

Minutes of Corporation Board – Part 1 2 July 2025

Board Members:

B Kaczmarczyk (Chair)	H Freeman
N Beldham (Staff Governor – Support)	J Hemper
C Brown	S Martin-Standley
J Brunt	S Lindeman
J Croot	L McKenzie
P Dewhurst	L Mycroft (Vice Chair)
J Evans	L Needham (Staff Governor – Curriculum)
M Fitzclark (Apprentice Governor)	J Richards (Principal and CEO)

Attendees:

J Shore (Head of Governance)	C Godfrey (Deputy Principal)
C Acaster (AP People & Culture)	T Kidsley (AP Finance, IT & Estates)
J Down (AP Student Experience & Wellbeing)	M Greaves (AP Teaching, Learning & Quality Improvement)

Apologies: B Turner (Student Governor), J Hemper, J Brunt, J Croot, L McKenzie

CH = Challenge

- 1/2425 Declarations of Interest
Members were reminded of the need to disclose an interest in any item of business to be considered at the meeting. Nothing was declared for Part 1.
- 2/2425 Chair’s Announcement
The Chair (BK) formally announced his intention to retire from the role at the end of March 2026, at which point he will have been a member of the Board since 2014; marking 12 years of service and 5 years as Chair. He thanked the Board for their support during his tenure.
- The Head of Governance (JS) advised that the process for appointing a new Chair would commence in the new academic year and succession planning would be discussed with all governors as part of their annual appraisals in July. The 6-month notice period provided by BK, in line with the Governor Recruitment & Re-appointment Policy, will allow for effective mentoring and handover for a smooth transition.
- 3/2425 Strategic Focus
Due to technical issues which delayed the start of the meeting, it was agreed that the strategic focus item for Funding Provision would be deferred.
- 4/2425 Minutes of the Previous Meeting & Matters Arising
The Part 1 minutes of the previous Corporation Board meetings held 21 May 2025 were reviewed and agreed as a true and accurate record. The review of confidential minutes is recorded under Part 2.
- 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 – 2.7.25*)
- Resolution:** The Board **approved** the non-confidential minutes (Part 1) of the previous meeting.
- 5/2425 Student & Apprentice Governor Report
The Apprentice Governor (MF) and Assistant Principal Student Experience & Wellbeing (JD) provided an overview of the Student & Apprentice Governor Report.
- The Board was informed that a full consultation had been conducted on the 8 strands of the personal development curriculum with both students and apprentices. The consultation with apprentices had closed, and the results would be reviewed by a working group led by MG.
- CH: The Board queried the response rate from apprentices to the survey. MF advised that the numbers were not immediately available but acknowledged that response rates were a concern and that new engagement strategies were being considered.

Action: Feedback from the consultation for the personal development curriculum to be shared with the Board following review by the Working Group.

The Board was updated on efforts to strengthen student voice activities for the next year, including a review of the Students' Union constitution. JD explained the challenges of establishing a vibrant Students' Union in a College setting and outlined various strategies to engage students and apprentices, including networking opportunities with other colleges, and formalising their involvement in committees and consultation activities.

On behalf of the Board, the chair thanked the Student and Apprentice Governors, as well as JD/MG, for their work and the update provided.

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

6/2425

Performance Report

(a) Performance Data

The Deputy Principal (CG) and Assistant Principal Teaching, Learning & Quality Improvement (MG) presented an overview of the Performance Report, focusing on attendance, retention, and predicted achievement. It was noted that there had been no significant changes since the last report and CG highlighted that overall attendance average was above the sector average and English and maths attendance was not far from the national average, however, it was acknowledged that there was still room for improvement, particularly in adult education.

