

Corporation Board

Wednesday 21 May 2025, 16:30 - 18:30

Boardroom or Teams

Attendees

Board Members

Beej Kaczmarczyk (Chair), Nicola Beldham (Staff Governor (Support)), Chantal Brown, Jason Evans, Howard Freeman, Jan Hemper, Stuart Lindeman, Lee Needham (Staff Governor (Curriculum)), Leigh McKenzie, Julie Richards (Principal & CEO), Lou Mycroft, Sue Martin-Standley, Bobby Turner (Student Governor, Absent from: 1, 1.1, 2, 3)

Absent: Peter Dewhurst, John Croot, Mark Fitzclark (Apprentice Governor), Jill Mannion-Brunt

In Attendance:

Craig Acaster (AP People & Culture), Jo Down (AP Student Experience & Wellbeing, Absent from: 1, 1.1, 2),

Michaela Greaves (AP Teaching, Learning & Quality Improvement, Absent from: 1, 1.1, 2),

Tom Kidsley (AP Finance, IT & Estates, Absent from: 1, 1.1, 2), Jessica Shore (Head of Governance)

Absent: Claire Godfrey (Deputy Principal), Gavin Varley (AP Engineering & Construction)

Meeting Minutes

1. Declarations of Interest

Members were reminded of the need to disclose an interest in any item of business to be considered at the meeting. No declarations were made.

1.1. Membership Update

The Chair informed the Board that K Cashmore had resigned from her position. On behalf of the Board, the Chair expressed thanks to KC for her fantastic contribution to the Board and her role as EDI Lead Governor. Her enthusiasm and support for the College was noted. The HoG will write to KC to express formal thanks on behalf of the Board. The vacancy on the Board and EDI Lead Governor Role will be addressed by the Governance & Search Committee.

2. Confidential Items

Confidential items are minuted separately under Part 2.

Discussion

3. Strategic Focus - Long Term Financial Planning

Information

SMT joined the meeting

The AP Finance, IT & Estates (TK) presented a long-term financial model projecting income and expenditure to 2037. The model included scenarios based on funding freezes, demographic changes, and inflation. The Board discussed the risks of declining reserves, increasing pay costs, and the need for improved retention and achievement. Further detail is minuted under Part 2.

The Board agreed that the model was a valuable strategic tool and should be revisited after the June spending review and used to inform future decisions on pay awards, curriculum planning, and cost control. The Board also agreed to share the model with the Association of Colleges (AoC) as an example of good practice in long-term financial planning.

On behalf of the Board, the Chair thanked TK for developing such a useful and informative modelling tool.

4. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Staff/Student Governors joined the meeting.

4.1. Approval of Previous Minutes - 3 April 2024

Decision

Chair

The minutes of the previous Corporation Board meeting held 3.4.25 were reviewed and agreed as a true and accurate record.

Resolution: The Board **approved** the minutes of the previous meeting.

4.2. Action Log & Matters Arising

Discussion

The action log was reviewed and there were no matters arising. Previous actions were updated and either marked as complete or carried forward as appropriate. (*Refer to Corporation Action Log – 21.5.25*)

5. Student & Apprentice Governor Report

Discussion

B Turner / J Down

The Student Governor (BT) and AP Student Experience & Wellbeing (JD), on behalf of the Apprentice Governor who was absent from the meeting, presented the Student & Apprentice Governor Report.

JD provided an update on student engagement and representation activities, outlining the ongoing development of the personal development curriculum, which includes 8 key strands. These strands are being adapted to better suit apprentices, with consultation underway to gather feedback from those currently in work-based learning. The aim is to ensure that the curriculum is relevant and supportive of apprentices' progression and success.

BT also discussed plans to enhance the student voice across the College and is exploring how student and apprentice representatives could be more effectively involved in cross-college committees. One proposal was to establish sub-groups that would allow representatives to gather broader feedback from their peers and bring those insights to committee discussions. This approach is intended to make student engagement more meaningful and impactful.

As BT is nearing the end of his term, he is focusing on succession planning and working to identify and encourage candidates to stand for election before the end of the academic year. The goal is to ensure a smooth transition and continued student representation into the 2025/26 academic year.

