Minutes of Meeting

CORPORATION BOARD TUESDAY 19 MAY 2026 AT 2.30PM AT THE INNSiDE BY MELIA HOTEL			
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
Chris Byrne	Staff Governor	X	
Sally McMahon	Staff Governor	X	
Matthew Bell	Student Governor	X	
Tyler James Rutter	Student Governor	X	
In Attendance			
Tony Lewin	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	
Simon Ross	Principal – Newcastle Sixth Form College (observer)	X	
Jamie Stevenson	Principal – Lewisham College (observer)	X	
Cat Lewis	Principal – Kidderminster College (observer)	X	
Jane Button	Principal – Southwark College (observer)	X	
Patrick Hughes	Chair – Lewisham College Board (observer)	X	
Jane Farrelly	Director of Governance	X	
Tracey Mullen	Governance Manager	X	

*attended part of meeting / ^attended virtually

Item	Agenda Item
1.	**Opening Items**
1.1	**Opening and Welcome**

The Chair welcomed all those present, acknowledging the efforts of those that had travelled far or joined online to be part of the meeting.

The Chair emphasised the expectations of those in attendance around the confidentiality aspect of discussing sensitive items.

1.2	**Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Independent Governors Darren Crossley, Rob Holt, Raghu Vydyanath, Louise Humpish, Joanne Marshall and Chris Wigginton. The Board noted that the meeting was quorate.

1.3	**Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest raised.

1.4	**Update from the Chair on Board Matters**

- The Chair advised that he had recently concluded the annual 1:1 performance conversations with Governors – these would be discussed at Search Committee and the outputs will be incorporated into the annual governance self-assessment.

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:

- The senior team mid-year appraisal process recently completed, with a good range of outcomes and progress made against objectives.
- Jane Button, Principal of Southwark College, has been offered the role of CEO at Waltham Forest College. The Board congratulated Jane, noting that her success is yet another example of NCG developing CEOs for the wider sector.
- The Board noted that the AoC has updated its Senior Post Holder Remuneration Code. An update of the changes will be presented to REMCO on 21 May and the Corporation may be asked for some approvals in due course.
- The London HE Centre is becoming more established with the challenges of making academic appointments in London where salaries fluctuate unfavourably and academics switch between institutions with regularity, being managed. NCG will ensure the model has been tried and tested to its full extent before expansion into other areas is considered.

- The OfS has decided not to appeal the judgement against the Freedom of Speech fine issued to Sussex University.
- The Chief Executive reported that NCG has identified an eligible project at Lewisham College that clearly aligns to the requirements of the GLA Construction Skills Capital Fund and the priorities of the London LSIP. A suitable space within Tressillian has been identified and will be refurbished to support the growth of the electrical provision. Costs are to be developed as the project design progresses; however, it is understood from GLA that funding requests are not expected to exceed £1million (total scheme costs), therefore the project will be developed on that basis. The project meets strategic objectives and the Lewisham College Masterplan. It was noted that match funding from NCG is not required. The submission is to be made to GLA by the 8th June.

Decision CB D237: The Corporation formally endorsed the submission of the proposed application for the GLA Construction Skills Capital Fund and the project which will be subject to the usual executive approvals through the Bids and External funding policy linked to NCG's Financial Regulations.

3. Items for Approval

3.1 Food Services Tender

The Board received the Food Services Tender report from the Chief Financial Officer and noted the key points as follows:

- Brakes is currently the main contracted supplier of food to NCG, with the current contract due to expire at the end of July 2026. In addition to this contract, NCG currently uses a number of other food suppliers resulting in inefficiencies in contract management and variation in the standards provided across NCG.
- Feedback from the Heads of Catering across all Colleges indicates that the current food supply arrangements are no longer fit for purpose.
- The Procurement team in conjunction with representatives from Facilities Management and Commercial Services conducted an options appraisal of the market to determine what would work best for NCG. The options considered were detailed within the report and the recommendation was to award the food services contract to Avendra International.
- The proposal to contract to one supplier would cover the full NCG geographical areas.
- Contract spend will be in the region of £11,625,000 across the duration of the contract.

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

- **Links to IFM Tender -** Members noted that the initial catering review was conducted as a separate exercise to the IFM tender and the decision was taken to insource catering across all colleges. As a result, catering was not in scope for the IFM tender and the IFM tender process had progressed too far for it to be amended and included. However, when the catering standards around quality and compliance are achieved, this may be reviewed. The CFO advised that the proposed framework represents immediate efficiencies and offers suitable flexibility to review again at that stage.

