

FURTHER EDUCATION CORPORATION MEETINGS 2024/25

MINUTES OF THE FURTHER EDUCATION CORPORATION MEETING

Held at 8.30am on Thursday 22nd May 2025

Stanley House Hotel (BB2 7NP)

Board Members present: Phil Wilkinson (Corporation Chair), Helen Curtis (Corporation Vice Chair, and meeting Chair), David Whatley (Corporation Vice Chair), Lisa O’Loughlin (Principal and CEO), Chris Kenyon, Liz Sedgley, Darren Hutton, Jenifer Burden, and Gill Sharples (Staff Governor)

In attendance: David Rothwell (Deputy Principal – Finance and Resources)
Debbie Corcoran (Director of Governance)

<p>Item 1.</p>	<p><u>1.1 Welcome and apologies for absence</u></p> <p>Phil Wilkinson (Chair of the Corporation) welcomed everyone to the Board meeting, which was noted to be being held within the Corporation’s annual 2-day strategic planning event. For this reason, there was a focused agenda.</p> <p>Apologies for the Board meeting were received from Steve Campbell, Melissa Conlon, Sarah Applewhite, Arif Ahmad, Simone Hartley-Gott (Student Governor), Aqil Javed (Staff Governor) and Emily Jayne Austin (Student Governor)</p> <p>The Director of Governance confirmed quoracy.</p> <p><u>1.2 Declarations of Interest</u></p> <p>Members and officers present declared they had no interests, personal, fiduciary, or otherwise in any item on the open agenda for the meeting.</p> <p><u>1.3 Consent Agenda Items</u> <i>Submitted: Report circulated with papers, items as below</i></p> <p>Members noted that given positive feedback on the introduction of a consent agenda approach at the last Board meeting, the approach continues. The Chair had agreed to propose a number of items to be considered as consent agenda items in the meeting. Members were then contacted ahead of today to ask if they would like any items to be moved from this section of the agenda for a fuller discussion, and no requests made.</p> <p><u>RESOLVED:</u> That following consideration of consent agenda items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft minutes of the 10 March 2025 Board meeting - approved • Management accounts with financial position as at 31 March 2025 – received and noted • Bursary Policy 2025/26 - approved • Business as usual Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) – received and noted • Triple A report (Quality and Standards Committee 18 March 2025 and Audit Committee 24 March 2025) – received, and in respects of the following recommendations from the Committees the Board also resolved the following:
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- 2023/24 Higher Education (HE) Self Evaluation Document (SED) approved
- Appointment of Wylie Bisset confirmed as internal audit service for 2025/26 and 2026/27 and the associated fee and contracting approach approved
- Appointment of RSM Audit as financial statement auditors for 2024/25 and associated fee approved

1.4 Matters arising and matters to formally note

Submitted: Matters arising log (circulated in meeting papers)

Presented by Debbie Corcoran (Director of Governance)

The matters arising log was received and noted. The Board noted the application of the College Seal to the following, since the prior Board meeting:

- a) Lease between the College and Pendle Borough Council for the ground and first floor premises at the Ace Centre in Nelson, for the Digital Hub – to 31 March 2024
- b) Contract with Rosslee Construction Ltd as the main contractor for the Industry Innovation Hubs (digital and cyber, and health and social care) at Accrington campus, at a contract value of £1,199,442 inc. VAT

RESOLVED: That the Board of Corporation:

- a) **Receive and note the matters arising log**
- b) **Note the application of the College Seal**

Members asked that the Board Minutes for today include a record of updates received, and any decisions or actions arising from the 2-day planning event being held yesterday and today. These are confirmed for the record as follows:

RESOLVED: That the Board of Corporation in its strategic awaydays on 21 and 22 May 2025:

Received and noted an update in relation to:

- Demographic shifts in relation to Nelson and Colne College and their implications to forward strategy in all areas, and curriculum developments in particular
- Implementation of the People Strategy, with insight enhanced through the 'happiness carousel'
- Progress and forward plan for Systems Improvement and Digital Strategy
- The Campus Master Plan and investment strategy, including an update on the current position in relation to the Strategic Investment Reserve (SIR)
- 5 year curriculum plans – with progress so far set out in 16-18 and adult curriculum plans
- Approaches taking forward the College's strategy as an anchor for collaboration – with consideration of next steps
- Branding, Travel, Marketing and School Liaison Strategy and key next steps
- The finance and investment position and plans – Review of current operating position and approved way forward through a cost reduction strategy (CRS)
- Deep Dives on Apprenticeships and Higher Education (HE) and related follow-up actions

