

**THE FURTHER EDUCATION CORPORATION OF MIDDLESBROUGH COLLEGE
CONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EMPLOYER VOICE COMMITTEE
9 FEBRUARY 2026**

PRESENT: S Lane (Chair) (CG), R Anderson (CG), D Lusardi (CG), (CG), M Wells (CG), L Woods (CG).

Officers: P Donnelly (AD), Z Foster (Head of Governance), R Gray (AP), K Hawking (Head of Work Experience), N James (App Recruitment Manager), G Potts (VP), B Robinson (Deputy Principal), O Rodley (VP), M Telling (Group Business Development Director), P Watt (AP).

IN ATTENDANCE: H Day (CG) and L Brothwood (CO as of 31.03.26) – both due to join the Committee formally as of 31 March 2026

KEY:

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

1. **Apologies for Absence** – I Anwar (CG), J Barwell (AP), P Blewitt (AP), D Dodds (Employer Rep), Z Lewis (Principal/CEO), C Yule (AP).

H Day and L Brothwood were both welcomed to the meeting with introductions being given by all in attendance.

S Lane outlined the focus and evolving nature of this relatively new Committee and its bi annual meetings.

2. **Declarations of Interest** – R Anderson declared any relevant interest in respect of LSIP, the Stamp Exchange in Newcastle (as the NECC are NSG's landlord) and Place Leaders Partnership

3. **Unconfirmed Minutes of 25.06.2025** – were approved as a correct record.

4. **Matters Arising**

- M Telling to share the dates of the advisory boards with Committee members so they could attend other meetings where available
- S Lane outlined the purpose of the proforma on Sector Intelligence Sharing for new members and encouraged the use of this to give feedback ahead of each meeting

5. **Verbal Overview and Risk Summary**

This item was combined with Item 6 presentation below.

6. **Economy, Policy and Place Update**

G Potts gave a full presentation which included:

- The overall national context and political influences
- National policy – the Government's 5 national missions and plans for change
- The Post 16 White Paper concentrating on employer focussed headlines: Skills England (of which Z Lewis was a board member); Growth and Skills Levy of which there was little detail available as yet; Expansion of Technical Excellent Colleges noting the College had put in a Clean Energy bid; Skills Passports; Local Skills Improvement Plans integration; Qualifications reform with the introduction of T Levels and reformed Level 2 pathways; Employer Investment and Engagement; and Jobs and Careers Service with a new national service
- Technical Excellent Colleges – with detail of the expansion beyond construction to four further sectors (advanced manufacturing, clean energy, digital and technologies, and defence). The Committee were informed that election processes for the TECs had started with delivery due to start April 2026. G Potts detailed the local college interest across the sectors
- Local Growth Plans – as outlined at the Strat Planning session with S Rose, which had highlighted that Digital was the fastest growing sector outside of London for Middlesbrough.

Governors discussed this with agreement that there was positive volume but also a natural ceiling in terms of growth, albeit the data from Skills England clearly showed that the Tees Valley employed more people in digital than anywhere else in the North East. G Potts also detailed the shared priorities with the government for the region, and resultant Get Britain Working plans and the role of key anchor institutions (including FE) within this.

- LSIP V2 was outlined as were industry trends and fluctuations locally. G Potts updated the Committee on wider relationships with the NHS with South Tees and increase of industry placements and employer led projects.

The Committee discussed placement numbers and potential options for NHS placements, and it was **agreed** that H Day would meet with Health team in the first instance to discuss further.

- The growth plan was discussed in relation to other local sectors. In addition, consideration was given to inward investments, some of which had not been realised.

7. The College Client Management (CRM) Approach Update

M Telling gave the background to the CRM development over the past couple of years which had resulted in the refreshed strategy. He detailed the performance to metrics for the four cohorts (Platinum, Gold, Silver and Bronze) and related activity with good progress noted on TNA (training needs analysis) completion over the last year.

Highlights from the employer feedback via the QDP survey were drawn out - which had been positive overall with 95% satisfaction, albeit acknowledging there it was a relatively small cohort of 60. He outlined the key themes identified which included strong relationships and engagement; high impact apprenticeship and recruitment outcomes; the quality of teaching, facilities and industry experience; and strong communication and responsiveness. Areas for improvement were also detailed – these being in relation to communication and clarity, with an update to Smart Assessor given where there had been some positive progress on new user interfaces; delivery structure and flexibility and targeted employer communications specific to individual sectors.

Questions and discussion included: the range of mechanisms used for employer feedback/check in's etc. which included annual meetings, employer advisory boards, events etc. and how the information was stored from these interactions; and ways of improving the response rate to the QDP survey (or similar type feedback) to ensure a representative sample of feedback; (including use of QR links at Employer Advisory forums for group feedback).

M Telling then shared the work around celebration of successes with employers including certification, events (with the Apprenticeship Expo 10 February) and increased marketing team activity and engagement. Additionally, he detailed the Employer Advisory Boards which involved over 100 local employers.

Feedback and questions included: how Bronze level employers were measured for potential with the TNA conversation being the starting point for that activity; whether there were targets for companies who the College wasn't currently actively engaging with and confirmation given that other links were often used and the Committee discussed the use of the client base more generally; how industry changes were captured and how the CRM might be used in the future to consider trend analysis, track referrals etc. and use of Co-Pilot to pull together current additional data.

