

**THE FURTHER EDUCATION CORPORATION OF MIDDLESBROUGH COLLEGE
CONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE GOVERNING BODY STRATEGIC PLANNING DAY 11 MAY 2024**

PRESENT: R Davies (CG and Chair), R Anderson (CG), S Brown (CO), D Budd (CO), J Castor (CG), Z Lewis (Principal/Chief Executive), D Lusardi (CG), A Hanif (CO), P Lynn (CG), M McClintock (CG), A Pajura-Jaszczak (Staff Gov), D Still (Staff Gov), P Sharp (CG), J Tait (CG), L Woods (CG), I Wright (CG).

OFFICERS A Adamson (V), Z Foster (Clerk), S Marshall (VP); B Robinson (DP), O Rodley (VP), M Russell (VP).

IN ATTENDANCE: J Barwell (AP), P Bland (Project Manager), P Blewitt (AP), T Pierce (Group Dir), P Stone (Dir of HE), P Watt (AP).

KEY: CG College Governor CO Co-opted Governor
DP Deputy Principal VP Vice Principal
Clerk to the Corporation AP Assistant Principal

1. Tour of new TTE Building

P Bland and P Blewitt led a tour of the new TTE building.

2. Apologies for Absence

I Anwar (CG), M Cameron (Student Gov), C Cannon (CO), A Coleman-Cooke (CO), T Edcombe (Student Gov), M King (CG), M Lamb (CG), S Lane (CG), S Mirsalehi (CG), K Parkinson (VP), S Shepherd (CO), I Wallace (CG).

3. Declarations of Interest – R Anderson in respect of LSIPs; R Davies in respect of Open University (Item 6.1).

4. Strategic Overview

Z Lewis gave a general overview to the session. She also shared M Russell's new job news and recruitment plans in place for his replacement. Governors gave their congratulations.

Z Lewis then detailed the background to the mission of the College and reminded governors of the local context (Tees Valley) generally, in relation to educational attainment of young people (v all workers) and comparative employment rates (England, NE and Tees Valley).

Governors' questions and discussion included: student progress/attendance within the Tees Valley (and wider North East); and the recent jump in employment rates for 2023 (and accuracy of this compared with previous years i.e. use of different criteria).

Z Lewis then outlined the College response to the Tees Valley through the College's curriculum intent and increased delivery in local sector priority areas, and related strategic investments leading to increased high sustained destinations for students.

Z Lewis gave a brief appraisal of the current strategic plan and key elements and related strategies (Taking Teaching Higher and Helping our People Thrive). It was noted that the current strategic plan was due to end July 2025.

Progress against all of the elements of the Strategic Plan were detailed including:

Our Partners – the positive impact of responding to meeting local need, strong collaboration education partners (both local and national) and College's positive response to meeting Government priorities.

Our Resilience – which was underpinned by strong governance, strong quality assurance and good financial health . providing a good basis for a key strategic challenges moving forward.

Our Team – recruitment and retention strategies (including use of Government incentives such as Taking Teacher Further); development and support (including cpd; and upcoming IIP accreditation) and communication, consultation and celebration activities for the staff community were highlighted.

Z Lewis also updated in relation to the complexities in relation to the national pay award discussions against a lack of national standard for pay in FE .

Our Community – A Adamson outlined the supportive and inclusive environment, drawing on safeguarding and the recent Careers Beacon award; enrichment and development opportunities for students (noting the particular success of social action groups and recent competitions) and student voice.

Our Ambition – O Rodley highlighted work within the various aspects including: the impact of the Taking Teaching Higher strategy; best practice activities (including How2; evidence based practice etc); visible leaders and performance dashboards; and positive destinations for students.

Our Commitment – B Robinson drew out the various strands of supporting employers with their workforce development needs including: the strength of employer relationships; mechanisms to develop work ready skills; and the adaptation of the provision to best suit the employer market (including advisory boards, bespoke programmes and most recently scholarships which P Blewitt outlined).

External recognition of this commitment was shown through the strong skills judgement in the recent Ofsted report (of which only approx. 20% of colleges gained across the UK).

Sector Support - Z Lewis then highlighted support that the College was extending to the sector which included: giving support to colleges with 'requires improvement' gradings in partnership with the AoC; Apprenticeship best practice (FEC); regional support; through the College Collective; Project S pilot (of which greater detail was given) and via recent international visits (most recently Germany).

Meeting Learner and Labour Market Needs – B Robinson outlined the various ways the College was meeting stakeholder needs across a number of areas such as t IoT; LSIP; Microsoft Showcase College status. He highlighted the project work across the key priority areas as a result of the LSIF which included the immersive health suite; the TTE new build for construction (retrofit) and engineering; and the expansion of the Adult provision with a new centre (likely from 2026).

