

**THE FURTHER EDUCATION CORPORATION OF MIDDLESBROUGH COLLEGE  
CONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EMPLOYER VOICE COMMITTEE  
25 JUNE 2025**

**PRESENT:** S Lane (Chair) (CG), D Lusardi (CG) from 2.25pm, (CG), M Wells (CG).

D Dodds (Employer Rep).

Officers: J Barwell (AP), P Blewitt (AP), P Donnelly (AD), Z Foster (Head of Governance), K Hawking (Head of Work Experience), G Potts (VP), M Telling (Group Business Development Director), P Watt (AP), C Yule (AP).

**IN ATTENDANCE:** A Lane (observing)

**KEY:** CG College Governor VP Vice Principal AP – Assistant Principal  
AD Associate Director DH Deputy Head

1. **Apologies for Absence** – R Anderson (CG), I Anwar (CG), R Gray (AP), N James (App Recruitment Manager), Z Lewis (Principal/CEO), B Robinson (Deputy Principal), O Rodley (VP).

A Lane was welcomed to the meeting with introductions being given by all in attendance.

2. **Declarations of Interest** –D Dodds declared that he was Chair of the Construction and Build Environment Board at the North East Institute of Technology.

3. **Unconfirmed Minutes of 22.01.2025** – were approved as a correct record.

4. **Matters Arising** – no direct matters outstanding, with ongoing input being noted where applicable

5. **The College Client Management (CRM) Approach Overview**

G Potts gave a follow up to progress from the January meeting including: confirmation that the dashboard was now in place; structural changes creating one Employer Voice team; employer classification system (segmentation) and how this was being used to understand the needs of employers in a systematic way to ensure a customised offer; and account management and communication developments.

Questions and discussion included: clarification on what defines Platinum, Gold and Silver memberships and the benefits of each categorisation; the different ways that employers could move up the various categories; how performance tracking was used; long term relationship building as part of the place based strategy; how the CRM could be further developed to include transient natured activities (e.g. via Teesworks, devolved funding for big local projects and related contract awards);

M Wells detailed a recent dinosaur park project with a range of students and British Steel, and the Committee discussed the benefit of such projects.

6. **Employer Voice 2024-2025 Update**

M Telling detailed the ten main ways used to collect information and feedback. He drew particular attention to the high overall satisfaction rate (95% QDP).

The Committee discussion focussed on the issues with Smart Assessor both for the College and employers, how this was being addressed (including weekly meetings) and ways that solutions could be expedited.

Action by G Potts and Team – to review Smart Assessor and return to the Committee with the outcomes of that and either ways the system could work or/and different options.

M Telling gave a further update in relation to assessor turnover and improved communications within the one central team now in place. He also detailed staffing changes in relation to the scholarship scheme with the appointment of a Scholarships Coordinator (Niamh Swaddle).

Feedback from full cost commercial clients and BELPS was also shared and further improvements being made to the Employer Advisory Boards detailed.

The Committee gave various recommendations for consideration including timing of meetings, further curation of the content of some meetings e.g. . making it more of a two way activity, opportunities to input; knowledge transfer etc.; and a discussion followed on positive changes to some other boards (such as Engineering).

Action by D Lusardi, G Potts, P Watt, M Telling and N Loughran to develop the Digital Employer Advisory Board to ensure it effectively serves those involved.

## 7. Construction Training Funding Update

G Potts appraised the Committee of the recent Government announcement which included:

- An injection of over £600 million over the next four years
- Up to 60,000 more engineers, brickies etc to be trained by 2029
- £100m for Technical Excellence colleges with G Potts giving an update in relation to the Tees Valley and wider North East and the College's collaborative approach
- £100m Skills bootcamps
- £40m Foundation Apprenticeships retention payments
- LSIP Partnerships £20 million towards forming partnerships between colleges and construction companies to boost teachers with relevant skills

Discussion focussed on Technical Excellence colleges including who may bid and how this would work more generally in the North East particularly within the tight timeline for application.

