

Agenda No: 04



MEETING OF THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS – MINUTES

Wednesday 1 April 2026 – 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	
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	
Suzanne Jobson	Independent	SJ	X	
Katy Malia	Staff Governor (Teaching)	KM	X	
Rachel Leech	Staff Governor (Support)	RL	X	
Dylan Smith	Student Governor (16-18)	DS		X
Anthony Gibbon	Student Governor (19+)	AG		X
Clerk				
Nicola Taylor-Mosley	Director of Governance and Compliance	NTM	X	
Attendees				
Chris Toon	Deputy Principal: Curriculum and Quality	CT	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	VCa	X	
Vicky Cross	Interim Director of Curriculum and Skills	VCr	X	
David Keetley	Financial Controller	DK	X [^]	
Learner and Staff Group	Learners	Group	X [^]	

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

3490 1. Chair’s welcome, apologies, conflicts of interest

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed the attendees.

The learners and staff joined the meeting. Introductions took place.

Apologies had been received from AA, AG and DS. **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.

Item 6 taken at this point

3491 2. Minutes of previous meetings

Taken after Item 6.

A) The Board **reviewed** the main minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 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 10 December 2025 and **agreed** that they were a true and accurate record.

The minutes were approved.

3492 3. Matters Arising and Action Log

The action log was presented; a number of actions remained ongoing with progress updated included, all other actions had been completed or closed.

The Board noted the report.

4. Chair’s Report

3493 4.1 Main Report

The Chair referenced the presentation from learners and noted the positive work taking place across the College.

The report was noted.

3494 4.2 Improved Reporting

The Chair provided a presentation which set out the proposed changes in reporting and what governors should expect to see differently going forward, with a specific ask around clarity of focus and succinct strategic reporting.

The Chair asked the Board to feedback on the reports provided as part of this meeting. The Board fed back the following:

- The report front sheets provided a more digestible report, with the ability to unpick different sections linked to risk and finance / staffing implications.
- Reporting was clearer.
- Further improvements could include:
 - Tick box elements on the front sheet to save author’s time

- Implementation of a traffic light system (or similar) to highlight where discussion needs to be prioritised.
- Within the Executive Summary, reference specific main report paragraphs where further reading is needed.

Action: NT / Governance Committee to collect and consider feedback over the next term (September 2026).

The Executive Team were asked to provide feedback and highlighted the following:

- The report template facilitated improved crafting and drafting specific to the Board's purpose, and clarity of discussion focus ensuring the best use of the skills and experience of governors.

The report was noted.

5. Principal's Report

3495 5.1. Main Report

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

- The DfE had confirmed a 0.55% funding increase for 16-18 provision in 2026/27. The North East Combined Authority had also confirmed that there would be no funding increase for adult provision for the next three years. Funding therefore continued to be a challenge, and in-year growth funding for 2025/2026 was not yet confirmed.
- The Trade Union national ask was a 10% pay award for 2026/27 and the Principal would be attending the AoC Employment Policy Group meeting with trade unions in June to discuss this.
- The College would receive additional funding in 2026/2027 for the increase in 16-18 full time learner numbers for 2025/2026 due to the lagged funding model, however there would continue to be cost pressures across the organisation.
- There was a number of policy updates included within the report, including those impacting the qualification landscape which would need further discussion and the need for a transition plan on qualification reform to be submitted to the DfE by July.
- There had been confirmed plans for the development of the Gateshead Quays area and there would be a number of opportunities for the College / learners relating to this.
- The College's bid to the DfE to become a Digital Centre of Technical Excellence (CTEC) had been supported and backed regionally. 5 centres would be funded nationally and the application outcome was expected in April 2026. DA made specific thanks to IJ for his work in this area.
- There would be more limited bootcamp funding moving forward. The College continued to work closely with NECA to understand any additional funding opportunities.
- The College's 2026 annual staff survey had recently closed with:
 - A 79% response rate (compared with 83% in 2025).
 - An average score of 7.9 (compared with 7.8 in 2025)
 - An Employer Net Promoter Score ENPS of +42, equivalent to Outstanding (compared with +39 in 2025).

The Board **recognised** the strength and positivity of the outcome of the College Staff Survey for 2026.

- There had been a number of success stories across learners, staff and the College as a whole, as detailed within the report.

The Board **discussed** the positive outcomes and impact set out within the report and **challenged** how performance would be sustained and managed, recognising challenges across the sector. The Board **noted** the need for innovation, maximisation and generation of income and **suggested** these would be key considerations at committee level and Board strategy days. The Board **recognised** the continued inclusive and supportive culture embedded across the College. The Board **noted** the importance of partnership development and partnership working to enable the College to signpost elsewhere where appropriate and to continue to build relationships for the benefit of learners.

The report was noted.

3496 5.2. Board Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

DA presented the report, setting out the progress against the Board level KPIs. There was suggested amendments of KPIs relating to learners and performance outcomes, as recommended by the Curriculum and Quality Standards Committee.

The Board **approved** the proposed changes in KPI reporting for the strategic priority of learners. It was noted that further changes may be suggested aligning with the College's new strategic plan.

