

NCG – Corporation Meeting

Minutes of Meeting held on Wednesday 18th November – 3pm to 6pm

Details			Attendance		
Full Name	Position	Initials	Attended	Apologies	No Attendance
Peter Lauener	Chair of Corporation	PL	X*		
Chris Roberts	Vice Chair of Corporation	CR		X	
Mark Squires	Independent Governor	MS	X*		
Caroline MacDonald	Independent Governor	CMA	X*		
John Cuthbert	Independent Governor	JC	X*		
Jeannette Strachan	Independent Governor	JS	X*		
Andrew Cunningham	Independent Governor	AC	X*		
Rob Holt	Independent Governor	RH	X*		
Chris McCourt	Independent Governor	CMc	X*		
Matthew Otubu	Independent Governor	MO	X*		
Shirley Atkinson	Independent Governor	SA	X*		
John Widdowson	Independent Governor	JW	X*		
Liz Bromley	CEO – Ex-Officio Governor	LB	X*		
Jennifer Mitchelson	Staff Governor	JM		X	
Vacancy	Student Governor				
Clerk					
David Balme	Executive Director and Secretary to the Board		X*		
Visitors/ Presenters					
Chris Payne	Deputy CEO	CP	X*^		
David Balme	Executive Director Governance, Assurance & Risk	DB	X*^		
Mike Wilmot	Chief Finance Officer	MW	X*^		
Steve Wallis	Executive Director of Quality	SW	X*^		
Scott Mulholland	Chief Information and Data Officer	SM	X*^		
Grant Glendinning	Interim Executive Principal of the North	GG	X*^		
Jon Ridley	Executive Director of HE	JR	X*^		
Nicola Taylor	Assistant Director of Governance (minutes)	NT	X*		

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

1. Chair Opening Remarks / Board Matters / Declaration of Interests / Apologies for Absence

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed the attendees.

Apologies had been received from JM and CR. The apologies were accepted, and the Board agreed that the meeting was quorate.

The Board were asked if they had any interests to declare in relation to the planned agenda items, and there were no new declarations to report.

The Chair noted that there had been a reorganisation of the meeting agenda format which had been undertaken to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the meeting.

2. Update from Chair on Relevant Matters – Verbal

2.1. External Governance Review Report

The Chair confirmed that the report had been received and shared with the Board. The report was a useful stocktake and included recommendations for further work around the relationships with College Boards and meeting agenda organisation.

The Chair requested a subgroup of governors to review the report in further detail be established and agree an action plan to address the concerns noted. AC, SA, CMc, MW and CMa confirmed they would join the subgroup.

Action: NT to arrange meeting of subgroup, along with PL, DB and LB for the week commencing 30th November.

It was confirmed the action plan would be brought to the February 2021 meeting.

Action: NT to add to agenda.

The Board noted the report.

2.2. Risk Focus

2.2.1. Risk Update

DB provided a risk update, and governors asked about the top risk priority and critical systems. DB confirmed that this was not currently known however he and SM would meet to discuss. DB noted that there is also the need to progress work in relation to business continuity. This has been deferred due to capacity, however will be an area of responsibility for the Director of Assurance (new role).

SM confirmed that work was ongoing around disaster recovery, and that NCG are currently looking for an external partner to support the testing of business systems and the delivery of desktop exercises.

Governors asked about cyber security attacks. SM confirmed he was working closely with external parties around incidents within the sector.

PL and RH offered contacts who may be able to assist with the above work.

Action: DB and SM to provide an update on this work at the February 2021 meeting. NT to add to agenda.

The Board noted the update.

2.2.2. Risk Management Policy

The Risk Management Policy was presented for approval. The policy had been previously reviewed and approved by the Audit Committee.

Governors noted the key questions contained within the policy and suggested that this should be looked at in further detail at the February meeting. Governors agreed that they would like training around Risk Management.

Action: DB to look at questions for Board and arrange Risk Management Training. NT to add to agenda.

The Board approved the Risk Management Policy.

Action: NT to process policy approval.

2.3. Governor Training / External Activity

The Board were asked if they had any relevant activity to report, and the following were noted:

- AC and JS attended the Masterclass with Bill Lucas.
- PL was due to attend the ETF Chairs Leadership Event.
- MO, CMA and JM attended the AoC Governors Online Conference. MS had been able to attend for part of the second day.

