicitly, especially in curriculum design, teaching and learning, and partnership engagement.

The Board **thanked** KW for her work in this area.

KW left the meeting.

The Board were asked to consider the following questions:

- Reflecting on what you've heard and read, what are the key points to take forward as part of the strategic refresh?
- Reflecting on feedback provided, is there anything above and beyond which should be considered?

The Board split into groups to discuss and fed back the following:

- The language of “strategic review” and what this meant in terms of the College’s future ambition and transformation.
- There was a strong appetite for an ambitious approach to the strategy, with a clear articulation of the College’s future direction.
- In progressing the strategy, the College should consider how current levels of 16-18 learner growth might continue and other possible areas where growth might be a strategic imperative and the structural or operational changes required to support it.
- Governors encouraged the College to take a proactive role in shaping and responding to the Government’s industrial strategy and NECA regional priorities. There was an opportunity to challenge and be challenged by partners. The College should consider how to align more closely with partner priorities and maximise the value of those relationships (including greater opportunities for learners where possible). Governors encouraged deeper collaboration with employers to improve the job application process and ensure learners are well-prepared.
- There was a call to move beyond individual partnerships towards more collective, regional collaboration (particularly with SMEs in the North East) to maximise shared impact.
- The strategy should consider what ambitions mean for teaching and learning - how pedagogy, curriculum, and delivery will evolve and what changes might be needed.
- Innovation needs to be better understood. Governors asked how and where innovation would be applied and how it would be kept under review. The College is expected to lead with innovative thinking. Governors asked how this culture could be embedded and how learners could be supported to carry that innovation into the workplace.
- The College should continue to evolve the Employment Edge brand to reflect future skills needs, including AI and digital readiness, while maintaining a strong foundation in core skills such as English and Maths. While embracing AI and digital futures, the strategy must also reinforce the importance of foundational skills and the ability to use AI as a tool for learning and work.

- There was a hope to see the continued emergence of creative approaches to work placements and employer engagement, ensuring there are strong models for connecting learners with partners. The strategy should place greater emphasis on real-world experience and supporting learners at all levels to access meaningful, supported experiences, linking with Employment Edge for Everyone.
- The College's presence at school and community level, particularly among current and parents of potential future learners, should be enhanced to build awareness and aspiration.
- The College should continue to build on its commitment to tackling poverty, with a bolder and more visible stance.

The Board reflected on its role in representing learners. There was a desire for a more outward-facing governance role, advocating for learners and building relationships.

Ahead of a finalised strategy being presented to Board in November 2025, it was agreed progress of this would be reported to the Chair, Vice Chairs and Committee Chairs over the summer, with a potential additional meeting being convened of the Board in the new academic year.

Action: Chair, Vice Chair and Committee Chair meeting to be set up to monitor progress of strategic refresh (August / September 2025).

The report was noted.

3448 8. Finance Report

8.1 College Estate Strategy

SJ presented the report and highlighted the following:

- Due to timing, the Estate Strategy had been circulated to FGP in advance of the Board meeting however it was not possible to seek recommendation given this. FGP members were therefore asked to provide their recommendation at the Board meeting ahead of the Board considering for approval.
- A lot of work had been undertaken ahead of SJ joining, with development work and drafts being shared with the Finance & General Purposes Committee.
- The document set out that the College had good quality facilities, some of which were underutilised and potentially in a less favourable location, as opposed to all being on one site.
- A foreword from the Chair and CEO / Principal was to be added.
- KPIs would be developed once baseline data was available.

Members of the Finance & General Purposes Committee provided their recommendation of the Estate Strategy. It was **agreed** to follow up with co-opted FGP governors outside of the meeting.

Action: NT to follow up with co-opted governors to seek their recommendation for approval (July 2025).

The Board **discussed** and **queried** the following:

- The strategic level of the strategy and ensuring themes were clear.
- Links with digitisation across the College and the Digital Strategy.