The report was noted.

3497 6. Learner Voice

Taken after Item 1.

Two students from Healthcare and Early Years, supported by their teachers, joined the Board to share their work on a college Colab project to create a Calming Kit - an accessible sensory kit to support emotional regulation for learners.

The students delivered a presentation setting out the outline of the project and learner involvement in researching sensory tools, designing prototypes, trialling items and sharing their ideas. The project brought together multiple departments across the college, with areas such as Construction and Engineering. The project had been nominated in the Quality Professionals Awards.

The Board **held a discussion** with the learners about the opportunities, collaboration and skills they had developed as part of the project, gaining assurance of the College's ethos of Employment Edge.

The Board **thanked the learners and staff** and **noted** the amazing work which would have an impact on student experience across the region and beyond.

The learners and staff left the meeting.

The report was noted.

Item 2 taken at this point.

3498 7. Accountability Agreement

CT presented the report, noting that an additional meeting of the Curriculum and Quality Standards Committee had taken place ahead of the Board meeting to discuss the proposed intent for the Accountability Agreement for 2026/2027.

The Curriculum and Quality Standards Committee provided broad agreement for the proposed aims, with the ask to sharpen measures in relation to regional skills priorities and for clear measurable outcomes to be set out.

In relation to the approach of the Local Needs Duty, the Committee supported an Independent External Review, ensuring staff engagement, alongside collaboration with other colleges if possible.

CT would present the draft Accountability Agreement to the June 2026 Curriculum and Quality Standards Committee meeting for recommendation, ahead of seeking Board approval in July 2026.

The report was noted.

3499 8. Review of Strategic Risk Register

NTM presented the report and highlighted the following:

- The risk register had been updated following committee review, Audit Committee discussion at the November 2025 meeting, and the subsequent governor risk workshop in January 2026.
- Actions agreed at the governor risk workshop had been actioned, with the revised register being presented to the recent cycle of committees.
- At the Curriculum and Quality Standards Committee, there had been a discussion on the removal of the risk relating to learner recruitment, and it was felt that this continued to be a strategic risk. This was discussed by the Audit Committee at their meeting on 3 March 2026 and it was agreed for *ER6 Failure to secure new or maintain/grow existing income streams and a potential over reliance on particular income streams* to be more specific to learner recruitment. This had been actioned.
- At the Audit Committee, there had been a discussion over the committee having oversight of *ER8 Insufficient digital and information security leading to a significant data breach and/or cyber-attack* with the Committee's agreement, and support from auditors, that the Audit Committee should not have oversight of a specific risk and instead oversight of the control of the risk management framework. It was suggested that this risk would be reallocated to the Finance and General Purposes Committee. This was subsequently supported by the Finance and General Purposes Committee.
- At the Audit Committee, there had also been a suggestion to remove risk tolerance scoring, instead focussing on risks outside of appetite. This had been actioned.
- The finalised and complete register was presented.

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

- Ensuring treatment plans were in place for all risks outside of appetite. It was noted that the Executive Team would have a limit on their ability to reduce strategic risk and further discussion might be needed at Board level where Board action, such as lobbying, might be needed to further influence.
- Leading of risk whilst undertaking recruitment for the Deputy Principal Finance and Resources. Assurance was provided from both Finance and General Purposes Committee and Audit Committee on the continued consideration of risk feeding through to committee discussion. Risk was embedded across the organisation and under the collective ownership of the Executive Team. The risk register continued to be presented at each Board and Committee meeting. DA confirmed the new post holder for the Deputy Principal Finance and Resources would lead this work going forward.

DA and VC provided an update on the recruitment of the Deputy Principal Finance and Resources, noting this vacancy was currently live and soon to close. An initial longlisting process would be undertaken by the recruitment partner ahead of the process being undertaken by the Selection Panel. Any recommended appointment would be circulated for Board approval.

DA confirmed that interim arrangements for the Deputy Principal Finance and resources post had been explored however this had not been successful. The Director of Business Development and Innovation was overseeing Estates for the interim period, and the Financial Controller remained in place as the Head of Finance. The Director of Governance and Compliance was leading the processes around risk. This remained under review whilst permanent recruitment was underway.

- The highest scoring risk relating to digital and cyber (ER8) and challenged the current and future controls suggesting more information would be needed for the Board to understand progress being made to mitigate. The Board were referred to the treatment plan, setting out a timed action plan to further mitigate. The Board **recognised** this was a significant risk to the organisation and the improvements made over the recent years. CT provided reassurance of the positive outcome of the Internal Audit focussed on Cyber in October. CT noted the consistent attempts to innovate within the limitations of the size, resource and cost. The Board **sought reassurance** that business continuity planning was in place to reduce the impact of this risk, and it was confirmed it was. The Link Governor for Digital (DC) suggested that organisations continued to focus on recovery time as resource and cost around this was felt to be more effective, compared to attempting to reduce the risk. CT provided reassurance that this was frequently discussed at the Digital Steering Group which fed into Finance and General Purposes Committee. The Finance and General Purposes Committee were now charged with overseeing this risk. An update on Digital was expected as part of the May FGP meeting and the mitigations around this risk would be included within this to provide reassurance to the Committee on the level of mitigation in place and the effectiveness of this.