3. Strategic Items

3.1. Chief Executive Group - Report

LB presented the CEO report, and provided the following updates:

- NCG are being visited by Ofsted on 24th and 25th November. Meetings are due to take place via Zoom. It was noted that governors may be invited to take part. The briefing to all staff has been clear that this is not an inspection, but an interim visit, the purpose of which is intended to provide advice and to support the Corporation's continued development.

Governors asked about the Ofsted inspection timetable, and it was confirmed that Ofsted were due to carry out interim visits to RI organisations during Sept-Dec, reports would be published but would not be graded. NCG can expect a full inspection from the start of next year.

- LB and members of the Chief Executive Team had attended the online AoC conference. There was a large focus on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and leadership development.
-

Governors asked about students without access to IT equipment and connectivity, noting that reports had included there were around 700 students at Newcastle without IT equipment and over 300 with no access to Wi-Fi. This concerned the Board, and they wanted to know about numbers across the group. It was confirmed that work is ongoing to understand the true picture, and NCG are conscious of the digital divide due to blended learning. Colleges are open for students to access college IT resources, and bursary funding is being used, where students are eligible, to purchase equipment. Another £0.5mil has been made available for additional purchases of IT, and laptops are being repurposed in each of the colleges. Principals have also been given autonomy to react to exceptional circumstances. Work is ongoing around exploring external funding opportunities, and discount schemes have been implemented with suppliers. A Digital Challenge Fund is being explored which staff, alumni and external partners can contribute to, to help learners.

SM confirmed that the numbers regarding students with no equipment and connectivity had been collected on an informal basis, and therefore there was a need to understand the data on a more granular level. SM also noted that students weren't given information around technology requirements ahead of their courses, and this needs to be done going forward. Work is also ongoing with the Good Things Foundation, who are working to tackle the digital divide on a national scale. Governors noted the work at WLC, whereby local businesses had donated equipment and asked if this was being explored across the Group. SM confirmed that this was being considered.

The results of the phishing simulation were also noted with governors raising concern in relation to the number of staff caught out. Assurances were sought and provided that work was being carried out to address this.

Governors asked about student numbers, noting specific concern around Kidderminster student numbers. DB confirmed that AD had provided a more recent update at his Local College Board meeting, and this showed an improvement in numbers. DB also noted that recruitment around MAS records was year-round.

Governors asked when Power BI would be up and running for NCG to which SM confirmed that NCG are currently at the information gathering stage. Quality dashboards are able to be created, and governors can be given access to the Beta version.

Action: SM to provide an update of reporting styles to the March 2021 meeting.

Action: NT to add to agenda.

Questions asked on BoardPacks in advance of the meeting:

Governors asked if the RI judgement would be an issue for Kickstart, hubs or traineeships bids. It was confirmed that there is no Ofsted grade requirement for providing training to support Kickstart, nor is there for being an

intermediary 'gateway' (matching young people to placement) – the latter can be undertaken by non-education organisations. There was no requirement for Grade 2 or above for the recent 19-24 year old traineeship procurement exercise to which we submitted an application. JCP Youth Hubs are more of a venue to host multi-agency work for young people, and so I don't imagine there is any Ofsted requirements involved.

The Board noted the report.

3.1.1. Approaches to Employability and Traineeships

CP presented the update on Approaches to Employability and Traineeships, noting that work was ongoing by the Curriculum Strategy Group.

It was confirmed that the Traineeships bid had been submitted, and work is ongoing around Youth Hubs in Lewisham and Southwark.

The Board noted the update.

3.1.2. Principal Portfolio Updates

LB presented the Principal Portfolio updates, noting that work had begun within the second level of leadership, for example, DG (Vice Principal at West Lancashire College) is looking at leadership development as part of his portfolio of work.

The Board noted the updates.

3.2. NCG Corporation Board Annual Report (Finalised Version)

DB presented the finalised version of the NCG Corporation Board Annual Report, noting that minor amendments had been made following the discussion at the last meeting.

The Board approved the Corporation Board Annual report 19/20.

3.3. Executive Director of Quality – Quality and Performance Report

SW presented the Quality and Performance Report, highlighting the following:

- College SARs have now passed through Executive review and are progressing to Local Boards for review, approval and to agree the lines of enquiry to underpin governor support and challenge during the 2020/21 academic year. SW has now completed the 2019/20 NCG SAR summary document for Corporation review in the December meeting. College SARs will also be tabled for confirmation of headline judgements (also summarised in NCG SAR).
- Attendance is running at 87.4% using the simple actual/expected measure and 90.1% taking into authorised absence (which includes Covid related isolation or illness). The rate will be partially influenced by a lag on the marking of asynchronous registers (as the Y mark for asynchronous learning is required to be updated within 5 days, when teachers are able to evidence the remote learning). Physical presence in the classroom and

synchronous remote are required to be marked at the start of the timetabled lesson.