RESOLVED:

1. Existing strategic goal for Higher Education (HE) remains for now, and the College will revisit the themes and granularity of stepping through the next few years and include a review of HE within the cost reduction strategy (CRS)
2. Approval of proposed cost reduction strategy (CRS) of an overall saving target of £2.4mn, with savings to be secured by 31 July 2026. Noting that the objective of this is to move the performance curve back to 'good' i.e. EBITDA of 6% without reliance on income growth. Update to be received at the 7th July 2025 Board Meeting
3. Approval of the Partnership Proposal with Lancaster University
4. Approval in principle of brand-assets, should the College Group's request for a name change currently under consideration by the DfE be agreed

Members also formally noted [and supported](#) the Principal's plan for a revised operating model and Estates Strategy update to be received at the first Corporation meeting of the 2025/26 academic year.

Item 2.

STRATEGIC DISCUSSIONS

2.1 Accountability Agreement 2025-26

Submitted: Report (circulated in meeting papers)

Presented by Lisa O'Loughlin (Principal and CEO)

Members noted that since 2023/24, following the Government's Skills for Jobs White Paper, and supporting funding and accountability consultations, FE Colleges were required to publish an annual Accountability Agreement.

Accountability Agreements are a 2-part document setting out the overall expectations on providers (including local authorities delivering more than £1 million of post -16 provision) in return for funding. Part 1 of the Agreement is provided by Government and sets out national skill priorities and expectations – with Part 2 needing to be developed by providers such as colleges. It was noted that the Agreement focusses on what colleges, designated institutions and local authorities deliver in the year ahead and how they intend to support local, regional, and national needs. DfE's expectation in relevant guidance is that these annual Statements are in all cases informed by providers' longer term strategic plans and ambitions and (for those institutions within scope, such as FE Colleges) the actions and outcomes from the Local Needs Duty.

A draft 2025 Accountability Agreement had therefore been developed by the Principal and senior team for Board consideration. In line with updated guidance issued in December 2023 and February 2025, the draft Agreement set out how the College meets the Local Needs Duty. Board members were aware that The Local Needs Duty is a statutory duty set out in Section 52B of the Further and Higher Education Act 2022, as amended by the Skills and Post 16 Education Act 2022 which came into force 28 June 2022 and formed part of the College's Strategic Review in 2022/23.

Members noted that the Duty requires governing bodies to periodically review how well the education and training they provide meets local needs and to consider what actions they might take to meet those needs better (whether alone or in conjunction with one or more other educational institutions). Members also noted that this is a strategic review that looks further ahead than just the next academic year, with an expectation that individual institutions will consider their role in the wider context of other local providers. DfE guidance states that these reviews should be conducted every three years. Members were assured that the Strategic Review commissioned by the Board and completed in 2023 responds to this expectation and remains valid until 2026. The resulting NCCG Strategy covers the five-year period up to 2028. In each of the years since 2023, the Board has undertaken two in-depth interrogations of this Strategy each year and monitors the associated business planning cycle, estates and investment strategies and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) through its annual meeting cycle.

Members reviewed the draft Accountability Statement 2025-26 shared and welcomed it as a clear statement which aligns with Board strategy and approved targets, as well as with national strategy, targets and expectations. The College's business planning cycle was considered and viewed as being robust, allowing for a clear read through from the NCCG Strategy to the Statement. It was noted that the upcoming annual Strategic Conversation between the College Group and DfE offers an additional check-point and 'sense-check' of the Statement. Board asked and were assured that the College Group's approach can flex in-year if needed to respond to emerging needs, changing priorities or collaborative opportunities. It was welcomed that the Statement is published, supporting transparency and accountability.

The Principal was thanked for leading the development of a clear, robust and informative Accountability Agreement 2025-26, and it was approved for submission to the DfE and for publication.

