Minutes of Meeting

CORPORATION BOARD TUESDAY 15 SEPTEMBER 2026 AT 2.30PM VIA TEAMS			
Corporation Board Members		**Attendance**	
Full Name	**Position**	**Attended**	**Apologies**
John Widdowson	Chair of Corporation	X^	
Vikki Smith	Independent Governor and Vice Chair	X^	
Liz Bromley	CEO – Ex-Officio Governor	X^	
Rob Holt	Independent Governor	X^	
Chris McCourt	Independent Governor	X^	
Darren Crossley	Independent Governor	X^	
Lisa Gregg	Independent Governor	X^	
Chris Wigginton	Independent Governor	X^	
Andrew Young	Independent Governor	X^	
Joanne Marshall	Independent Governor		X
Andrew Forrest	Independent Governor	X^	
Ian Dunn	Independent Governor	X^	
Paul Fitton	Independent Governor	X^	
Raghu Vydyanath	Independent Governor	X^	
Louise Humpish	Independent Governor	X^	
Sally McMahon	Staff Governor	X^	
In Attendance			
Tony Lewin	Deputy CEO /Executive Principal (Curriculum)	X^	
Gerard Garvey	Executive Principal – People & Culture	X^	
Steven Wallis	Executive Director of Quality	X^	
Scott Mulholland	Chief Information, Data & Estates Officer (CIDEO)	X^	
Lisa Sproats	Chief Finance Officer (CFO)	X^	
Jon Ridley	Principal - Newcastle College, Executive Lead (HE)	X^	
Claire MacLean	Executive Director – Business Development & External Engagement	X^	
Lynne Griffin	Director – People & Development	X^	
Jamie Stevenson	Principal – Lewisham College (observer)	X^	
Jane Farrelly	Director of Governance	X^	
Tracey Mullen	Governance Manager	X^	
Alan Fenton	Deputy Principal (HE)	X^*	

*attended part of meeting / ^attended virtually

Item	Agenda Item
1.	**Opening Items**
1.1	**Opening and Welcome**
The Chair welcomed all those present to the first meeting of the 2026/27 academic year.	
1.2	**Apologies for Absence**
Apologies were received from Independent Governor Joanne Marshall. The Board noted that the meeting was quorate.	
1.3	**Declarations of Interest**
The Chair declared an interest in relation to agenda item 4.1 and a higher education campus in Birmingham with which he is connected.	
1.4	**Update from the Chair**

- The Chair highlighted that the agenda included a strategic discussion on the evolving political and policy landscape and its implications for the future direction of the Group. Members would receive an update on the current policy environment and the key challenges facing the sector under agenda item 3.1.
- The Chair referred to the governance development session held on 14 September, which was dedicated to safeguarding. The session was well attended by Governors and College Board Members, demonstrating their commitment to this important area. The Chair reiterated the significance of safeguarding and was pleased to note that colleagues continued to engage proactively with safeguarding training and developments, ensuring they remained up to date with current expectations and responsibilities.

2.	**CEG Report**
2.1	**Chief Executive Group Report**

The Board received the Chief Executive Group's (CEG) report from the Chief Executive and noted the key points as follows:

- Student outcomes continue to improve in A Levels, T Levels and apprenticeships, but improving English and maths results remains a key priority, with targeted intervention groups established to address under-performance.
- Members noted the Executive Director of Quality's focus on driving improvement across the Group through the sharing of best practice between colleges. The Board was advised that, following analysis of learner outcomes, actions were being developed to support continued improvement and consistency of performance across all colleges in the coming year.
- Work is underway to develop a new Quality and Inclusion Plan focused on two core priorities: improving learner attainment and ensuring progression into employment, apprenticeships or further study.