- Retention is currently 98.7% (98.7% for FE and 78.9% for apprenticeships). Reports have been updated to monitor the attendance and withdrawals of groups that may be deemed 'at risk' based on SAR analysis.
- Safeguarding and behaviour – there has been a reported increase in challenging behaviour in SC, whilst CC have witnessed an increase in violent incidents around the college; KC are experiencing low level disruption outside the college, where learners are congregating due to a lack of capacity in the college for social space. External referrals are tracking broadly in line with last year, which is surprising given the expectation that cases may have increased (CC has seen an increase due to the incidents above). NCL has not made an external referral to date, on enquiry the team have dealt with over 200 internal referrals, which are either known already to external agencies, or have been actioned internally by the safeguarding and student services team.
- Staff have adjusted well to online delivery. Evaluation of Teaching, Learning and Assessment (ETLA) is taking place online. There remains to be concerns regarding TLA at Lewisham, with inconsistency across departments and study programmes.

Governors asked if the use of CAG grades the previous summer which might have resulted in more students with gaps in learning was having an impact. SW confirmed that the English and Maths working group were carrying out work around this, and initial assessments have highlighted some concerns. Targets for this year will need to be considered.

Governors noted the poor performance of Apprenticeships. SW agreed that this remained a concern and area of focus. Further improvements were expected this year however governors were reminded that a number of learners have been furloughed and had breaks in learning (BiLs). The number of out of funding (OoF) apprentices has also increased. Retention has improved. SW referred to the Apprenticeship Performance slides, noting that there were larger cohorts in high skilled areas. A robust process is now in place with apprenticeship standards being approved by the Apprenticeship Council. Work is ongoing to improve the quality of delivery. It was confirmed that DfE had decided not to publish the achievement rates for the 19/20 academic year as this would not provide a realistic assessment of performance due to the impact of Covid.

Governors asked why some of the apprenticeship areas within the motor industry were small cohorts, which was surprising due to employer need, SW confirmed that the standard is coming on stream this month. The Standard Approval Model (SAM) has a minimum group size that must be evidenced before approval and funding is calculated to ensure financial viability.

DB confirmed that as part of the College Board work plan, training is being provided to upskill College Boards to allow them to provide challenge and oversight of apprenticeships in their local colleges.

SW confirmed that the Equality Works review of EDI had been included within his papers, and an action plan is being created to address the recommendations. This will include a new EDI strategy for NCG.

Questions asked on BoardPacks ahead of the meeting:

Governors asked if there had been any progress on managing the situation outside the colleges arising from the limited social space in the colleges. SW confirmed that issues appear to be settling, although still more of a concern in Southwark. The SLT have had to action some disciplinary concerns and also have had police dogs in for routine drugs walk around, which didn't turn up any issues. SW confirmed that this would be continually monitored.

Governors asked if there were concerns that the issues around school results in the summer would mean that some students are less well qualified and may struggle to cope academically this year. SW confirmed that NCG have been checking via QCPR and the main qualification aims target setting process hadn't seen the need to lower targets, and that teams are working to fill any basic knowledge gaps and maintain high expectations. SW noted that this is easier in vocational subjects, however the same high expectations have been applied for A level at NSFC. English and Maths teachers have observed a noticeable difference through extended initial assessment with staff noting that students with grade 3 (old grade D/E) are more aligned to what one would expect from a grade 2 (old grade E/F) profile on entry. SW suggested that getting near the 18/19 high grade averages would be a challenge for the sector.

The Board noted the report.

3.4. Chief Finance Officer – Finance Report

MW presented the Finance Report and highlighted the following points (noting that the P3 Management Accounts had been uploaded prior to the meeting which provided an updated position):

- Financial Performance was adverse due to delays in processing HE and Adult enrolments. The main area of concern is that apprenticeships numbers are 50% down on last year. Commercial income is also down, with catering running 75% down on last year. 16-19 recruitment is c2% up on last year. HE recruitment is strong at Newcastle College, however poor elsewhere. Costs in relation to Covid are increasing (including cleaning, PPE and H&S related costs, as well as additional agency spend around cover and absence). MW confirmed that the Q1 forecast would be presented to the Board in February 2021, as part of the usual reporting, and that this would provide a better overall picture.

-

- The lease of the NCG owned building which is used to house a casino is up for renewal next year.

The Board noted the report.

