



MEETING OF THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS – MAIN MINUTES

Wednesday 5 November 2025 – 4.00pm to 6.00pm

Governors	Type	Initials	Attendance	Apologies
Michael Williams	Chair / Independent	MW	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	
Eamonn Toland	Independent	ET	X	
Maria Craig	Independent	MC	X	
Peter Francis	Independent	PF	X	
Ryan Gibson	Independent	RG	X	
Katy Malia	Staff Governor (Teaching)	KM	X	
Dan Wallace	Staff Governor (Support)	DW	X	
Dylan Smith	Student Governor (16-18)	DS		X
Anthony Gibbon	Student Governor (19+)	AG	X	
Clerk				
Debbie Corcoran	Acting Director of Governance and Compliance	DCo	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 and OD	VC	X	
Deni Chambers	Director of Curriculum and Skills	DCh	X	
Sophie Higginson	Student at the College and Peer Researcher	SH	X^	

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

3457 1. Chair's welcome, apologies and conflicts of interest

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed attendees. Introductions took place. Particular welcome was shared with RG and AG who were attending their first Corporation meeting since appointment, and DC who was acting as Interim Director of Governance. Members welcomed SH who was attending the meeting for item 6. 'Learner Voice – Poverty Outcomes Research', with the running order of agenda items changed to allow for an earlier input.

Apologies had been received from CD, MG, DS and CT. **The Board agreed that the meeting was quorate.**

Attendees considered conflicts of interest. No conflicts were noted, other than today's agenda including consideration of a recommendation from Remuneration Committee on a senior postholder (SPH) annual pay award (item 12 'Committee Chairs Update'). Independent Board members **agreed** for all members, SPH and attendees to remain in the meeting for this but not participate in decision-making. Members were reminded to declare any conflicts if they arose during the meeting.

3458 6. Learner Voice – initial findings of poverty research project

Note – agenda items taken out of order.

NH presented the report, which shared an update on a key piece of research commissioned by the College from Rocket Science to gain insight into the impact of financial difficulties as a barrier to student's learning at the College. **The Board thanked** PF and CD who had acted as lead governors for the work and contributed their expertise and oversight at every stage. Particular welcome and thanks were shared with SH for joining the meeting for this item, to directly offer learner voice on challenges experienced as a learner, along with insight into the project itself given she is one of 10 learners recruited and supported to be Peer Researchers through the work.

The Board **noted and considered** the project overview, update and emerging findings - supported by a presentation tabled in the meeting, covering key areas such as:

- The research is at draft outcome stage, and will return to a future Board meeting for full review – at this stage it already offers valuable insight to inform conversations and considerations of the Board at tomorrow's Autumn Strategy Day where the College's Strategic Plan will be reviewed
- The completed research will feed into Gateshead Council's Anti-Poverty Strategy, the ongoing work of North East Combined Authority (NECA) around child poverty and also support the College to develop actions to better support learners
- Given local context, it was recognised that understanding key challenges in this area is a key priority for the Board and College and is also reflected in the importance placed on Further Education (FE) College's approach to disadvantage and inclusion in the new Ofsted inspection framework, and in priorities set out in the new Skills White Paper
- The methodology used in the research project is rich, varied and values co-creation. It has 4 elements: i. peer research led by 10 College students who were trained by Rocket Science as Peer Researchers and then facilitated sessions to co-design research tools and conduct co-analysis ii. a College wide-survey of students iii. learner interviews led by the Peer Researchers and supported by Rocket Science and iv. multivariate analysis from the College's Course Completion Survey and enrolment data
- The research had achieved a comprehensive and deep reach: 97 learners were engaged in peer reviews; 863 learners completed the survey and 26,452 learner records were analysed. Insight will be further enhanced by analysis of nationally published Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) data when available

Key emerging findings from the research were **reviewed and discussed** by the Board. Likely considerations from the research were drawn out for reflection in the review of the College's Strategic Plan and to inform development of forward actions. These included evidence and insight through the research on:

- The characteristics of the types of learners affected by financial difficulties – with factors such as home postcode, curriculum areas, gender and ethnicity being important
- The barriers learners face, with 27% of learners at the College saying their education is affected by hunger every day; 30% of learners being affected by transport challenges and missing or having difficulties getting to College every day or once a week; 3% of learners having faced homelessness and 7% having unstable home lives, affecting their ability to study; 18% being disadvantaged due to a lack of access to a laptop or tablet for assignments; challenges were also reported in being able to pay for supplies/clothing/placements and nearly half (48%) of learners were noted to have a part-time job and c10% having care commitments
- The impacts of financial insecurity are recognised as being multi-factorial. Learners at the College who are struggling financially have lower attendance than those who do not. Members noted that while learners who reported that financial difficulties have a negative impact on their studies are less likely to aim to progress to further training, they are more likely to report promotions or increased responsibility – suggesting that Gateshead College is supporting people to move into more financially secure positions
- Learners had shared their views on the support available from the College - with many learners not aware of support or sharing they are uncomfortable asking for help due to stigma around poverty and financial difficulties (with analysis provided by curriculum area and level of learning)

SH shared her own perspective of challenges, and the significant benefit she had gained through participating in the project as a Peer Researcher in terms of increasing her skills and confidence.

The Board agreed a number of key strategic-level considerations emerging from the research to be considered moving forward:

- a) *Strategic fit* – how can poverty reduction be embedded across College Strategy?
- b) *Policy influence* – what role can the College play in shaping policy using learner-led insights?

- c) *Collaborative opportunities* – what partnerships and governance structures are needed?
- d) *Resource planning* – what investment is needed for food, technology and financial literacy?
- e) *Culture and stigma* – how can the Board foster a culture where learners feel safe and supported to access help without judgement?

Collectively, **the Board recognised and expressed** through support and challenge in the meeting that:

- A dynamic approach is needed in this priority area to shape understanding, ongoing response and effective and impactful actions in the short and medium term
- Co-creation of solutions (with students and across partners) is essential – in the project itself, implementation and also the evaluation of impact
- The Board and College have the opportunity to use insight through the research to support there being a clear understanding of 'inclusion' both internally and across organisational boundaries
- Inter-sectionality of learners and experiences/characteristics is an important factor, and **it was agreed** that this will be drawn out in the finalised report
- Access to existing support and removal of barriers to access this is key, with an overview given in the meeting of the current promotion and process to access Bursary support available to learners, and assurance given of learner feedback being considered in the development of future processes and approaches
- **The Board asked to understand** at the next stage of the project if there are any actions recommended around the culture and understanding of all staff to remove any barriers and engage staff in solutions, through consideration for example of forward approaches in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and implementation of the College's 'Education with Employment Edge' ethos
- Given emerging insight, **the Board asked** that equity and adequacy of student access to IT equipment be considered in the finalisation of the report, and welcomed the analysis underway in relation to learner access and take-up to free breakfasts and availability of food at each of the College's campus

NH and SH were both thanked by the Board for the interesting and insightful report and presentation. The Board had greatly valued direct student voice to enrich the discussion and looked forward to considering implications and opportunities in their review of the College's Strategic Plan.

SH left the meeting.

Action: Finalisation of the Poverty Research Report to consider Board feedback as above (NH)

The Board noted the report.

3459 2. Minutes of the previous Corporation meeting

The Board **reviewed and approved** for accuracy, the draft minutes from the 2nd July 2025 Corporation meeting.

The minutes were approved.

3460 3. Matters arising/Action Log

The Board **reviewed and noted** the matters arising log, presented by MW – noting that all actions had been completed or closed.