Capital and Cash – M Russell gave a comprehensive account of the cash challenges over time which would affect the College – specifically the effects of increased number of school leavers and need to invest to manage the growth in learners and bigger programmes against the restrictions under reclassification and the FE commissioner's advised benchmark of 30 days cash buffer.

He confirmed that the current three year budget plan would ensure that by the end of the plan the cash buffer was achievable. The prudent plan was due to be considered by the Governing Body at its July meeting.

Attention was also drawn to some future national options may include annual capital allocations and more flexible borrowing arrangements.

5. Strategic Planning Workshop Part 1

5.1 FE+ Curriculum Review Outcomes

Z Lewis reminded governors of the annual accountability statement requirements and of a tri annual local curriculum review in collaboration with other local providers. The curriculum review requirement had now been updated – no longer having to be in collaboration with other colleges and their governors. FE+ (the Tees Valley consortium of 5 colleges) had determined to keep this in as good practice and the group met (principal and two governors from each) for a workshop to map this out and come to some key agreed outcomes and actions.

Z Lewis, R Davies and P Lynn reported positively on the collaborative nature of the workshop and of a subsequent AoC Principals and Chairs meeting. They updated Governors on the agreed outcomes and further considerations which were evidenced in the FE+ Tees Valley Colleges Curriculum Review 2024 and the College's Accountability Statement (both shared with governors).

There was some discussion on the conclusions from the meetings including encouragement of an increased role by Governing Bodies in relation to local lobbying on key issues.

5.2 Annual Accountability Statement

The draft statement for 2024-2025 had been shared ahead of the meeting. Z Lewis confirmed that all of the colleges within the FE+ cohort would have the agreed actions from the curriculum review stated within their accountability statements. She also highlighted p13-14 which specified the targets for 2024-2025 which would be mapped and reported on at every Governing Body meeting in the forthcoming year.

R Anderson updated Governors on the collaborative approach within the Tees Valley area under the LSIP.

Clarification was given regarding the corresponding graphs within the documents, with Z Lewis also updating on the differences between the College matching against priorities against the wider collective's matching.

Clarification was also given in relation to the intention for digital skills with it being confirmed that this was two fold – one general for all and the other specialist digital skills.

After consideration, the Governing Body approved the Annual Accountability Statement 2024-2025

Post meeting note: Using Chair's action, the Chair and Vice Chair have made minor amendments to the FE+ Statement shared within the Accountability Statement approved, removing the highlighted risks. These remain in place within the FE+ Curriculum Review document (which is linked to the Accountability Statement).

6. Strategic Planning Part 2

6.1 Higher Education Strategy

P Stone gave an overview of the item which was split into four distinct areas for discussion and decision. He tabled the full set of information for all governors at the meeting.

HE Governance Proposal – P Stone detailed the complex nature of operating HE activities within the FE environment. He outlined the current structure including the recent addition of the Governing Body's HE Committee and also the role of the Academic Board within the current structure which had been queried by both the OfS and within the recent Open University (OU) revalidation process.

The proposed change to the model would allow for a simpler reporting system which would also adhere to the requirements of both the OfS and OU more easily. In essence, this would involve removal of reporting to both CMT and Curriculum and Standards (though the Director of HE would still attend Curriculum and Standards meetings as HE cut across all faculties). The Academic Board would have oversight of anything to do with the delivery of HE in the College with accountability and resourcing decisions confirmed by SLT. The HE Committee would give an oversight and governance perspective and report directly to the Governing Body.

Greater detail of the two distinct strands of the Academic Board were highlighted (with a focus on general business and quality assurance at alternate meetings of which there would be three of each per year). Furthermore, an additional meeting of the HE Committee was proposed to allow for a greater quality assurance focus (these being in December and April to fit in with the HE quality cycle).

Discussion followed on the proposal with acknowledgement that this did present a better streamlined approach overall and would fit in with the OfS compliance model. It was also considered that HE would still be taken in the round within the wider Curriculum and Standards Committee discussions as the model for HE was faculty based. The set up of the HE Committee with the Chair of Curriculum and Standards Committee being ex-officio and with another member sitting on both Committees further ensured integration of HE.

Governors then agreed to the following recommendation:

- Approval of the revised HE Governance Structure and Meeting Schedule to take effect from September 2024

Action - R Davies asked the Audit and Risk Committee to consider the success of the HE Governance proposal in around 18 months time.