3.5. Corporation Matters

DB presented the Corporation Matters update, and the Board approved the following:

- Newcastle College – David Pearson
 - Independent Governor - Four-year term.
- Lewisham College – Robin Landman
 - Independent Governor - Four-year term.
- Lewisham College - Deavon Baker-Oxley
 - Independent Governor - Four-year term.
- Lewisham College – Simbina Joseph
 - Student Governor - One-year term / until the Student's learning ends.
- Kidderminster College – Janak Patel
 - Independent Governor - Four-year term.
- Kidderminster College –Victoria Pingree
 - Student Governor - One-year term / until the Student's learning ends.
- West Lancashire College – Rebecca Butcher
 - Independent Governor - Four-year term.
- West Lancashire College – Claudia Bradbury
 - Student Governor - One-year term / until the Student's learning ends.
- Carlisle College – Holly Angus
 - Student Governor - One-year term / until the Student's learning ends.
- Newcastle Sixth Form College – Elliot Luke
 - Staff Governor - Two-year term.
- Revised review date of February 21 for the HE Fees Policy.

The Board noted the remainder of the report.

Action: NT to process appointments.

3.5.1. Covered under a confidential minute

3.5.2. Approval of Lewisham Student Union Constitution

DB presented the Lewisham College Student Union Constitution, noting that due to Covid, the constitution document had not yet been approved by the Students' Union.

The Board approved the document, noting that further changes may be required following review and approval by the SU.

3.5.3. Covered under a confidential minute

4. Deep Dives

4.1. HE Provision – History and Future Plans

JR joined the meeting.

The Chair confirmed that JR had been invited to attend the Corporation Board to provide an update on the history and future plans of HE at NCG. This was an action from the last meeting.

JR presented to the Board, and specifically highlighted the following:

- Employers are sometimes unable to recruit at a technical level (based on DfE research from 2018, showing that only 4% of 25-year olds have a Level 4 or 5 as their highest achievement level).
- Initiatives at Newcastle, such as the 'Stay and Succeed' programme (whereby graduates are offered a year's paid internship to encourage them to stay within the North East), TedX conferences being held at the Newcastle University Centre and engineering showcase events open to industry.
- Work continues with employers to shape the curriculum. Advisory boards are in place for STEM subjects. Employers are signed up to Gold, Silver or Bronze commitment levels and these can include the offering of placements, resource donations, lectures etc.
- Over 90% of the HE provision is based at the Newcastle College University Centre. At Kidderminster, Carlisle and Southwark, NCG awards are in the minority to Pearson and / or the franchise arrangements with local universities.
- Plans for the future include using the resource at Newcastle College to support HE across NCG.

JR noted that there hadn't previously been a vision statement specific to HE, however the following has been created 'To be the UK's leading provider of College Based Higher Education, recognised for our highly-vocational approach with exceptional levels of employer support and strong civic impact'. JR also presented the guiding principles.

Governors noted their disappointment in the lack of use of NCG awarding powers in Group colleges beyond Newcastle and that there were opportunities to explore, including the part-time market.

Governors asked how the suggested vision statement would be measured in terms of "leading" and "exceptional". Governors also noted there was no

mention of collaboration and partnership. JR confirmed he would consider both of these aspects as part of the HE strategy development.

Governors discussed options around provision, noting potential issues around spreading provision too thinly in a range of different programme areas, and instead suggested starting with a defined number of programmes to fit with the needs of the local areas.

Governors discussed the potential implications of the White Paper, however noted that due to NCG having TDAP award powers, they would be in a strong position to collaborate with others.

JR provided an update on the partnership with OLC, including how NCG is assuring academic standards.

Governors noted the difference in collaborating within NCG, externally and via franchise opportunities, and discussed the different risk levels.

The Board endorsed the vision statement and guiding principles, noting further work would be required around Collaboration and Partnership as per the discussion. CMa, SA and JW confirmed that they would be happy to work with JR on this area.

JR left the meeting.

4.2. Apprenticeships – Funding and Quality

GG provided a presentation on Apprenticeships, specifically relating to funding and quality. GG took the Board through some commonly used acronyms, the Apprenticeship frameworks and standards, funding, apprenticeship incentives for employers and how apprenticeships are measured in terms of achievement (providing further detail around Qualification Achievement Rates ((QARs)), Timely QARs and Minimum Standards). GG confirmed that only 7% of apprentices remain on frameworks.

It was noted that there is a growing market around energy and decarbonisation, however there are no standards around green energy as of yet.