The Board **formally noted** that the following have been approved since the previous meeting:

- a) Appointment of Sarah Judson, Deputy Principal Finance and Resources, to NEAC – approved in August 2025
- b) Appointment of Ryan Gibson, Independent Governor – approved in August 2025
- c) Award of the Skills Bootcamp Delivery Tender – approved in August 2025
- d) 2025/26 Internal Audit Plan – approved in September 2025
- e) Appointment of Debbie Corcoran to provide temporary support to the Corporation in an acting Director of Governance capacity in Nicola Taylor's absence – approved in October 2025
- f) Appointment of Anthony Gibbon (19+) and Dylan Smith (16-18) as Student Governors – approved in October 2025

The Board noted the report.

3461 4. Chair's Report

The Chair provided a verbal update which covered the following key points:

- Publication of the Skills White Paper, noting the Principal's valuable briefing on this matter provided in his report today. Tomorrow's Strategy Day is a valuable opportunity for the Board and senior team to consider the significant implications and opportunities for the College. The independent Curriculum Assessment Review report (CAR) has also been published this morning, with significant implications, and **will be considered** by Curriculum and Standards Committee at its next meeting
- The review of the structure of the senior leadership team at the College has been completed with support by Rockborn consultants, and recommendations will be considered by an additional meeting of the Remuneration Committee next week, and a recommendation then shared with the Board

Action: Curriculum and Standards Committee to consider and reflect on implications and opportunities through the CAR report (CT and DC)

The Board noted the report.

3462 5. Principal's Report

DA introduced headlines from the report shared, which provided key updates for the Board from across the College and also the wider landscape. DA highlighted key aspects which were considered with the Board:

- Agenda and supporting information have been shared with the Board for tomorrow's Strategy Day, with an engaging approach in place to benefit from Board insight and expertise
- All 3 unions recognised by the College have accepted a 2025/26 annual pay offer, noting that the offer is in line with AoC's recommendation (a 4% annual increase to salary in 2025/26 or payment of £300, whichever is the higher). The award will be backdated to 1 August 2025 and paid in November 2025. Thanks were shared with CT, SJ and VC who had led local negotiations
- Developments in the policy, skills and curriculum landscapes were set out and detailed e.g. the new Ofsted inspection framework, noting there is training planned for governors; publication and key messages in the new Post-16 Skills White Paper; appointment of the North East Automotive Alliance (NEAA) as the Employer Representative Body for the region's new Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP); the first meeting of the new Gateshead Strategic Partnership (GSP) group – hosted by the College - and publication of Gateshead Council's ambitious plans which were launched at the 'Gateshead – State of the Nation' event on 10th October (with the launch video shared in the meeting)
- An update was provided on the North East Combined Authority (NECA) and the Regional Skills Strategy. Members welcomed that the College has been invited by NECA to work with them and broader partners to develop a 'Place Based Budgeting Pilot', and that following the launch of an Artificial Intelligence (AI) growth zone in the North East, that the College will lead be the sector on this work. DA will sit on the working group overseeing this, which is led by the Mayor and Secretary of State for Education
- Recognition of the strength of the College's 2024/25 achievement results, and thanks shared for the whole cross-College approach and leadership of CT and DC
- Plans for the College's 80th Birthday Celebrations, with the Board thanked for engaging in the celebrations

MW thanked DA for the detailed update and welcomed that DA's leadership had been recognised in his being invited to Chair the Gateshead Strategic Partnership. MW recognised the excellent progress being made by the College as an individual organisation and collectively through work with key partners.

The report was noted.

3463 7. 2024/25 Strategic Progress Update (including Key Performance Indicator KPI update)

DC summarised the report, which provided an update on delivery of the College's Strategic Plan. The following 3 key aspects were set out and **reviewed with the Board** in the meeting:

- An update on 2024/25 year-end was shared, demonstrating the good progress made in delivering the College's Strategic Plan and its 4 strategic priorities (Learners, People, Partnerships and Sustainability) delivered through 11 supporting strategies
- Performance against key performance indicators (KPIs) at both Board or Committee/supporting strategy level was set out – with KPIs being monitored regularly at Board and Committee level
- Areas of strategic priority for 2025/26 were outlined and form the basis of the College's Accountability Agreement and curriculum and professional services self-assessment findings