The Board **approved** the College Estate Strategy, subject to the incorporation of Board feedback and that this additional information be added.

Action: SJ / Executive Team to finalise Strategy to incorporate Board feedback and agree launch / publication of the College Estate Strategy (September 2025).

The Strategy was approved.

8.2 Finance Report – April 2025 Management Accounts

SJ presented the report, noting that the forecast outturn for 2024/2025 was a breakeven position. The May 2025 management accounts were in development, and the forecast outturn was not expected to change.

The Board noted the report.

8.3 Procurement Tenders

SJ presented the report which included a tender recommendation for approval of the College's Training and Education Delivery Partner. Only one bid had been received. This had been discussed and recommended by the Finance and General Purposes Committee. The Board **queried** the risk of this; however it was confirmed that the tender evaluation was quality focussed, and the proposed contract was for annual renewal over five years, and therefore low risk.

SJ noted that a further tender relating to Skills Bootcamp was in progress and this would be circulated for Finance and General Purposes Committee recommendation and Board approval electronically once complete.

Action: SJ to circulate upcoming tender for FGP recommendation / Board approval (July 2025).

The Board **approved** the award of the Training and Education Delivery Partner contract as set out within the tender recommendation and **noted** that a future tender may be circulated for Board approval via electronic means in July 2025.

The report was approved.

8.4 Subcontracting Policy and Plan 2025/2026

IJ presented the report and noted the subcontracting plan had been created on the assumption of approval of the prior tender item, which had now been formally approved by the Board.

The Board **queried** the gendering of the wording in the paper associated with football provision and asked for this to be considered / made consistent.

Action: IJ to review the wording in papers / publications going forward regarding the gendering of football provision and ensure consistency (September 2025).

The Board **discussed** the evaluation and monitoring of subcontracting provision, ensuring high standards.

The Board **approved** the Subcontracting Policy and Plan for 2025/2026.

Action: IJ to arrange publication of the Subcontracting Policy for 2025/2026 on the College website (July 2025).

The report was approved.

8.5 Budget 2025/26 and Financial Outline for 2026/27

SJ presented the report and highlighted the following:

- The budget had been presented and recommended through the Finance & General Purposes Committee.
- The budget set out a deficit position, supported by required levels of cashflow, with the aim to support learner growth within a lagged funding model. The DfE financial health score of the proposed budget position was Good. The College wished to support growth to allow it to meet the skills needs within the region and prevent not in employment or training (NEET) within the local area.
- The proposed budget was suggested to be prudent, with there being the possibility of further funding to follow, such as 16-18 full time in-year growth funding from the DfE.
- The proposed budget assumed no in-year 16-18 full time growth funding for taking additional learners over and above the College's funding allocation however, if in-year growth funding was announced and implemented, this would improve the College's budget position.
- An updated budget, setting out the bridge between the proposed budget and any changes, would be presented to the Finance & General Purposes Committee in September 2025 once further funding / income opportunities had crystallised.

The Board discussed and queried the following:

The Board **noted caution** around the monitoring and messaging of a deficit position amongst staff and external partners. The College were clear in their aim of supporting learner growth in exceptional circumstances with the hope to improve the financial position based on the lagged funding model

The Board **queried** any considerations of Ofsted of a deficit position, however it was suggested that Ofsted was focussed on teaching and quality, rather than finance and the proposed budget saw the College retain a DfE financial health rating of 'Good', in line with the approved College Finance Strategy. The College would continue to liaise with the DfE regarding the deficit position and had discussed this previously. Given the financial health was due to be graded as Good there were therefore no concerns regarding financial viability.

The Board **approved** the Budget for 2025/2026 and the financial forecast for 2026/2027, noting the continued elements of unknown funding and uncertainty.

Action: SJ to arrange submission of the Board approved Budget 2025/2026 and Financial Forecast 2026/2027 to the DfE (July 2025).

The report was approved.