GG presented NCG's overall 3-year trend data which included a breakdown of achievement rates across each of the Colleges. For NCG there had been year on year improvement however the pace of change was slow and remained below the national rate. GG updated the Board that the 19/20 achievement rate had now been published and had fallen below the 17/18 rate of 58%. This was explained as being due to Covid and that there would be similar results across the sector.

GG noted that data showed that the best achieving apprenticeship programmes were those with smaller cohorts.

GG provided the Board with an update on the work undertaken by the Apprenticeship Council, including the work around unifying and standardising paperwork.

The Board noted the update.

4.2.1. Proposals for the “Synergy Hub” – Incorporating NCG’s Apprenticeship Hub

GG presented the proposal for the Synergy Hub, which is to be a set of services for learners and employers, including the Apprenticeship Hub.

The plan is for the Synergy Hub to be based at Rye Hill House, in Newcastle, on the first floor. The space would house the NCG Apprenticeship Hub, an area for off the job training, apprenticeship review and support for apprentices and employers, an area for local businesses to access services such as workforce planning and business clinics, and an area for Digital / STEM teaching, training and showcasing.

The Board noted the update.

4.2.2. ESFA Letter – Minimum Standards for 2018 to 2019

SW presented the letter from the ESFA, with regards to failing to meet the minimum standards for the 18/19 academic year. Governors asked why the letter had only been recently received and it was confirmed it had been delayed due to Covid.

The Board noted the contents of the letter and the additional contractual obligations / conditions of funding.

5. Items for Approval / Noting

5.1. NCG’s Annual Report of HR 19/20

LB presented the Annual Report of HR 19/20.

The Board approved the report.

5.2. NCG’s Annual Report of Complaints 19/20

SW presented the Annual Report of Complaints for 19/20. SW noted that there had been c700 cases of correspondence in relation to Centre Assessed Grades (CAGs) being awarded.

Governors suggested that the report also included data regarding compliments going forward.

Action: SW to include compliments going forward.

The Board approved the report.

5.3. NCG College and Student Updates

CP presented the NCG College and Student Update report.

The Board noted the update.

5.4. Corporation Committee Minutes

5.4.1. Corporation Committee Minutes

No minutes were presented.

5.4.2. College Board Minutes

The Board noted the following minutes:

- Carlisle College - Meeting 6 of the 19/20 Academic Year.
- Kidderminster College - Meeting 6 of the 19/20 Academic Year.
- Lewisham College - Meeting 6 of the 19/20 Academic Year.
- Southwark College - Meeting 6 of the 19/20 Academic Year (two sets of minutes as original meeting became inquorate).
- West Lancashire College - Meeting 6 of the 19/20 Academic Year.
- Newcastle College - Meeting 6 of the 19/20 Academic Year.
- Newcastle Sixth Form College - Meeting 6 of the 19/20 Academic Year.

6. Minutes of Previous Meeting / Information Flows / Matters Arising / Register of Actions

6.1. Review of Minutes from the Previous Meeting – 6th October 2020

The Board reviewed the minutes of the previous meeting and agreed that they were a true and accurate reflection of the meeting.

The Board approved the minutes.

6.2. Review of Minutes from the Previous Meeting – 6th October 2020 – Confidential

The Board reviewed the minutes of the previous meeting and agreed that they were a true and accurate reflection of the meeting.

The Board approved the minutes.

6.3. Matters Arising

N/A

6.4. Register of Board Actions

The Board reviewed the register of actions and noted that relevant actions had been covered within the meeting or closed as per the document.

The Board noted the updates.

6.4.1. Black FE Leaders Campaign – NCG Response

LB presented the revised version of the NCG Response to the Black Leaders in FE Open Letter, following the action from the last meeting. LB also included an article from FE Week around FE leading the way on inclusion, for information. LB confirmed that a meeting with the BFELG was taking place and an update would be provided in December.

Action: LB to include update within CEO report.

Action: NT to include within agenda.

The Board noted the update.

6.4.2. NSFC Progression Update

The Board noted the update in relation to the information they requested around progression at Newcastle Sixth Form.

7. Information Flows

The Board reviewed the information flows, received from Newcastle College and Newcastle Sixth Form College.

The Board approved the proposed responses.

Action: NT to respond.

8. Any Other Business

Not applicable.

9. Deferred Items

The Health and Safety Annual Report for 19/20 had been deferred due to the postponement of H&S reviews following Covid. This is due to be presented at the December 2020 meeting.

10. Date and Time of Next Meeting – 15th December 2020

Approved: 15th December 2020