CH: The Board queried whether it was possible to benchmark attendance against similar-sized FE colleges nationally to allow for a more meaningful comparison. CG advised that while some data is available, it is not comprehensive due to the voluntary nature of data submission by colleges. Since attendance data does not form part of the Individualised Learner Record (ILR), there is no option to filter by college size. CG confirmed that the College's attendance average was about 85.1%, which is above the average provided by the AOC, but unfortunately, there is no way to filter this data by institution size. Anecdotal evidence has also indicated that the College's English and maths attendance was higher than what was being seen elsewhere. However, there is no more formal benchmarking available at this stage. It was further noted that the College could pay for benchmarking data from the ILR via Tribal, but this would incur a cost to which CG expressed reservations about as different colleges record attendance in different ways, making comparisons unreliable. PD commented that in the Higher Education sector, such benchmarking is common practice but he accepted the limitations within the FE sector.

CG highlighted that there is now less reliance on attendance as a measure of quality of education, with progress and achievement being seen as a more important metric and key indicators of success. It was acknowledged that many students face challenges that affect their attendance and that independent study and remote work are becoming increasingly common.

CH: In relation to adult attendance rates, the Board queried why there was no breakdown provided between short and long courses. CG advised short courses have higher attendance rates, while long courses face more challenges due to the life commitments and complexities of adult learners.

CH: The Board raised a challenge regarding adult attendance, noting that while short course adults were performing well, adult attendance overall had been a consistent issue. Senior Managers were asked whether there were any early thoughts on why this was the case. CG advised that unfortunately, the dashboard did not allow filtering by short and long courses but estimated that short courses had very high attendance at around 96% and long courses were closer to 85%. It was explained that short courses only required attendance for 3-4 weeks, which contributed to the higher rate and that adults often faced more barriers to attendance, such as childcare and economic pressures.

The Board requested more detailed reporting and breakdown of the data in the future and CG confirmed that work was underway to provide this in the new academic year. **Action: CG**

(b) Satisfaction Survey

The end-of-year satisfaction survey was presented for information within the report. MG acknowledged that the current approach was not working effectively, as many students saw it as a tick-box exercise and the data was not helping to drive improvement. The College has planned for a total revamp of the student voice and satisfaction survey process over the summer. PD suggested alternative approaches, such as sending a single question per day via mobile phones, to increase response rates. MG thanked PD for this suggestion and agreed that it would be considered by the working group reviewing the process. Discussion around student incentive for completion was also held.

(c) Teaching & Learning Update

An end-of-year update for teaching and learning was provided within the report and the board commended the candour of the commentary provided, however, the following challenges were raised and discussed.

CH: The Board expressed concerns around some of the commentary within the report specifically relating to tutor awareness of student needs and the strategies in place for this. MG explained that the curriculum review process had targeted areas for development and that the evaluation had identified areas needing which required improvement. It was clarified that the issue referenced was related to specific pockets rather than widespread issues. The College is investing a new quality structure to provide tailored support and development for staff, including learning walks and individualised development.

CH: The Board expressed disappointment that “programme planning is not consistent across College”, querying what the reasons were for a few areas “not effectively planning the whole programme of study cohesively”. MG clarified that curriculum planning was strong overall but that holistic programme planning, ensuring that different elements such as English skills were integrated across assignment, could be improved in some areas. The College is working to enhance this through development activities and increased collaboration between teams.

CB withdrew from the meeting.

(d) English & Math Strategy

CG provided an update on the English and Math Strategy, noting that while progress was being made, the journey was ongoing and challenging, with more students are arriving at College with lower grades and greater needs for access arrangements. The strategy has been enhanced, and some positive trends were emerging, such as improved maths exam attendance (up by 2.4%), although English exam attendance had declined slightly (down by 0.9%). Attendance and retention were broadly in line with national averages, and the College was seeing strong performance in these areas.

The 3 main priorities of the strategy were emphasised as focusing on teaching to the gaps rather than blanket delivery, ensuring that instruction is tailored to address the specific needs and weaknesses of students. This approach aims to improve overall student performance; continuing to embed English and maths across the curriculum. This involves integrating these subjects into various vocational and academic programs to reinforce their importance and relevance; and maintaining an English and math-first mentality, prioritising these subjects in timetabling and resource allocation. This approach ensures that students receive the necessary support and instruction to succeed in these critical areas.