The Board welcomed the report and expressed appreciation for the efforts to embed student voice more deeply into College governance and operations. The value of both formal and informal feedback mechanisms were acknowledged and continued innovation in student engagement was encouraged.

Resolution: The Board **received** and **noted** the contents of the Student & Apprentice Governor Report.

6. Performance Report

Discussion

M Greaves / J Richards / T Kidsley

An overview of the Performance Report was presented, which in addition to the key focus items discussed, also included a written update on Safeguarding, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion and Performance key risks and KPIs.

6.1. Curriculum Planning & Strategy Update

The College has completed the full cycle of curriculum moderation meetings, during which each curriculum area presented its plans for 2025/26. These meetings were structured to ensure alignment with financial sustainability, quality of education, and responsiveness to employer and learner needs. Each curriculum plan was endorsed by at least one employer, and curriculum leaders were required to map clear learner pathways from entry to progression and employment. This includes co-designing and co-delivering content, embedding real-world skills, and aligning with labour market needs. Key areas of focus include addressing skill shortages in engineering, construction, digital skills, and health and social care. There was also a strong focus on embedding green skills and sustainability across all curriculum areas.

The College is planning to expand its 16-18 study programmes, increasing enrolments from 2,947 to 3,018 learners. This growth is supported by improved internal progression, earlier intervention strategies and increased demographic. New T-Level pathways, including Business and Construction, are being introduced, with a focus on employability, digital skills, and green technologies.

Apprenticeship starts are forecasted at 510, with a focus on improving retention and achievement to enhance financial contribution. Growth is expected in engineering, construction, accountancy, and business services.

For Adult Skills, the College aims to deliver 100% of its devolved Adult Education Budget, although it anticipates a loss of flexibility to over-deliver. Provision will focus on digital inclusion, green skills (such as retrofit and EV charging), and employability. Uptake of adult learning loans remains low due to eligibility barriers, but employer-funded training is increasing.

Higher Education provision is expected to remain stable, with 184 students and over £1m in income. The College is shifting its focus toward Higher Technical Qualifications and short professional courses, in collaboration with regional partners to develop a Derbyshire Higher Skills Strategy.

As discussed under the Finance Report, the College is also leading a £900k Youth Guarantee Trailblazer project, in partnership with Derby, Burton, and South Derbyshire Colleges, to support NEET learners into education and employment.

The personal development curriculum, branded as “Empower,” is being delivered by development coaches rather than lecturers; this shift allows teaching staff to focus on their vocational specialisms while ensuring that students receive targeted support in areas such as citizenship, financial literacy, health and wellbeing, and employability. The curriculum is embedded across all programmes and tailored to meet the needs of both full-time students and apprentices, with green skills integrated into tutorial content. It is designed to prepare learners for life and work, supporting their progression into meaningful employment or further study.

Governor SL advised that he had attended 2 of the moderation meetings and provided assurance to the Board that the process was really robust, considering every element of the curriculum from both a financial and quality perspective.

Discussion was held around the apprenticeship levy and its implications for the College’s strategy.

The Board acknowledged that apprenticeship income remains volatile and difficult to predict. Although the college has seen some growth in apprenticeship numbers, national trends have been relatively flat. There was concern about potential changes to the apprenticeship levy, particularly if it is reformed to allow broader use beyond traditional apprenticeships. Such changes could lead employers to redirect funds toward shorter, bespoke training courses, which may impact the college’s apprenticeship income.

Governor LMCK highlighted that levy transfer opportunities are still available across Derbyshire and encouraged the College to continue accessing these funds. However, it was noted that some large employers are choosing to return unused levy funds to the government rather than transferring them to other providers, which represents a missed opportunity for the sector. In response, the College is preparing to adapt its curriculum offer. This includes planning for shorter, modular training programmes in areas such as retrofit, green technologies, and modern construction methods. These programmes could be funded through a reformed levy system if changes are implemented. The Board agreed that it is essential to remain agile and responsive to policy developments and employer needs. Governors supported continued monitoring of the apprenticeship landscape to ensure the College’s curriculum and funding strategies remain aligned with national priorities and local demand.