- Significant government reforms to funding, qualifications, apprenticeships and devolution are expected over the coming years, and NCG is actively influencing national discussions to help shape these changes.
- The Job Evaluation project is making strong progress, with hundreds of roles reviewed, supporting the organisation's commitment to a fair, transparent and evidence-based approach to role evaluation.
- Recruitment activity has been exceptionally busy, reflecting continued growth across the Group, with headcount and full-time equivalent staffing increasing by around 4% year-on-year.
- Digital transformation continues to progress, with NCG recognised as an AoC Digital Insight Hub, the rollout of Microsoft Copilot licences, and ongoing improvements to systems, data and employer engagement platforms.
- New partnerships are being explored to better support disadvantaged learners and reduce the risk of young people becoming NEET, reinforcing NCG's commitment to social mobility and inclusion.
- Overall, NCG remains financially stable, growing, and well positioned to respond to a rapidly changing education landscape while continuing to improve outcomes for learners.
- Members received an update on Higher Education outcomes and recruitment noting that performance at Newcastle College University Centre remained strong, with first degree outcomes significantly exceeding minimum regulatory thresholds. Recruitment had remained broadly in line with budget expectations despite increasing competition from higher education institutions and private providers. Importantly recruitment to L4 had held strong which is important as L4 is the pillar for the sustainability of the provision.
- The Executive Director of Quality provided an overview of the Quality Outcomes Update:
    - The Board noted that learner recruitment remained strong, with the Group ahead of growth targets and on track to achieve planned funding growth. Adult learner recruitment and engagement also continued to perform well.
    - Members noted that curriculum changes were supporting improved learner progression and destination outcomes through increased participation in regulated programmes.
    - Members noted that GCSE English performance was above the national benchmark, while mathematics performance remained below national rates. Performance varied across colleges and targeted improvement activity remained focused on colleges where performance was below expectations.

The Board, having noted the key points above and the contents of the report, queried the following:

- **Higher Education -** members discussed recent sector commentary regarding franchised provision and the importance of maintaining effective governance and oversight arrangements. Assurance was provided that partner performance, governance arrangements and quality outcomes would continue to receive scrutiny through established governance structures and would form part of a later substantive discussion.
- **Learner Outcomes and Recruitment** – members questioned whether projected learner attrition had been reflected within current forecasts and whether growth targets remained

achievable when this was taken into account. Assurance was provided that historical attrition patterns had been incorporated into planning assumptions and that colleges remained confident of meeting recruitment targets. Members also discussed regional differences in recruitment patterns, particularly within London, where learner movement between providers created greater volatility.

- **Learner Outcomes** - members questioned whether aggregation of Group achievement data risked masking areas of exceptional performance or underperformance within individual colleges. Assurance was provided that detailed college-level scrutiny would continue through the FE Quality and Students Committee and that future reporting would continue to identify both strengths and areas requiring improvement.
- **Learner Progress & Destinations** - members questioned whether learner destination and progression outcomes should receive greater focus alongside qualification achievement. It was agreed and confirmed that progression into employment, apprenticeships, higher education and further study should continue to form part of future reporting.
- **English & maths** - members sought assurance regarding actions being taken to address English and maths performance and were advised that curriculum reforms had already been implemented for the new academic year and that targeted improvement activity focusing on teaching quality, leadership and sharing best practice across the Group was underway.

3. Strategic Deep Dive

3.1 Political Landscape: A Paradigm Shift

The Board received a strategic update from the Chief Executive and Corporation Chair regarding the evolving political and policy landscape and noted the following key points:

- Government proposals for increased devolution of adult education and 16-19 funding continue to develop. The devolution of 16-19 funding would be hugely significant for NCG, given the large volume of 16-19 learners (approximately 14000) across NCG's colleges.
- NCG currently operates across five devolved regions with different levels of devolution maturity and may need to respond to differing local priorities and funding approaches.
- Curriculum reform, qualification reform and local skills planning are expected to create both opportunities and challenges.
- Increasing numbers of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) remain a significant concern across the sector. NCG Principals remain well-placed to respond appropriately on the NEET issues within their respective places.
- NCG's national footprint, place-based governance arrangements and stakeholder relationships position the Group well to respond to these developments.
- The Chief Executive provided feedback from attending the Number 10 North policy roundtable event as an invited speaker, where discussions focused on devolution, English and maths reform, employability, learner resilience, careers education and local skills priorities.