Decision CB D238: The Board approved the Food Services contract award to Avendra International for a maximum of 60 months, including an initial period of 24 months with an option to extend for a further 3 x 12-month periods.

Action CB A74: The Corporation Board to receive an appraisal update of the Food Services Tender after the initial 24-month period – item to be added to Corporation cycle of business.

3.2	**Governance Code of Conduct**

The Board received the Governance Code of Conduct from the Director of Governance and noted:

- The existing Code was no longer fit for purpose due to fundamental internal changes to NCG's governance model and changes in the wider external landscape such as the introduction of Accountability Agreements and reclassification of colleges into the public sector.
- The updated Code is based on the Eversheds model template which is widely regarded as sector best practice and provides a clear separation between the responsibilities of the Corporation and the members of the wider NCG Governance Community.
- The updated Code is a key component of NCG's wider governance framework and will be shared with all members of the NCG Governance Community.

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

- **Safeguarding** - the Board noted that the document was more detailed than previous iterations. The Director of Governance advised that given the level of detail included in the new code (much of which was based on the Eversheds best practice model template) and after wider review by executive colleagues, it had been agreed to include additional detail around the Corporation's statutory responsibilities in relation to safeguarding and the following wording would be included within section 5.2:

  In addition to the responsibilities set out above, Corporation Governors have additional statutory responsibilities with regard to safeguarding learners. These responsibilities are set out in the "Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE)" guidance, which states that Governing bodies have strategic leadership responsibility for safeguarding arrangements and must ensure that they comply with their duties under legislation. They must have regard to KCSIE guidance, ensuring policies, procedures and training are effective and comply with the law at all times. Governing bodies should ensure that all governors and trustees receive appropriate safeguarding and child protection (including online) training at induction. This training should equip them with the knowledge to provide strategic challenge to test and assure themselves that the safeguarding policies and procedures in place are effective and support the delivery of a robust whole college approach to safeguarding. Their training should be updated regularly.

- **CUC Code of Conduct** – the Chair advised that the Committee of University Chairs is currently finalising its updated Code of Governance (for HE). The Director of Governance and Executive Lead for HE agreed to review the HE Code against the AoC Code of Governance to ensure alignment.

Decision CB D239: The Board approved the Governance Code of Conduct.

3.3	**Corporation Matters**

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

- Dr Emmanuel Arakpogun joined NCG as a coopted committee member in 2024. He is a senior lecturer at the University of Stirling with a professional background in banking and fintech. Emmanuel currently serves on both the HE Governance and People & Culture Committees and it was proposed to renew his membership of these committees for another two-year term.
- The Director of Governance recently attended a national roundtable of governance professionals at the DfE hosted by FE Commissioner Ellen Thinessen. Much of the discussion focused on risk and assurance frameworks and the FE Commissioner summarised the key risks facing the sector that Boards should be aware of. The risks were detailed within the report for the Board's information. The FE Commissioner further advised that Boards should be assured that disadvantaged learners are receiving the support they need to thrive and advised that colleges should consider developing a Learner and Data Journey Strategy to support Board understanding in this area.
- The 2026-27 Accountability Agreement was attached for the Board's information. The document sets out the rules colleges must follow in order to receive government funding and makes clear that governing bodies are responsible for making sure money is used properly, risks are well managed and colleges meet their legal duties.
- The Charity Commission has published updated guidance for charity Trustees on conflicts of interest, with research by the regulator suggesting many trustees are unsure how to recognise a conflict. The updated guidance focuses on early identification and provides real-life scenarios and decision steps in order to help Trustees identify, declare and manage any perceived conflicts of interest.
- The company seal was used on 16 occasions since the last Corporation meeting. The detail was provided within the document.

Decision CB D240: The Corporation approved the reappointment of coopted Committee Member Emmanuel Arakpogun to the HE Governance and People & Culture Committees.

4. Items for Assurance

4.1	**Quality & Performance Report**

The Board received the Quality and Performance Report from Executive Director of Quality and noted:

- Ofsted has approached NCG to become a partner in testing its pilot peer inspector model. Under this approach, peer inspectors will be drawn from schools, colleges and providers to join Ofsted inspection teams to conduct inspections. Ofsted will select 6 to 8 inspectors from approximately 14 expressions of interest submitted by NCG Managers. It was noted that unfortunately the pilot would not include the West Midlands or London regions.
- The NCG TLA Hub continues to be embedded effectively across the Group, with 9 teachers now having received Exemplary TLA badges. The Board congratulated the colleagues who had received exemplary TLA practice awards.
- NCG continues to be positioned positively following the annual publication of the National Achievement Rate Tables (NARTs) in March. This is the annual release of sector and provider-level rates by the DfE.
- Across all learners, NCG was performing at or marginally above sector averages last year (2024/25) when compared with the General FE and Tertiary College sector (GFEC) on retention, pass, and achievement rates.
- NCG is currently performing above the national average on overall apprenticeship achievement. In 2024/25, NCG's achievement rate stands at 73%%, compared with the national rate of 65.7% (+5.6pp). The Group has now moved into the top quintile of GFECs which was pleasing to note.
- NCG is performing well (on or above targets) in most areas however attendance remains the main area of concern, particularly for 16–18 learners, where rates are below target and are notably lower than last year. However, this was expected due to a deliberate NCG policy change that removed the neutral Authorised Absence (A) register mark, for issues relating to tighter oversight of inclusion, and to remove register error. A SMS text service has been piloted in Southwark College which has resulted in an increase in teacher compliance in marking of registers within 20 minutes and has received positive feedback to date.
- The annual apprenticeship survey has concluded with positive results. A total of 916 apprentices responded. Overall, 95% of apprentices reported that they were satisfied with their apprenticeship programme, consistent with the extremely high satisfaction levels seen last year.
- The structural changes to English and maths (timetabling, longer programmes for learners furthest from grade 4) have been agreed and are in the planning/timetabling phase for 2026/27. Investment in a new digital platform (Century) will promote a more systemically consistent approach to independent learning and assessment.
- RSM recently completed a safeguarding audit in line with the annual business assurance plan. Verbal feedback (with the written report pending) indicates that NCG's safeguarding controls are robust, with several positive features identified. One area requiring improvement is the recording of induction and mandatory annual training for volunteers. Local arrangements were found to be inconsistent and require centralisation and strengthening. There is a work plan in place to implement improved controls in this area.
- Exam season has commenced across all colleges. At Newcastle College more than 2000 students will be sitting English and maths exams. Some learning has moved to online to facilitate the use of classrooms for GCSE examinations.

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

- **Ofsted Peer Inspector Pilot** – members queried how the pilot would be financed. The Executive Director of Quality reported that Ofsted will cover inspectors' expenses only, with providers have to meet release and backfill costs. He advised that he would monitor the cost of backfill and the Board agreed that NCG's participation in the pilot would serve NCG well over the longer-term.
- **Annual Apprenticeship Survey** - a member queried whether employers undertook an annual survey as it would be beneficial to see the triangulation between apprenticeships and employers. The Executive Director of Quality advised that this is conducted by the business development team as part of NCG's stakeholder engagement strategy.
- **Attendance** – the Board queried how NCG compares against national benchmarks. The Executive Director of Quality advised that whilst the data is reported to the DfE, it is not comparable as each college has a different approach to measuring and reporting. He added that the AoC undertakes a survey every 2 years and NCG has a performance rate of circa 85% which is 1 point of the national target. The Board noted that it is a challenging target to benchmark given the national variance in college size and student courses and numbers.

Action CB A75: Executive Director of Quality to share the RSM Safeguarding Audit report with the Board.

4.2	**Financial Health & Operations Report**

The Board received the Financial Health and Operations Report from the Chief Finance Officer and noted:

- The P8 year-to-date management accounts demonstrated a good financial position.
- The Q3 forecast is expected to be favourable to Q2, as in year income has been confirmed for 16-18 growth and NIC grant, and the HE partnership delivery has been confirmed. Work is underway to utilise additional funds - a list of priority spend areas across the Group has been agreed - the focus is now to ensure this is maximised by year end.
- As in previous years, there may be an opportunity to provide a one-off non-consolidated payment to staff.
- Work is underway on the 2026/27 Budget which will be presented to the Corporation in July for approval.
- The Energy Academy design and planning works have commenced which will be funded by the North East Combined Authority (NECA). NCG has approval to claim the costs now that planning consent has been received.
- Cash is in a favourable position due to continued delays in capital spend, together with additional HE income.
- NCG received the final payment in relation to the Deptford sale on 1st May, held as restricted cash ahead of reinvestment in capital spend.
- The FE Financial Reporting pilot continues to explore options for aligning the FE sector year-end with government accounts.

- The IFM procurement tender process closed on 16 May. The outcome report will be presented to the Corporation at its July meeting for approval.
- Due to the current global position, brokers are currently resistant to committing to energy supplies past March 2027. The Board will be kept updated on the position through updates within the report.

In addition to the above, the CFO advised that she had recently attended the AoC Finance Conference and had joined the estates session and there seemed to be a focus on the conditions of estates and maintaining good premises which was welcome news for NCG however, the final plans were not yet known.