	<p>RESOLVED: That the Board of Corporation approve the College Group’s Accountability Agreement 2025-26, and its submission to DfE and publication</p>
<p>Item 3.</p>	<p>ITEMS TO RECEIVE OR APPROVE</p> <p>3.1 <u>Barbara Anne Memorial Prize Trust Fund (2023/24 Trustees Report and Financial Statements)</u> <i>Submitted: Report (circulated in meeting papers)</i> <i>Presented by Debbie Corcoran (Director of Governance)</i></p> <p>Members considered the 2023/24 Trustees Report and financial statements for the charity, given its responsibility as corporate trustee. The Corporation approved use of funds (£1,250 plus VAT) for legal advice to support their consideration of options for increased use of the charitable funds available to deliver against the charity’s purpose. The Board recognised the value of broadening the use of the funds in line with the charitable purposes to increase impact, given that the historic approach has been for a modest annual award to be made to a single student (usually the highest achieving student for A level English Literature).</p> <p>In discussions it was also agreed to explore opportunities for the charitable funds to generate interest, to increase the benefits available to any possible recipients. The Board approved delegated authority for the Principal and Vice Principal Academic to have delegated authority to approve annual prize awards from the fund moving forward.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Board of Corporation, as corporate trustee, receive and note the report and approve:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) the Report of the Trustees and Financial Statements for the Year Ending 31st July 2024 of the Barbara Anne Memorial Prize Trust Fund, for signature by the Corporation Chair and onward submission to the Charities Commission b) expenditure as above for legal advice to support consideration of forward options for the Trust Fund c) Principal and Vice Principal Academic to have delegated authority to approve annual prize awards from the fund <p>Members also considered the position in relation to other charitable funds transferred to the College Group from Accrington and Rossendale College at the point of merger. It was agreed for options to return to the Board on the utilisation and potential consolidation together of the funds, with a budget (£2,570 exc. VAT) approved for legal advice.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the Board of Corporation approve a budget of £2,570 exc. VAT for legal advice to support their consideration of options to better utilise and bring together charitable funds transferred from Accrington and Rossendale College</p> <p>3.2 <u>Subsidiary Mid-Year Report</u> <i>Submitted: Report (circulated in meeting papers)</i> <i>Presented by David Rothwell (Deputy Principal – Finance and Resources)</i></p> <p>The mid-year report updated on the position in relation to the College’s 2 subsidiary companies – NCC Professional Services Ltd and NCC Energy Services Ltd. The Directors of the 2 companies continue to meet on a quarterly basis to provide oversight of progress and activities, and copies of minutes were provided for assurance.</p> <p>The Deputy Principal confirmed that in relation to NCC Professional Services Ltd, the company continues to grow in scale as expected, with its workforce more than doubling in size this year - increasing from 32 FTEs in July 2024 to 68 FTEs in March 2025. There have not been any changes to the Companies operating model or employment terms and conditions. Employee remuneration for the Company continues to be pitched at College equivalent +5%. In terms of operating position, the Company continues to operate on a breakeven basis with the College</p>

	<p>Group being its sole customer. At the current level of operating the Company is saving the College Group c£160,000, and this saving will continue to increase over time as the Company grows further.</p> <p>NCC Energy Services Ltd has not commenced trading operations, with the focus being on progressing finalisation of the decarbonisation capital project. Detailed oversight of the capital project is provided by the Board's Capital Estates and Sustainability (CES) Committee which next meets on 16 June and will again receive a detailed progress and risk report from HI Group who continue to act as project managers/cost consultants.</p> <p>Members asked what proportion of support staff at the College Group are employed by NCC Professional Services Ltd, and it was confirmed to be c25%, with usual annual staff turnover in this area being 15-20%. Members queried if cost savings generated through the arrangement are included in the financial plans and estimates shared with the Board on the awaydays, and it was confirmed to be the case, with financial reporting always showing a consolidated position for the College and subsidiaries.</p> <p><u>RESOLVED:</u> That the Board of Corporation receive and note the Subsidiary Mid-Year Report</p>
<p>Item 4.</p>	<p><u>Any Other Business and Close</u></p> <p>The Director of Governance shared that a Board member had confirmed their intention to retire today and given this it was agreed for Search and Governance Committee to progress recruitment to vacancies on behalf of the Board. Members discussed the skills mix and experience to be targeted in recruitment, and while this will be informed by the Committee's review of skills gaps/profile and other factors such as the Board's prioritisation of diversity in recruiting, there was consensus to explore applications from potential Board members with knowledge and insight into the local education market. It was recognised that a short-term approach may be needed while recruitment progresses to ensure continuity in key areas, and it was resolved for Chris Kenyon to be appointed as Lead Governor for Prevent and Safeguarding from 8th July onwards on this basis.</p> <p><u>RESOLVED:</u> That the Board of Corporation appoint Chris Kenyon as Lead Governor for Prevent and Safeguarding from 8th July 2025 onwards</p> <p>The Chair thanked members for attending and their contributions, and the meeting was closed.</p>

Debbie Corcoran
Director of Governance

Signed as an accurate record by the Chair of Corporation



Name: Phil Wilkinson
Date: 7 July 2025