CH: The Board questioned whether group sizes were appropriate for different levels and whether the strategy addressed this. CG explained that due to the devolved model, group sizes were determined by the number of students in each class, with functional skills groups always being smaller. The College aimed for an average maximum group size of 15 for GCSE classes, with some groups being smaller. It was acknowledged that the strategy did not explicitly address group sizes but that appropriate support was provided where needed. The Board noted that Ofsted often comments on standardised group sizes not reflecting different student needs and inspectors expect to see smaller group sizes for lower-level students, and that appropriate use of learning support is important. CG agreed, noting that the College had not pushed for large class sizes and had invested in staffing to allow for smaller groups where appropriate.

The College’s outward-looking approach was also highlighted, including participation in mastery specialist programmes and leveraging technology such as Century. The College was in the third year of using Century, with a new strategy in place to drive further impact.

The report concluded with a summary of actions being taken to improve teaching quality, student engagement, and the effectiveness of the strategy. The Board expressed support for the direction of travel, three-pronged approach and the focus on key priorities.

(e) Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Update
EDI Policy

The Assistant Principal for Student Experience & Wellbeing (JD) presented the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Policy for approval, providing an overview of updates which had been reviewed by the EDI Committee.

Key updates included expanding the focus on mental health, social deprivation, and inclusion. These updates aim to address the evolving needs of students and staff. Discussion was held around the importance of equity and the need for ongoing training and development.

Resolution: The Board **approved** the updated EDI Policy.

Annual EDI Statement

JD presented the Annual EDI Statement for Board approval of publication on the College website. The statement has been reviewed and updated with input from the EDI Committee and sets out the College’s objectives for the next 3 years.

Resolution: The Board **approved** the Annual EDI Statement and its publication on the College website.

(f) Safeguarding Update

A safeguarding update, including key information around reporting safeguarding concerns, training and resources and government guidance was provided within the report for governor information.

(g) Key Performance Indicators – Quality

A full summary of in-year performance against the 24/25 Quality targets was provided within the report.

(h) Key Risks - Performance

An overview of the Performance key risks was provided within the report, including behaviours, performance outcomes and career aspirations and future stakeholder and economic need.

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

7/2425

Finance & Corporate Services Report

The Assistant Principal Finance, IT & Estates (TK) presented the Finance & Corporate Services Report, highlighting the following key focus items for the Board's attention.

(a) Period 10 and Period 9 Management Accounts

The Board was provided with a high-level overview of the P10 management accounts. TK explained that there had been no significant changes from the P9 accounts, which had already been scrutinised and recommended for approval by the Finance & Corporate Services (F&CS) Committee on 19/6/25.

The current financial forecast was outlined, with the College forecasting an educational EBITDA outturn of £2.5m against a budget of £1.9m. The importance of maintaining and growing the EBITDA margin was emphasised, especially in light of increased student and apprenticeship numbers. At present, the EBITDA margin stood at approximately 1.4%. The pay-to-income ratio was reported to be around 66.31%, which was considered satisfactory. The FE Commissioner's recommendation remains at 65%, but it was noted that as long as the College continues to contribute decent levels of educational EBITDA and educational value, the current ratio is acceptable.

The Board was informed that the College was forecasting outstanding financial health for the year, which is a year ahead of the previous 3-year plan. This is subject to capital movement and the potential to over-deliver on apprenticeships by an additional £200k remains. The reforecast was described as conservative, with risk-adjusted educational EBITDA ranges between £2.2m and £2.7m, and the forecast was pitched at £2.45m.

CH: The Board challenged the reliability of the pay-to-income ratio target, given the pressures from recent pay awards and the likelihood of further increases. TK noted that the FE Commissioner's target of 65% had not changed in many years, despite significant changes in the sector, including a 6.5% pay award that was only partially funded. The Board questioned how the College could realistically maintain this ratio in the face of rising costs and union demands, with the starting point for next year's negotiations at 10%. TK highlighted the importance of maintaining discipline so that any extra income from increased student numbers is not immediately absorbed by increased costs. The Board was reassured that the College's financial strategy is working, as evidenced by the increasing number of cash days and the improvement in financial health compared to 2 years ago.