3449 9. Curriculum and Quality

9.1 Accountability Statement 2025/2026

CT presented the report and noted that due to timing, the Accountability Statement had been circulated to CQS in advance of the Board meeting however it was not possible to seek recommendation. CQS members were asked to provide their recommendation at this Board meeting ahead of the Board considering for approval.

Members of the Curriculum and Quality Standards Committee provided their recommendation of the Accountability Statement 2025/2026.

The Board approved the Accountability Statement 2025/2026.

Action: CT to arrange submission of the Accountability Statement 2025/2026 to the DfE (July 2025).

CT noted that the UK Government Industrial Strategy had recently been published, and that a new Employer Representative body would be appointed to lead delivery of a combined North East region Local Skills Improvement Plan from 2026.

The development of the Accountability Statement for 2026/2027 would begin earlier in 2025/2026 and an additional Curriculum and Quality Standards Committee was proposed for April 2026 to create earlier space and time for discussion.

The Statement was approved.

9.2 Year to Date Performance and QIP 2024/25

CT presented the reports, noting that there was a strong level of performance across the organisation and comparative information had been included where possible. The DfE dashboard was available to access.

Apprenticeship achievement rates were increasing, with the College using different methodologies to track this. This was hoped to be above the Government target of 67%.

The Board **noted** the College's success and achievement of performance and quality.

The report was noted.

3450 10. Internal and External Audit Plans 2025/2026

SJ presented the report and highlighted the following:

- Due to timing, the External Audit Plan had been circulated to Audit Committee in advance of the Board meeting however it was not possible to seek recommendation. Audit Committee members were therefore asked to provide their recommendation at the Board meeting ahead of the Board considering for approval.

Members of the Audit Committee provided their recommendation of the External Audit Plan for 2025/2026.

The Board approved the External Audit Plan for 2025/2026.

- The Internal Audit plan was in development and would be circulated for Audit Committee recommendation and Board approval electronically ahead of the end of July 2025.

Action: SJ to circulate Internal Audit plan to Audit Committee for recommendation ahead of seeking Board approval (July 2025).

The remainder of the report was noted.

3451 11. Corporation Matters

NT presented the report, noting a number of documents had been recommended for Board approval via Board committees.

The Board approved the following:

- **Committee Terms of Reference 2025/2026**
- **Board Terms of Reference**
- **Board Standing Orders**
- **Board Scheme of Delegation**

- Board Instrument and Articles of Government
- Meeting Dates for 2025/2026
- The appointment of PF to the People Committee

Action: NT to process appointment of PF to the People Committee (July 2025).

Action: NT to arrange publication of updated Governance documentation (July 2025).

The remainder of the report was noted.

3452 12. Committee Chairs Update

NT presented the report, noting that a number of policies had been recommended for Board approval via Board committees.

The Board **suggested** the addition of developing a learner plan, alongside developing a workforce plan.

Action: VC to amend EDIB Policy ahead of publication (July 2025).

The Board **approved** the following policies:

- Preventing Sexual Harassment Policy
- Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Policy
- Conflicts of Interest Policy
- Reserves Policy
- Financial Regulations
- Tuition Fees 2025/2026 Policy

Action: ET to arrange publication / notification of updated Board approved policies (July 2025).

The remainder of the report was noted.

3453 13. Review of Strategic Risk Register

SJ presented the report, noting that a review of the Risk Register would take place over the summer period, ensuring digestibility and readability.

The Chair of the Audit Committee (MC) noted the support from the Audit Committee on this piece of work and confirmed that Audit Committee members had been asked to feedback to consider as part of the review.

The report was noted.

3454 14. Meeting Evaluation

The Chair confirmed the meeting evaluation would be circulated post-meeting.

3455 15. Any Other Business

The Board **noted their thanks** to DG and MWa for their time, contributions and efforts as the Student Governors for 2025/2026, wishing them the best for the future.

3456 16. Date of next meeting

The next meeting was scheduled for Wednesday 5 November 2025 at 4.00pm.