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

- **Financial Reporting Year Pilot** - the Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee referred to the FE Financial Reporting Pilot and queried the timelines and progression of work. The CFO confirmed the pilot was currently running a dry run of financial data to the March year-end position across the sector which aligned to the DfE reporting guidelines. It was noted that two reporting periods would be challenging.

4.3	Learner Voice

The Board received an update on Learner/Student Voice from the Student Governors and Director of Governance.

The Board recalled that at the last meeting of the Corporation Board, the Student Governors had offered to seek student feedback on Artificial Intelligence and Careers Information Advice and Guidance (CIAG). The Learner Voice forum met on 12 May 2026 and the HE Student Partnership and Engagement Committee (SPEC) met on Monday 27 April. The Student Governors provided feedback from these meetings:

AI

- There were generally mixed responses to AI, with some students labelling it necessary in their field (e.g. engineering) and others automatically associating it with cheating.
- There was general consensus around the need for more information / support around AI and acceptable use.
- Students expressed concern around the potential for AI to take jobs in certain industries.
- Students also raised concerns around the environmental impact of AI usage.

Careers Information Advice and Guidance

- With the exception of NCUC, most students felt that there is a lack of dedicated careers advisors at each college - some do not have advisors whereas others may have advisors in place, but they often work part-time and can be hard to contact.
- In some colleges, careers advice is discussed as part of tutorial, however students felt that this is not the expertise of the tutor and a dedicated careers advisor would give a wider range of opportunities.

- Students would like more 1-to-1 support, more careers events and better preparation for employment (e.g. interview skills, workshops).
- HE students highlighted that it would be beneficial to teach students how to network and sell themselves, to give them the confidence to stand out in the competitive jobs market.

Key messages for the Board included:

- There is a need for dedicated Careers teams.
- There is opportunity for cross-NCG collaboration and shared resources.
- Advice must be relevant, up to date and led by student aspirations.
- Students need support with CV-writing, interview and general communication and networking skills.

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

- **AI** – the CIDEO advised that the AI Steering Group will be developing standard guidance around the safe and responsible use of AI for students.
- **Employer / Student Engagement** - a member queried whether NCG engaged with ambassadors and if not whether it was a possibility in the future. In response, the Principal of Newcastle College advised that employers were being asked to engage with students and campaigns and groups had been developed to enable and promote engagement between students and employers.
- **CEAIG across NCG** - Principals added that there is good practice taking place across NCG but agreed services needed to be pulled together to make the offer more consistent and accessible to students Group wide. The Executive Principal (Curriculum) advised that the DfE has recognised that it is asking colleges to provide careers service with no additional funding. Members agreed careers advice was an essential service for students and the NCG guarantee reiterated such a message.
- **CEAIG Next Steps** - the Chief Executive reported that she had been surprised at the feedback around careers advice and thanked Student Governors for coordinating the feedback and reinforced the importance of ensuring students had access to high level careers advice. She advised that there may be an opportunity for the Executive Director – Business Development & External Engagement to set up a Group involving national careers advice services, with the possibility of having a joint service with universities.

Meeting Note: Chris McCourt left meeting at this point**.**

Action CB A76: The Executive Director of Business Development & External Engagement to pull together best practices in CEAIG across NCG in light of the student feedback received.

Action CB A77: The Chief Executive requested that the Corporation Board's feedback and agreed actions be fed back to the next meetings of the Learner Voice forum and the HE Student Partnership and Engagement Committee.

5.	Minutes and Action Register
5.1	**Minutes of Previous Meeting – 24 March 2026**
Decision CB D241: The Board approved the minutes of the meeting held on 24 March 2026 as an accurate record.	
5.2	**Register of Actions & Decisions**
The Board received the Register of Actions and Decisions and noted that there were 4 actions on the register that were to remain open at this time.	

6.	Closing Items
6.1	**AOB**
The Principal of Newcastle College was delighted to report that Newcastle College was the 2026 winner of the Community Engagement Award - HE/FE Sector award at the recent Education North Awards (ENAs). The Corporation Board acknowledged this was an outstanding achievement and congratulated all those involved. The Board congratulated Jane Button on her success as new CEO of Waltham Forest College and wished her every success in the future.	
6.2	**Meeting Evaluation**
The Executive Principal (Curriculum) reported that the meeting had been positive, with a good level of discussion, and papers had been well prepared. He noted that the logistics were well organised.	
6.3	**Date and Time of Next Meeting**
The next meeting of the Corporation Board will take place in person at 2pm on Wednesday 8th July 2026 at 2pm in Rye Hill House.	