The Board was also informed that the College is forecasting to finish the year with just over £4m in cash, equating to around 50 cash days (5-6 weeks). Whilst this is a considerable improvement, it was acknowledged that this is still not a large reserve for a business of the College's size. The 3-year financial plan aims to build on this position and further strengthen the College's cash reserves.

CH: A challenge was raised regarding the risks associated with sudden increases in costs, such as energy prices. The Board asked how the College would manage if there were unexpected shocks to the system. TK acknowledged that while some good deals had been negotiated, these would eventually expire, and any sudden increases in costs would be a risk to the financial plan. This was identified as one of the key risks being monitored.

Resolution: The Board **approved** the Period 9 and Period 10 Management Accounts.

(b) Budget 2025/26 and 3 Year-Financial Plan

TK presented a high-level overview of the 3-year financial plan, which aims to maintain a minimum £2.5m EBITDA each year, keep the staff-to-income ratio between 67% and 68%, and increase cash reserves by £700k per year. The plan projects outstanding financial health across all years, with a closing balance of £6.2m at the end of the period.

The main strategic priorities were outlined, including capitalising on demographic opportunities, maintaining financial discipline, increasing conversion, retention, achievement, and progression rates, and ensuring curriculum efficiency and outcomes. The plan also highlighted the importance of aligning classroom and work-based learning, preparing for future demographic decline, and tracking student destinations.

TK emphasised the importance of maintaining and growing the EBITDA margin to ensure the financial health of the organisation. This involves careful planning and discipline in managing both income and expenses. The plan includes strategies to build financial resilience, such as increasing cash reserves and ensuring a strong balance sheet; this approach

aims to prepare the College for potential economic uncertainties. Diversifying income sources is also a key component of the plan; this includes developing commercial training offers and reducing reliance on government funding, which currently accounts for 85% of income, to create a more sustainable financial model. The plan will be implemented with a focus on achieving the outlined financial goals. Scenario assumption ranges were shared and discussed with the Board, as requested by the F&CS Committee.

CH: A challenge was raised regarding the tracking of student destinations, particularly for those leaving at Level 2 or 3. The Board asked how the College would facilitate and monitor progression into employment or further training, and whether incentives could be offered to improve tracking. The College responded that the Youth Guarantee Trailblazer funding now allows for continued support of leavers, including assigning progression coaches to assist with interview skills, CV writing, and apprenticeships. The Board was informed that a destination survey would be launched, with analysis by sector, age, and level to be reported at a future board meeting.

Resolution: The Board **approved** the 3-year Financial Plan.

LN withdrew from the meeting.

(c) **Capital Investment**

A proposal was made within the Financial Plan to increase capital expenditure by 36% to £1.5 million. This includes urgent investment in estates and curriculum areas, as well as a PA system which was discussed in detail with the Board.

PA System

TK presented a proposal to invest £300k in a tannoy system across the College estate. The system would be used primarily for emergency communications, including lockdowns, but could also serve broader communication purposes such as weather-related closures or general announcements adding further value beyond safety. The proposal was previously discussed by the Finance & Corporate Services Committee but brought to the Board for approval due to the significant cost and its inclusion in the capital investment plan.

CH: The Board discussed the merits and risks of this investment and governors expressed concern about the high cost of the system, questioning whether it was proportionate to the risk and the opportunity cost of diverting funds from curriculum investment. TK advised that the counterterrorism policing team had recommended this type of system as best practice for dynamic, site-wide emergency communication. It was also clarified that the system would be wired, not wireless, to ensure reliability and reduce vulnerability to cyber threats.

The reputational risk of not acting was highlighted and discussed, especially if an incident occurred and it was revealed that the Board had declined to invest in a recommended safety measure.

The possibility of phased implementation based on risk was debated but ultimately it was agreed that this could leave high-risk areas exposed and that it should be fully implemented. The Staff Governor supported the proposal, noting that relying solely on mobile phones would not be sufficient in all areas of the campus.