The Board noted that each of its Committees has agreed strategic priorities within their remit for 2025/26. Committees have also reviewed and propose Board level KPIs for 2025/26, with 11 Board KPIs to remain into 2025/26, one KPI to be brought forward for Sustainability (which will be considered in the November Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting) and one further KPI to be added for learners (agreed by Finance and General Purposes Committee, as a key indicator for the Brand and Marketing Strategy). 13 KPIs will therefore be reported to each Board meeting in 2025/26 to support Board to maintain oversight of key strategic outcomes.

Members welcomed the report and the assurance within it. **The Board agreed** for MC, lead governor for strategic planning, to work with DC on the framework for 2025/26 to consider the Board's request that the number of KPIs be reduced and simplified to support focus, if this reduction does not increase risk or dilute impact or assurance. The importance of the KPI framework enabling in-year updates against an agreed framework while also remaining agile was recognised by all.

Action: Ongoing development of the strategic progress and KPI framework to consider the possibility of reducing the number of KPIs and simplifying the approach (DC and MC)

The report was noted.

3464 8. Strategic Risk Register

SJ summarised the report, which shared the latest version of the Risk Register (as at September 2025) and updated on development of the new Risk Register. A horizon scan had been included for review, which captures potential risks based in the current landscape in FE and also beyond. In relation to the project to review the Risk Register, SJ updated that over summer there has been consultation with governors and executive team, as well as consideration of good practice. The driver for the new approach is to take into account governors feedback to support a way forward that offers digestibility, quality and clarity, along with visibility in respects of how actions are tracked and presented.

Members **shared their view** that the new framework is a positive improvement and looked forward to it being considered by Audit Committee at their next meeting so that a recommendation on adoption can then return to the Board.

The report was noted.

3465 9. Committee Chairs Update

MW introduced the report and invited Chairs to summarise. DC outlined that a number of policies, documents and a proposal had been recommended for approval via Committees.

The Board approved the following:

- **Safeguarding Children and Child Protection Policy**
- **Safeguarding Adults at Risk Policy**
- **Prevent Policy**
- **Information, Technology and Communications Policy**
- **Sustainability Strategy (Additional wording)**
- **Health and Safety Policy**
- **Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement**
- **Redundancy Policy**
- **Recruitment and Selection Policy**

9.1 Curriculum and Quality Standards Committee

PF updated, and **the Board formally noted** that the Committee had approved/formally noted the following relating to statutory areas of oversight/delegated responsibility from the Board (with detail provided in the pack):

- a) Safeguarding, Welfare and Wellbeing Annual Report 2025/26
- b) Curriculum Strategy Annual Report
- c) Quality Strategy Annual Report

9.1.1 2024/25 Performance Report

DC presented the report, setting out the strong achievement position for 2024/25. The Board noted that the comprehensive report had been reviewed by Curriculum and Quality Standards Committee in detail, and that comparative benchmark information had been provided where available.

Retention, achievement and attendance were all reported against and **considered by the Board**. DC updated that the draft Self-Assessment Report (SAR) is under development and will be reviewed at the next Curriculum and Quality Standards Committee meeting, with a proposed SA grade then shared with the Board.

The Board reflected that:

- Thanks and recognition should be shared with leaders and College staff for the results and impact achieved
- Given the College's high standards, ambitions rightly remain high – there is clarity and focus on any areas where performance is below an ambitious Board KPI target, even when the College is above national average
- While recognising significant success, Board remains assured that the College and senior teams focus is on areas for attention such as maths and English, functional skills and inclusion as a key cross-cutting theme

The report was noted.