6.2. Predicted Outcomes 2024/25

Achievement rates for 16-18 learners are predicted to improve to 83.7%, which is above the 23/24 national average and demonstrates a 3-year improvement. Achievement of students aged 19+, whilst showing a 4.2% increase from 2022/23, is still predicted to be below the national average by 5.6%. Targeted interventions are planned for adult English, maths, and ESOL provision, particularly due to retention issues and some data not being captured in the ILR.

Significant improvements are expected for Apprenticeships in both Chesterfield (68.1%) and Derby (78.6%) against a national average of 62.3%.

These outcomes are part of a broader strategy to improve quality and retention, supported by curriculum redesign, investment in teaching and learning, and enhanced quality assurance processes.

CH: In relation to adult provision, the Chair noted that whilst many providers nationally run a significant amount of short provision, the College has largely focused on delivering entitlement-based, longer programmes. This strategic choice has helped the College secure a strong share of funding, particularly under the devolved adult education budget, with 97% of provision aligned to entitlements and delivered within the East Midlands. However, it was acknowledged that this approach may be contributing to lower retention and achievement rates in some adult learning areas, especially when compared to providers offering shorter, more flexible courses. It was suggested that the College should consider reviewing its curriculum offer to potentially include more short courses, particularly where they could improve outcomes and meet learner needs more effectively.

Resolution: The Board **received** and **noted** the contents of the Performance Report.

7. Finance & Corporate Services Report

Discussion

T Kidsley

The Assistant Principal Finance, IT & Estates (TK) presented the Finance & Corporate Services Report, highlighting the following key items for the attention of the Board. A full overview of the financial KPIs and key risks were shared as a written update within the report.

7.1. Management Accounts – Period 8

At Period 8 (P8), financial performance remains in line with the approved budget forecast, with an expected EBITDA of c.£2.5m, which reflects a stable financial position at year-end. The College has received confirmation of in-year growth funding, which has increased income by £500k. In addition, apprenticeship income is currently forecast to exceed the budget by £200k, with the potential to increase by a further £300-£400k depending on final completions and new starts. However, the Board were reassured that the College is taking a cautious approach and will only include confirmed income in its forecasts.

Pay costs have increased in P8 due to the implementation of higher employer National Insurance contributions and the uplift in the national minimum wage. These increases were anticipated and are being managed within the overall pay budget. Non-pay costs are currently tracking above budget; this overspend is attributed to increased student numbers, particularly in the 16-18 age group and strategic investments in equipment and materials to support curriculum delivery.

A significant financial pressure continues to be the reliance on agency staff, particularly in English and maths, where recruitment remains challenging. The College is also facing recruitment challenges in other hard-to-fill roles, which has led to increased use of recruitment agencies.

CH: The Board questioned the overspend in non-pay areas. Management responded by noting that increased student numbers, particularly in the 16–18 cohort, have driven up costs for materials, equipment, and support services. To address this, a new control mechanism has been introduced requiring any department that exceeds its budget to seek approval from the finance team before incurring further expenditure.

CH: The Board expressed concern about the continued reliance on agency staff, particularly in English and maths, due to recruitment difficulties, and questioned whether alternative strategies could be explored to reduce reliance on external recruitment. Management acknowledged this as a significant issue and confirmed that approximately £200k would be spent on agency staffing in these areas this year. Despite efforts, recruitment remains extremely challenging, with schools offering significantly higher salaries for similar roles. It was emphasised that delivering English and maths is a statutory requirement, and therefore, agency staff are being used as a necessary measure to ensure continuity of provision. This not only impacts the budget but also raises concerns about the consistency and quality of delivery. CA advised that the agencies typically charge between 15-20% of the annual salary and acknowledged the financial impact and the risk of staff leaving shortly after placement but reiterated that this approach is currently necessary to maintain staffing levels in critical areas.

There was also discussion about the impact of inflation on non-pay costs and whether the college could continue to absorb these pressures without compromising quality or staffing levels.