The Board, having noted the key points above and the contents of the presentation, queried the following:

- **Learner Choice** - members questioned how devolved funding arrangements may impact learner choice and curriculum availability. It was acknowledged that balancing local labour market priorities with learner aspiration would become increasingly important and may present challenges for providers operating across multiple regions.
- **Timings** – the CEO advised that some mayoral authorities are planning to be ready by December 2028. The Board noted that mayors are keen for devolution to take place as smoothly as possible but that there is significant variation across the mayoral authorities in their understanding of curriculum reform and qualification redesign.
- **Place-based Response** - members sought assurance regarding NCG's ability to respond effectively to differing regional priorities and devolved arrangements. Assurance was provided that NCG's governance model, experienced leadership teams and strong local stakeholder relationships provided a strong foundation for responding to future changes.
- **Regulatory Requirements** - members questioned whether increased devolution was likely to result in additional governance and reporting requirements. It was agreed that increased complexity was likely and advised that stakeholder engagement and external capacity was being strengthened to support future requirements. The CEO reported that she will continue to flag the complexity of administration and any additional compliance burdens in the relevant national forum.
- **NEET Learners** - members sought assurance that the Group was developing an appropriate response to increasing numbers of NEET learners. It was confirmed that this remained a strategic priority and would continue to inform curriculum planning, learner support and employer engagement activity across the Group.
- **Executive Capacity** – noting the significant challenges ahead, the Board queried whether the executive had sufficient capacity and bandwidth or whether any additional resourcing may be required. The CEO advised that national stakeholder engagement is managed by the Business Development team with Principals actively engaged in their respective regions. Additional appointments may be required at a later date.

  The Board noted the significance of the CEO's attendance and presentation at Number 10 North, agreeing that it reflected NCG's standing within the sector. As the only national college group with operations across both devolved and non-devolved regions, NCG is uniquely positioned to provide informed insight into the differing impacts of devolution across the further education landscape.

Action CB A79: The Chief Executive's Number 10 North speech and supporting materials would be shared with Governors.

4.	Items for Approval
4.1	**HE Centre Expansion**
This item was covered under confidential business.	
4.2	**2025/26 Annual Safeguarding Report and Updated Safeguarding Policy**

The Board received the 2025/26 Annual Safeguarding Report and updated policy from the Executive Director of Quality and noted the key points as follows:

- Safeguarding arrangements remained effective across the Group, supported by strong governance, established reporting processes, trained safeguarding professionals and a positive safeguarding culture.
- An external safeguarding audit awarded the highest level of assurance, providing confidence that safeguarding governance, policies and oversight arrangements remain robust.
- The safeguarding landscape continues to evolve, with mental health, online safety, artificial intelligence, domestic abuse, homelessness and wider community risks identified as key areas of focus.
- NCG continued to engage with national safeguarding developments and consultations, helping to inform future safeguarding guidance for the further education sector.
- Priorities for 2026/27 include strengthening online safety and AI monitoring, enhancing training and information-sharing arrangements, and embedding safeguarding arrangements across the Higher Education Centres.
- The Board received the revised Safeguarding Policy, noting that the updates reflected current statutory requirements and supported the continued effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements across the Group.

The Board, having noted the contents of the paper and the key points above, queried the following:

- **Safeguarding Workforce and Staff Wellbeing -** members sought assurance regarding support for staff managing increasingly complex safeguarding cases. The Board heard that established safeguarding leadership structures, specialist networks, Safeguarding Council activity, and staff wellbeing arrangements were in place across the Group. This was confirmed by the Safeguarding Link Governor who attends Safeguarding Council meetings and meets with the Executive Director of Quality on a regular basis.
- **Online Safety and Emerging Technologies -** members questioned how emerging technology-related safeguarding risks, including artificial intelligence and synthetic media, were being managed. It was noted that updates arising from Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 had been incorporated into policies and practice, including the development of a logging, filtering, and monitoring policy.
- **Governor Development and Training** - members were assured that Governors would continue to receive safeguarding development opportunities. It was confirmed that recordings and materials from the recent safeguarding development session would be available to access

via the Governor portal. It was noted that the next governor development session would focus on artificial intelligence.

Decision CB D253: The Board approved the updated NCG Safeguarding Policy and endorsed the safeguarding priorities identified for 2026/27.

4.3	**Modern Slavery Statement**

The Board received the Modern Slavery Statement and was reminded that, under the Modern Slavery Act 2015, NCG is required to review, approve and publish an annual Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement within six months of the financial year-end.