9.1.2 Enrolment Update

DC updated the Board on the enrolment position in 2025/26:

- 16-18 learner recruitment is above the same point in the prior year – positioning the College well for growth funding, with R04 projections shared
- T levels – recruitment shows a year-on-year increase in the number of learners
- Adult education – full-time enrolment is above plan and part-time enrolment tracking close to forecast
- Apprenticeships – improved end point assessment (EPA) processes and higher achievement rates mean progressing learner numbers are below this point in the previous year, and starts are below target, with a continued focus in place to address this given rolling recruitment
- Higher Education (HE) – provision has been realigned with Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs), and starts are higher than at this point last year

The Board recognised the achievement of growth in 16-18 learner numbers and the positive impact on income. **The Board queried** the position on T levels and HE, given enrolment is currently below KPI ambition and noted that forward strategy and focus will be considered in the review of the Strategic Plan and oversight in place in-year through KPIs. **The Board** noted that the Curriculum and Quality Standards Committee have oversight of curriculum planning and strategy and **asked for consideration to be given** to support the Board's oversight through the year in an efficient way, alongside their considering financial efficiency.

DC was thanked for the detailed report and analysis within.

Action: Consideration to be given to in-year approach to oversight at Board and Committee level on curriculum planning and strategy (CT, DC and Nicola Taylor)

The report was noted.

9.2 Finance and General Purposes (F&GP) Committee

MH set out recommendations from the Committee to the Board, and **the Board approved** an **amendment to the Sustainability Strategy**.

9.2.1 2024/25 Financial Outturn

SJ summarised the report and shared that a letter from DfE received this morning has confirmed that following CFFR submission the College's financial health grade has been confirmed as 'good'. The letter and supporting Governor Finance Dashboard **will be shared** with the Board for information and assurance, along with a copy of the FE Commissioners recent correspondence on benchmarks for the sector.

The summary position which was **noted and reviewed by the Board** was:

- 2024/25 operating surplus is £111k compared to the budget surplus of £257k
- All Barclays bank loan covenants are met subject to validation by the bank early in 2026
- Closing year-end cash balance (including restricted cash) of £5.3081m represents 50 cash days in hand - excluding restricted cash the year-end cash balance is £3.237m representing 31 cash days

The Board discussed the College's cash days position compared to the FE Commissioner (FEC) benchmark of 40 days and College Finance Strategy target of 31 days. **It was agreed** for the view of the College's external auditors (Validera) to be sought on the College's cash days position, and approach to recording un/restricted cash in the target/calculation.

SJ assured that the external audit of the 2024/25 financial statements is progressing well and to the agreed timeline.

Action: Following to be shared with the Board: DfE letter on financial health, supporting Governor Finance Dashboard and copy of the FE Commissioners recent correspondence on benchmarks for the sector (SJ and DCo)

The report was noted.

9.2.2 Update on 2025/26 Budget

SJ summarised the report which updated on the following being included in the 2025/26 budget:

- a) 16-18 increase in funding rates (£160m announcement)
- b) Wave 6 Digital Bootcamps
- c) In-year growth funding
- d) Employers National Insurance Contribution (NIC)
- e) Student recruitment
- f) Pay award

The report was noted.

9.3 Governance Committee and 9.4 People Committee

The report was noted.

9.5 Remuneration Committee

LCJ shared the Committees recommendation, and following review, **the Board approved** that the **2025/26 annual pay award for all staff agreed earlier in the meeting also be applied to senior postholders (SPH)**.

The Board noted that Committee minutes had been included in the report for information and assurance, with the 13 August 2025 Audit Committee minutes to be approved at the Committee's next meeting on 11 November.

The report was noted.

3466 10. Corporation Matters

DC summarised the report produced by Nicola Taylor, and **the Board approved:**

- a) the recruitment of an independent Governor with a focus on skills and/or experience in poverty, working with young people and/or barriers to learning**
 - b) and the Board and Committee Workplan for 2025/26**
- and also **formally noted** application of the College Seal to 2 documents

Members received an update on the ETF Governance Development Programme and were encouraged to access the provision to support their continuing professional development.

The report was noted.

3467 11. Any Other Business

There were no items of any other business. MW thanked everyone for their attendance and participation, and the meeting was closed.