In terms of risks and opportunities, the College is awaiting confirmation on the continuation of how much of the increased employers national insurance will be covered through the employers national insurance grant. On the opportunity side, the College is optimistic about additional apprenticeship income and continued strong performance in adult skills delivery.

The Board acknowledged the importance of improving retention and achievement rates as a means of protecting income and reducing inefficiencies, and supported the College's efforts to strengthen financial controls and curriculum planning.

Resolution: The Board **approved** the Period 8 Management Accounts.

7.2. Year-End Position 2024/25

The College expects to meet its financial targets and maintain a strong financial health rating at year-end, with a forecasted EBITDA of c.£2.5m. This includes the benefit of £500k confirmed in-year growth funding, which has been factored into the forecast.

The FY24/25 risk adjusted educational EBITDA range is between £2.2 to £2.8m. As discussed under the Period 8 accounts, TK presented a visual overview of adjustments (in year growth, apprenticeship income, pay costs, non pay costs), as well as risks and opportunities (employers NI grant position, apprenticeships, agency and recruitment).

7.3. Financial Planning & Draft Budget 2025/26 Overview

The College's financial planning for 2025/26 has been guided by two overarching goals; maintaining strong EBITDA (targeting around £2.5m) and increasing cash reserves to ensure long-term financial sustainability amid sector-wide funding pressures. The plan is built around preparing for demographic growth, particularly in the 16-18 age group, and ensuring the College remains resilient in the face of inflation, funding uncertainty, and recruitment challenges.

The following key budget assumptions have been made:

- 16–18 Study Programme Growth: Student numbers are expected to increase from 2,947 to 3,018, driven by demographic trends and improved internal progression.
- Apprenticeship Income: Forecasted to increase to just under £5 million, with a cautious approach to recognising additional income until confirmed.
- Adult Skills Budget: Planned to be fully delivered but capped at 100% with no flexibility to over-deliver (previously allowed up to 110%).
- HE Income: Forecasted at just over £1 million, broadly in line with the current year.
- Advanced Learner Loans: Expected to decline due to restrictive eligibility criteria and low uptake.
- Pay Award: A 3% pay increase is included in the draft budget.
- Inflation: Assumed at 3% for planning purposes.

The financial strategy focuses on improving retention, achievement, and progression to protect income and enhance quality. The long-term financial model demonstrated to the Board as part of the strategic exercise at the start of the meeting, indicates that without intervention, the College's cash reserves could decline significantly at the turn of the decade.

7.4. Transformation Fund Update

Decision

The Department for Education (DfE) has approved the College's business case to refurbish North Block 1.

The refurbishment will be managed through the Transformation Sub-committee, which will oversee delivery and ensure compliance with DfE expectations. One of the key conditions set by the DfE is that the refurbished space must be used specifically for the student groups outlined in the original business case, namely, those in construction, engineering, and other workshop-heavy disciplines. The College has acknowledged this requirement and committed to monitoring student usage in the first year to ensure alignment with the agreed purpose. In addition, the College has secured approval for additional power infrastructure to be installed in the building. This upgrade is intended to future-proof the facility and support the technical demands of modern vocational training.

In relation to the new build, TK reported that the project is progressing well, with 43 float days as of 25/4/25 and no reported issues along the critical path. TK expressed optimism about the timeline and delivery, noting that the refurbishment will significantly enhance the College's capacity to deliver high-quality, industry-relevant training.

7.5. Financial Regulations

Decision

The Financial Regulations were shared with the Board for review and approval. TK advised that there had been no changes since the previous update in June 2024 following internal audit.

Resolution: The Board **approved** the updated Financial Regulations, as recommended by the F&CS Committee.

Resolution: The Board **received** and **noted** the contents of the Finance & Corporate Services Report.

7.6. Youth Guarantee Pilot - Empowering Futures

Decision

The Board was given an update on the Youth Guarantee Pilot, a government-funded trailblazer initiative designed to support young people who are not currently in education, employment, or training (NEET). This initiative forms part of the national "Get Britain Working" white paper.