The Chair sought reassurance that a fixed price would be obtained to avoid cost overruns and that provisional sums would be minimised, which was confirmed by TK.

It was agreed that the investment would be benchmarked against similar institutions to provide further assurance to governors.

Action: SLT to proceed with procurement of a fixed price contract and implementation of the tannoy system.

Action: Benchmarking data to be shared with governors for assurance.

Resolution: The Board **approved** a maximum of £300k for a tannoy system implementation across the full estate.

Transformation Fund Project

An update on the Transformation Fund project and the work of the Transformation Fund Sub-Committee was provided within the report.

The College has received approval from the Department for Education (DfE) to retain North Block 1 and must now seek new planning permissions, with a meeting scheduled for this. TK explained that the original plans had been approved on the basis that the College would construct a new building and remove an existing block. However, since the decision had been made to retain the block, new permissions were required.

It was also confirmed that the new build project was progressing well, with a meeting held on site that day. The project remained on target for completion by 18/12/25, and the Board was informed that the timeline was being closely monitored to ensure alignment with all funding deadlines.

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

8/2425 Corporate Report

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 and People & Culture.

(a) Technical Excellence Colleges - Construction

The Board were informed that the College had submitted its endorsement to Derby College, which is acting as the lead college for the Construction Excellence College bid. This endorsement was made in conjunction with other colleges and was supported by the East Midlands Colleges Alliance (EMCA). JR confirmed that the Board would be kept updated on the outcome of the bid.

(b) Key Performance Indicators – 2025/26

The proposed Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the 2025/26 academic year were shared for approval by the Board. Governors were referred to the appendix within the report, which included the proposed KPIs against the previous year's targets. JR explained that the updated KPI sheet showed current progress, with most indicators now marked as green, reflecting strong performance. It was noted that the new KPIs had been set to address any shortfalls against national averages and to ensure continuous improvement.

The addition of a new KPI under the "People" category (PEO11) was highlighted, which tracks the number of staff who have secured promotions or career development opportunities within the organisation. JR explained that this addition was made following a recommendation made by the Board. Analysis showed that 7–8% of staff had achieved promotions or new roles during the current academic year, which emphasises the College's commitment to developing its own staff.

It was also explained that, for the first time, the retention KPI would include 3 milestones throughout the year (December, March, and end-of-year) rather than just an end-of-year target. This change would allow for more meaningful monitoring and timely interventions to support student retention.

The new KPIs will be issued to teams and incorporated into Performance Development Review (PDR) targets for the next year.

Resolution: The Board **approved** the KPIs for 2025/25.

Key Performance Indicators – In Year

The current KPI position was shared with the Board within the report, including commentary against each target. As at July 2025, the KPI achievement was rag rated as 88% green, 9% amber and 3% red.

Green Skills / FE Climate Roadmap Update

A written updated on Green Skills and Progress with the Climate Roadmap was provided within the Corporate Report.

The Green Skills Lead Governor also provided the Board with a verbal update at the meeting under Statutory Reporting below.

Key Risks – Corporate

An overview of the key corporate risks and mitigations was provided within the report for information.

Health & Safety Update

A report from the new Safety, Health and Environment Manager was shared with the Board for information. The recommendations included in the report will be developed into the Health & Safety Business Plan for implementation in the new academic year.

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

9/2425 Governance Report

The Head of Governance (JS) presented the Governance Report which, in addition to the key items highlighted below, included an update on membership and recruitment, annual meeting schedule and business cycle for 2025/26, link governor engagement, curriculum validation meetings, meeting attendance, policies approved at Committee-level, ratified Committee minutes and the latest Data Protection Report presented to Audit Committee.

(a) Governance Self-Assessment Process 2024/25

Governance QIP 2024/25 – Year End Review

The Governance Quality Improvement Plan (GQIP) for 2024/25 has been updated against the actions and associated RAG ratings at year-end and was reviewed by the Governance & Search Committee on 24/6/25. Strong progress has been made with the vast major of actions complete. A small number of actions remain in progress or are appropriately scheduled for review and/or completion in the next academic year. Any outstanding actions will be carried forward into the 2025/26 GQIP.