Governors also discussed: increasing employer knowledge of the opportunities through a range of methods; the wider Industrial Strategy and of future opportunities for all six sectors identified with a need for the College to be well positioned to support; training options/models which suit employers and employees e.g. bootcamps; outside working hours etc and showcasing the benefits to both to engage in development; the possibility of a digital technical excellence college and how the College could prepare for such an opportunity (including the use of Microsoft as a core partner).

## 8. Sector Intelligence Sharing on current trends and Business Cycles

**Construction** – D Dodds gave a comprehensive update which considered the impact of geopolitics; devolved funding and portfolio of projects; the need for training in key growth areas such as housing/retrofit/transport/utilities; the possibility of onsite training modules for apprenticeships; ways of supporting local employment particularly young people in construction and related need for soft skills (such as Outlook) by employers; risk of NEETs and issues affecting that cohort; on site drive for T Levels; and PR with the Chamber of Commerce on social value and procurement which could potentially be expanded to include colleges.

The Committee discussed the possibility of reshaping NVQs to fit 45 day model.

**Digital** – D Lusardi's update included: the predominant focus of AI and need to have people at the right skill level, and the opportunities seen by the industry of the advancement of AI

The Committee discussed the challenges of AI for employment of young people and the perception of the impact of AI by young people which was often less than positive (particularly in relation to automation of future roles); and employer need for Office 365 skills for the workplace and lack of this from many new entrants and how the College was addressing this through curriculum review generally and through departments (with the example of Health being outlined).

**Engineering** – S Lane gave a comprehensive update for her sector which had a number of unpredictable elements affecting profitability made more uncertain with tariffs, energy prices, and difficulties competing with Europe and the US etc. There was some hope that the Industrial Strategy may unlock some decision making to support the sector going forward.

## 9. VP Update

### 9.1 Overview of Apprenticeship Recruitment

P Donnelly confirmed that the College was on course to achieve the apprenticeship profile having caught up on a difficult first quarter. He outlined strong employer engagement; good recruitment figures (with a positive first quarter anticipated) and the positive impact on the structural team change thus far.

## **9.2 Overview of Work Experience Placements**

K Hawking detailed significant progress over 2024-2025 with 99.4% of students having participated in the work experience programme in some capacity. She also outlined particular success with Tier 1 where all students had been placed. However, the increased volume of students requiring access to placements would continue to make work experience a challenge in coming years particularly for construction, engineering, electrical installation, although the additional flexibility for T Levels with simulated activity could be helpful to support this.

The Committee discussed: the success of the work placements and potential ways that the CRM could assist with this including re-engagement with employers and account management more widely.

## **9.3 Strategic Employer Developments**

M Telling gave an flavour of some of the activity by the College including: good progress with NHS apprenticeships (Senior Health Care Worker L3); Scholarship update; high profile events (including Student Awards and Charity Football tournament); commercial training, and the focus on the National Apprenticeship Expo as the main employer event for the forthcoming year.

## **9.4 Adult Skills Innovation**

G Potts gave a brief update changes and new opportunities for BELPs.

## **9.5 Emerging Themes from Employer Advisory Boards**

The Committee acknowledged that much of this had been covered within the meeting.

## **10. Governor Reflections and Board Membership**

Governors discussed and confirmed:

- That the bi annual meetings were very useful
- That feedback could be more easily collated via a proforma with a suggestion that this should include: i) industry outlook ii) procurement/opportunities iii) any issues with the provision iv) improvements v) innovation vi) horizon scanning

Action by G Potts, M Wells and S Lane to develop an appropriate proforma and for Z Foster to share with employer members of the Committee so the collated proformas can be within the papers for future meetings.

## **11. Time and Dates for 2025-2026 meetings**

- Wednesday 21 January 2026 1.30-4pm D Dodds noted his apologies for this meeting.
- Wednesday 24 June 2026 1.30-4pm

## **12. Any other Urgent Business**

None taken

*The meeting closed at 4.11pm*