The College submitted a successful bid to deliver the pilot within the East Midlands Combined Authority (EMCA) region and has been awarded a total of £900k in funding to lead the project. The College will act as the lead partner and purse holder, delivering 50% of the outcomes, with the remaining 50% split between Burton and South Derbyshire College and Derby College. The main delivery hub will be based at West Studios, with additional outreach through the Chesterfield town centre Youth Hub to enhance accessibility and outreach.

The Board provided full support and approval for the College to proceed with the implementation and coordination of the Youth Guarantee Pilot in collaboration with its partner colleges.

Resolution: The Board **approved** the signing the Youth Guarantee Trailblazer contract.

8. Corporate Report

Discussion

J Richards

The Principal (JR) presented the Corporate Report, which in addition to the key areas discussed below, included a written update on the National Picture (including Government Policy & Legislation), Strategic Relationships & Events, People & Culture, Health & Safety, in-year KPI progress and Corporate key risks.

8.1. Annual Accountability Statement

JR presented the 2025 Accountability Agreement, which aligns with the College's strategic plan and the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP). The statement is structured around the College's 5 strategic pillars (the "5Ps") and is intended to serve as both a compliance document and a practical tool for internal planning and performance reviews. An overview of the key objectives outlined within the statement was provided.

The Board expressed strong support for the strategic alignment and approach towards practical application. Discussion was held around the importance of employer engagement, particularly in identifying higher technical qualifications (HTQs) that align with local workforce needs. As part of the ambassadorial role, governors with an employment focus were encouraged to contribute ideas from their sectors to support the development of HTQs and other strategic initiatives.

Resolution: The Board **approved** the Annual Accountability Statement.

9. Governance Report

Information

J Shore

The Head of Governance (JS) presented the Governance Report which, in addition to the key items highlighted for information and discussion, included a standing item update for meeting attendance, ratified committee minutes and policies approved at committee-level. The Board were also advised that no written resolutions or Chair's action on its behalf had been taken since the previous meeting.

9.1. Stakeholder Engagement / College Events

Governors were reminded to review the list of upcoming college events included in the report and to confirm their attendance at any of the events scheduled for the remainder of the term. It was noted that the date of the Staff and Student Awards has been changed to Monday 30 June.

Governors were reminded to notify the HoG of any stakeholder engagement undertaken in order for the governor activity log to be updated accordingly.

9.2. Link Governor Engagement

The summer term link governor visit was held on 8 May, with 5 governors in attendance. The feedback received from governors and staff was positive and the individual Link Governor reports were shared with the Board for review.

The governors who attended expressed appreciation for the opportunity to engage directly with staff and students.

Resolution: The Board **received** and **noted** the contents of the Governance Report.

9.3. Annual Governor Appraisals

As part of the governance self-assessment review (GSAR) process for 2024/25, all governors will be invited to take part in an annual appraisal with the Chair. The respective Chairs of Committees will also conduct appraisals with the co-opted governors. The HoG will coordinate availability and set up the meetings for July. As in previous years, a self-assessment/personal reflection pro-forma will also be issued for prior completion.

Feedback from the appraisals will be reviewed by the Governance & Search Committee in an anonymised form and considered as part of the GSAR.

10. Statutory Reporting & Lead Governor Reports

Information

Lead Governor Reports for Health & Safety and Digital were shared with the Board within the meeting pack. There were no updates for Safeguarding, EDI, SEND or Green Skills. An update from the Green Skills Committee will be shared at the next meeting.

The HoG reminded the Board that all Link Governor and Lead Governor feedback is shared on the portal.

Resolution: The Board **received** the Lead Governor Reports and **noted** the Statutory Reporting updates.

10.1. Green Skills Pledges

Discussion

L Mycroft / M Greaves

As part of the Corporation's commitment to the green skills agenda, governors were invited to submit individual green skills pledges. These pledges will contribute to the college's whole-institution sustainability plan and support its application for a Green Gown Award.

Action: Governors to consider and submit a green skills pledge to undertake over the next year.

11. Date of Next Meeting - 2 July 2025

Information