Action: CT to ensure ER8 is a focus as part of the Digital update to the May 2026 Finance and General Purposes Committee (May 2026).

Post-meeting note, this item had been deferred to June 2026.

The Board approved the revised risk framework, the recommended reporting schedule and proposed risk appetites.

3500 9. Finance Report

DK joined the meeting.

DK presented the report and highlighted the following:

- The January 2026 management accounts were presented. The College was performing well at the year-to-date position. Variable income streams were performing as expected. The ending of bootcamp funding in March 2026 had been included within the forecast.
- There remained positive headroom on bank covenants, a positive cashflow position and a forecast to achieve the College's reserves policy of ensuring 31 cash days at month end.
- The position on in-year 16-18 full time growth funding was awaited. No assumption for this had been included within the accounts, so any funding would be positive.
- Lagged funding for 16-18 provision would equate to an approximate increase of £2m in 2026/2027 (approximately 200 additional learners). A rate increase of 0.55% for 16-18 would be included from 2026/2027. It had also been confirmed there would be no increase

in the free college meal allocation for 2026/27. The College continued to subsidise the free meal allowance to a higher rate to the benefit of learners.

- The Adult allocation from NECA would remain unchanged from the current year.

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

- Catering options and comparisons with other schools / colleges on cost – IJ confirmed the College catering contract was currently out to tender with a new contract to be put in place for 1 August 2026. The Board **discussed** options of working with contractors to develop healthy meal options within the free college meal allowance. IJ provided reassurance of the College's offer of free breakfast and lunch.

Action: IJ / CT to discuss the strategic nature of catering procurement with DB.

The Board **noted** opportunities to collaborate with other organisations to reiterate messages around cost pressures and the impact of this.

- The lack of equitability of funding increases across schools and colleges.
- The College being ahead of the year-to-date position with DK providing reassurance that this was largely to do with phasing.
- The impact of new standards relating to lease accounting with DK providing reassurance this was not expected to be an issue for the College, with leases capitalised and depreciated over the life of a lease. DK suggested this would not impact financial health or covenants.

Action: DK to present further information and reassurance on the impact of new standards relating to lease accounting at the May FGP meeting (May 2026).

The Audit Committee noted they had received a presentation from the College's external auditors on this at their November 2025 meeting.

DK left the meeting.

The Board noted the report.

3501 10. Recruitment Update 2025/2026 and 2026/2027

CT presented the report and highlighted the following:

- For recruitment in 2025/2026, income positions had crystallised, with recruitment performing reasonably overall.
- Apprenticeship applications were down on plan, however due to differing apprenticeship values, this had not impacted income. The College remained on track to reach budget.
- Only marginal growth was expected in 2026/2027, and therefore if marginal growth was seen, the College may not be eligible for in-year growth funding.

The report was noted.

3502 11. Committee Chairs Update

NTM presented the report and highlighted a number of policies had been recommended through committees for Board approval. In relation to the Conflicts of Interest Policy, this had been reviewed mid-cycle based on Audit Committee discussion with the strengthening of the policy to increase openness and transparency, along with a more straight forward form for completion.

The Sustainability Link Governor (DB) noted the encouragement from the Finance and General Purposes Committee for all governors to undertake sustainability training. This would be circulated post-meeting.

Action: NT / RL to circulate Sustainability training link to all governors.

The Board **approved** the following documents:

- **Grievance Procedure**
- **Data Protection Policy**
- **Whistleblowing Policy**
- **Conflicts of Interest Policy**
- **Financial Regulations**
- **Tuition Fee Policy 2026/2027**
- **Stakeholder Framework**
- **Finance Strategy**

Action: Report authors to process document approval and publish internally / externally as required.

The report was approved.

3503 12. Corporation Matters

NTM presented the report which set out the following:

- An update on Committee membership
- Information on governor development opportunities
- An update on Board and committee reporting, as per the presentation under Item 4.2
- Proposed Board and committee meeting dates for 2026/2027.

The Board **approved** the following:

- **The appointment of KM to the People Committee**
- **The recruitment of a co-opted governor to the Governance Committee with skills / experience in governance and / or governor recruitment.**
- **The proposed Board and committee meeting dates for 2026/2027**

Action: NT to progress the following KM appointment to People Committee.

Action: NT to progress co-opted recruitment to the Governance Committee.

Action: NT to issue meeting invites for approved Board and committee meetings for 2026/2027.

The report was approved.

12.1 Board Assurance on Effective Strategic Planning

NTM presented the report noting this set out what's expected in relation to the [Guide to effective practice in strategic planning in further education](#) published by the DfE / FE Commissioner, the evidence of practice of this being undertaken at the College and how the Board can be assured of this.

The report was noted.

3504 13. Any Other Business

N/A

3505 14. Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Wednesday 1 July 2026 at 4.00pm.