The previous statement had been updated in line with this requirement and presented to the Board for approval. Amendments to the statement included:

- Updates on actions completed during the year to strengthen NCG's approach to preventing modern slavery and human trafficking.
- Financial information within the statement has been updated, including NCG's annual turnover and current procurement tender thresholds.
- The assessment of supply chain risks has been refreshed, with further refinement of the identified areas where modern slavery risks may arise.
- Minor amendments have also been made to improve clarity and reflect current organisational structures, including updates to wording and job titles.

Decision CB D254: The Board approved the 2025/26 Modern Slavery Statement.

4.4	**Policies for Approval**

The Board received the following Policies for Approval from the Director of Governance and noted the key changes as follows:

- **Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech** The Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech had been subject to a minor update to reflect that the Office for Students (OfS) complaints scheme is now operational (section 8.3).
- **Whistleblowing & Disclosure Policy** The Whistleblowing & Disclosure Policy had been reviewed as part of the ongoing programme of policy updates following the establishment of the Higher Education Centre (HEC). Minor amendments have been made to clarify that the policy applies to both NCG colleges and the Higher Education Centre. No substantive changes have been made to the policy's purpose.

Decision CB D255: The Board approved the Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech

Decision CB D256: The Board approved the Whistleblowing & Disclosure Policy.

5. Items for Assurance

5.1 2025-26 Accountability Statement Close-Out Report

Meeting note: this item was discussed after item 2.1 to allow the Deputy CEO to leave the meeting early.

The Board received the 2025-26 Accountability Statement Close-Out report from the Deputy CEO / Executive Principal (Curriculum) and noted the following key points:

- The Department for Education approved NCG's 2025/26 Accountability Statement, and the final year-end review of performance against strategic aims and objectives was presented to the Board.
- NCG had a total of 40 strategic aims and objectives, comprising 37 college-specific objectives and 3 Group-wide objectives.
- Overall performance was strong, with 37 objectives rated Green (achieved), 3 rated Amber (partially achieved) and none rated Red.
- Common themes across college objectives included curriculum development linked to employer needs, sustainability and green skills, adult education, apprenticeships, staff development, SEND, ESOL and Higher Education.
- Eleven objectives focused on strengthening 16-19 curriculum provision and responding to local labour market needs, while five related to sustainability and green technologies.
- The Board noted that the vast majority of objectives had been successfully achieved and that many of the targets were intentionally ambitious and challenging.
- The report concluded that NCG had been successful overall in delivering the strategic aims and objectives set out in the 2025/26 Accountability Statement, reflecting a culture of high expectations and continuous improvement across the Group.

The Board, having noted the contents of the paper and the key points above, queried the following:

- Members questioned whether the Amber-rated objectives indicated any wider concerns regarding delivery. It was noted that explanations had been provided against each objective and that overall performance represented a stronger position than in previous years, with the vast majority of objectives successfully achieved.

5.2 Corporation Matters

The Board received the Corporation Matters report from the Director of Governance and noted the following key points:

- Recruitment to vacant College Board Chair positions was progressing, with appointments expected to be confirmed shortly.
- Preparations for the next External Governance Review were underway, with a provider selection process in progress.
- The Board noted updates arising from the 2026 College Financial Handbook, including changes relating to governance, financial management and cyber security requirements.

- Plans were noted to strengthen learner engagement and representation through the appointment of Student Governors and a Group-wide student leadership event.
- Governors were encouraged to engage with college events and visits across the Group.
- The Company Seal had been used on 5 occasions since the previous meeting.

6.	Minutes and Action Register
6.1	**Minutes of Previous Meeting**
Decision CB D257: The Board approved the minutes of the meeting held on 8 July 2026 as an accurate record.	
6.2	**Register of Actions & Decisions**
The Board received the Register of Actions and Decisions Register and noted there were two open actions. It was agreed that both actions could be closed out.	

7.	Closing Items
7.1	**Any Other Business**
There was no other business raised.	
7.2	**Date and Time of Next Meeting**
The next meeting of the Corporation Board will take place at 2pm on Tuesday 20 October 2026 at Rye Hill House.	