AoC Code of Good Governance – Self-Assessment Review

The revised AoC Code of Good Governance was adopted by the Board for implementation from September 2024. The HoG undertook a self-assessment review against the Code's 6 fundamental pillars of effective governance, which was shared and discussed with the Governance & Search Committee on 24/6/25 for further input. The self-assessment review was shared with the Board for approval and will be incorporated as an evidence document within the Governance Self-Assessment Report for 2024/25.

Resolution: The Board **approved** the self-assessment review against the AoC's new Code of Good Governance.

Annual Appraisals

Information was also shared with the Board regarding the annual governor appraisal meetings and the Independent Chair's appraisal.

(b) Instruments & Articles and Standing Orders

As part of the 3-yearly review cycle, the Corporation's Instruments and Articles and Standing Orders have been reviewed and updated versions were presented to the Board for approval. Amendments were made following recommendations from the External Board Review (EBR) and recent guidance from the Department for Education (DfE), which highlighted certain clauses that are now considered outdated.

A summary of the specific changes was provided within the report, which included updates to terminology, removal of obsolete references, and alignment with current regulatory expectations. The Board discussed the proposed amendments and unanimously approved them.

The updated Instruments & Articles and Standing Orders will be published on the College website in the new format to ensure transparency and compliance.

Resolution: The Board **approved** the updated Instruments & Articles and Standing Orders, as recommended by the G&S Committee and in line with DfE guidance

(c) Remuneration Committee Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference for the Remuneration Committee were reviewed at the committee's last meeting. However, due to a changeover in board administration, these terms had not yet received formal approval from the full board. The Head of Governance explained that the terms of reference had been updated to reflect current best practice and committee responsibilities.

Resolution: The Board **approved** the Terms of Reference for the Remuneration Committee.

(d) Department for Education Updates

An update on recent communications from the Department for Education (DfE) was provided within the report, including information on updated financial benchmarks, the latest version of the College Financial Handbook and changes to governance requirements. All relevant documents were included in the meeting pack for governors' reference.

(e) Chair's Action and Written Resolutions

JS confirmed that there had been no Chair's Action or Written Resolutions made by the Board since the previous meeting.

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

10/2425

Statutory Reporting & Lead Governor Updates

Verbal updates were provided on statutory reporting areas, including safeguarding, health and safety, equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The board also received lead governor reports on green skills and digital strategy, which were included in the meeting pack. These reports were commended for their thoroughness and for highlighting key areas of progress and ongoing challenges.

Green Skills

The Vice Chair (LMY), who is the Green Skills Lead Governor provided the Board with a verbal update on the Green Skills Strategy Group, which has completed its first year and has achieved "emerging" status on the Climate Action Roadmap. The group includes a wide range of representatives from across the college.

LMY explained that the College is ahead of the curve in estates, which is notable given the challenges posed by the built environment, and is performing strongly in partnerships. However, it was acknowledged that teaching, learning, and research were areas for further development, largely due to long-term staff absence. LMY reassured the Board that the strategy group now mitigates this gap and has plans to address it. In terms of leadership and governance, progress is steady but further progress is dependent on the findings of the baseline carbon footprint, which will inform future decisions.

The priorities for the coming year include implementing carbon literacy training which is currently holding the College back.

LMY also highlighted several individual green projects that have been successful and confirmed that the strategy group is working to bring these together into a more cohesive framework. In relation to awards, the College has submitted 2 Green Gown Award applications, and a student representative has been nominated for a Beacon Award.

The Board will receive a newsletter update at each meeting to track progress and maintain visibility of the strategy's development.

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

11/2425 Confidential Items

Confidential items are minuted separately under Part 2.

12/2425 Date of Next Meeting

24 September 2025 - Mandatory Safeguarding & Prevent Training (*online*)

22 October 2025 – Corporation Board

The Chair and Principal thanked all governors and staff for their work during the year and wished everyone a good summer break.

The meeting concluded.