HE Fee and Delivery Model Review

P Stone gave an overview of the current fees model which had not increased since 2019. He detailed the contributing factors for a review of the fee and associated delivery models as they currently stood, drawing particular attention to the regulatory aspects in terms of part time delivery. He also highlighted the feedback received from students in respect of fees, delivery models, group sizes, financial support (where bursaries were highlighted as a benefit), academic support, resources, application process and setting. He also gave some comparative data in respect of fees locally.

He then detailed in full the proposed delivery and fees strategy models including an analysis of both risks and benefits. Finally, he confirmed that in order to be able to increase fees from September 2025 a proposal would need to go to the OfS this year.

Governors' discussion and questions included: clarification on the first degree models; querying the proposed fee options (i.e. why not the full £9250) and options re greater offer of a bursary should those fees be increased; debate on increasing the fee for Level 6; the increase of costs associated with running the courses; whether costs of delivery would increase under the proposed models (with confirmation there would be no additional costs); local comparisons in relation to fees; the potential positive impact of demographics on HE; agreement on the need to rationalize the current system; key risks including potential staff turnover and strategies to support retention (including Advanced HE status; incremental advances; culture); destinations of HE students generally (which were excellent) and in comparison with other local institutions (which was unknown); the complexities of destinations particularly in relation to the definition of successful destinations as defined by the OfS (going into standard occupational roles 1-3) against successful destinations as determined by the College's HE students (often more technical in nature) and meeting the needs of the local economy.

Assistant Principals confirmed that they were in support of the proposals.

Governors then approved:

- the revised HE Fee Strategy Recommendations as detailed in the tabled proposals but additionally which included the upward adjustment to £9250 to L6 fees and associated part time delivery model and its application effective from September 2025

Degree Awarding Powers (DAP) proposal

P Stone talked to the proposal regarding Degree Awarding Powers (DAPs) (i.e. the ability to confer our own degree awards up to Level 5) and outlined the reasoning for the timing as it was a lengthy process (up to three years).

He then detailed fully the risks and benefits of having the DAPs; current charges compared to costs with DAPs and gave an outline of the process, associated costs, and potential savings.

Governors fully discussed the risks and benefits of applying for DAPs including: time frame of the process; the overall benefit of future proofing the HE provision; the position/support of the Open University (OU) should the College go down this route; the ongoing validation role of the OU for Level 6 should DAPS be sought and approved; student feedback including perception of an MC degree rather than OU; future validation of additional courses; additional costs and counter-savings; staff retention; and ongoing monitoring of the provision via HE Committee; role of OfS in process.

It was confirmed that once started the progress could be suspended at any point.

The Governors gave **approval** for:

- the process for applying for DAPS as of summer 2024 to commence, after discussion with the Open University (OU)

Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) Gold ambition next steps

P Stone reminded Governors of the 2023 rating of Silver for the Teaching Excellence Framework highlighting the Gold outcome for student satisfaction and Bronze for progression (as highlighted under the fees and delivery model review item above).

He then detailed the challenges for improving outcomes at the next opportunity (2028), specifically that student outcome judgements were based on four year time series data analysis; the inclusion of non-regulated

courses which negatively affected the College's data in 2023 and the benchmarking of SOC 1, 2 or 3 job roles as the only positive outcomes (again which had negatively affected the College's data in 2023).

However, he also highlighted some potential opportunities to improve the outcomes including learning from those who had been successful at achieving Gold (locally and nationally); and approaches to influence the future approach. It was confirmed that this would be supported and monitored through the HE Committee's review process.

R Anderson left the meeting at 1pm.

6.2 IoT

B Robinson gave the full background to IoTs generally and the detail of the North East IoT of which the College was a primary member and to which it placed significant value.

An update was given to the recent change in membership and of possible options to restrengthen the group. B Robinson also informed Governors of the re-licensing due Spring 2025.

Governors' discussion included: IoT re-licensing; and the new North of Tyne Combined Authority's possible local impact.

7. Destinations Data Workshop

This item was not taken

8. Matters for Publication

No restricted matters were identified.

9. Time and Date of next meetings

9.1 Curriculum Planning 5pm on Monday 10 June 2024 – all governors invited.

9.2 Curriculum and Standards Recommendations 4.30pm on Monday 1 July 2024

9.3 Corporate Services Recommendations 4.30pm on Monday 8 July 2024

9.4 Governing Body (Ordinary) 5pm on Thursday 11 July 2024

10. Any other Business

- a) Student Awards Presentation on Tuesday 14 May 2024 – L Wood and D Budd agreed to represent the Governing Body.

The meeting ended at 2pm.