Action by G Potts, M. Telling and Team to expand QDP return rate and detail (i.e. give more granular information) and develop other employer feedback mechanisms particular to consider any potential cross sector shared issues and share progress with the Committee

8. Products and Services

P Donnelly gave an overview to the overarching team which had been newly restructured to develop two fully aligned teams of Employer Engagement and Learner Recruitment to support employers with the full range of workforce development solutions.

He outlined the employer journey, comprehensive Training Needs Analysis (TNA) and the collaborative approach supporting this.

Learner Journey – N James gave a comprehensive overview of the Learner Recruitment team and processes for the apprenticeship, BELP and bootcamps recruitment.

R Gray then gave an overview the various components and associated offers within the Adults provision and also detailed the resulting destinations of learners. P Donnelly then outlined the commercial and apprenticeships offers.

P Donnelly then took the Committee through employer feedback key headlines for both apprenticeships and BELPs programmes and resulting actions by the team including interview support drop in sessions before apprenticeship interviews; company fact file for research activities during BELP course and mock interviews within the BELP course.

Questions and discussion included: how and when the feedback was collected (at the end of the course as part of the interview); whether renewal dates for courses were kept and the possible benefit of doing so for future and recurring business (noting this was retained for apprenticeships).

9. Sector Intelligence Sharing on current trends and Business Cycles

A general local economic overview was given by R Anderson highlighting a difficult six months for many businesses with the delayed budget and halted investment. She detailed a slight easing over quarter 1 although there had been some retreat from external markets, and some shift to India and SE Asia. The service sector had been affected by the rise of AI for entry level jobs and increased requirements by businesses for industry ready candidates. Overall, she confirmed a challenging climate particularly with the current political uncertainty.

Health – H Day gave a horizon scanning perspective which considered maternity incidents and resulting review/impact on providers; the use of AI in healthcare and associated patient safety and risk management; and the opening of a new medical school in Middlesbrough (Teesside Uni).

Digital – D Lusardi detailed a challenging arena for service based digital companies.

The Committee discussed the College's programmes and associated IAG for AI and software development and push towards cyber security, the requirement for multiple skills set. Also discussed was the increased need for commercial awareness and entrepreneurial skills; the reasoning for the pivot towards cyber security and need for those skills and more basic skills and knowledge around the use of AI regionally. The lack of availability of jobs within the region once qualified (ICT Apprenticeship L2) was also raised, with confirmation that there were a high number of unemployed software developers nationally.

Engineering – S Lane gave an update to her written report drawing attention to the findings from NE Advisory Make UK which confirmed some small growth for some, within a wider flatlined or declining picture and a general lack of development.

She also updated on the Defence sector within the North East which had the lowest GDP spend (and Teesside the lowest in the country) with possible future options discussed for expansion into the Tees Valley; and insight into the Space Sector where Durham University were leading the way nationally.

Overall, there was a lack of confidence with employers, not assisted by the impact of aspects of the Employment Rights Bill.

Maritime – M Wells confirmed an increase in admin based activity within the sector due to the rules and regulations being implemented particularly in relation to Customs and Excise.

10. VP Update

10.1 Overview of Employer Engagement

P Donnelly gave an update on the status of employer engagement across the College Group outlining key progress and strategic developments within the apprenticeship provision with strong confidence on reaching target figures, commercial industry training and adult and community learning offer. He also detailed notable achievements and opportunities for further engagement.

10.2 Overview of Work Experience Placements

K Hawking gave a comprehensive update on work experience placements progress across the College which was generally performing well with considerably more students engaged at this time compared to last year. She confirmed that Tier 1 placements remained the core of the work of the team. Attention was drawn to the recruitment of Employment Project Placement Co-ordinators as a result of the number of projects and opportunities being developed to utilize the new flexibilities to support work experience.

Questions and discussion included: whether placements had to be completed at set times of the year with confirmation that this could be flexible; how employer feedback from work placements was used including feedback to curriculum areas to tailor provisions further; future curriculum reform and impact on number of T Levels and associated increase in work placement hours and greater use of the flexibilities; and the ongoing challenge to have enough placements for all students and essential good relationships with employers to further support this.

10.3 Adult Skills Innovation

R Gray gave an overview on the activity within the Adult and Community learning provision resulting from Advisory Board feedback. She drew particular attention to the responsiveness of the College to employer needs, good relationships and success stories.

Confirmation was given that information was sought from employers where risks become outdated to ensure the curriculum remained responsive to need.

10.4 Emerging Themes from Employer Advisory Boards

M Telling presented a picture of strong engagement with employer partners. He outlined some further developments, notably tailoring of communications to better ensure curriculum alignment with requirements.

Discussion followed on how the focus of communications could be improved including the involvement of marketing and other tools utilized.

11. Governor Review of Top Risks

Governors considered the work of the Committee and the information it received and discussed how it could best support the College. The use of more granular employer feedback was **agreed**, albeit the Committee did not require the full detail of this.

In the climate of economic uncertainty, it was **agreed** that the data and development of the CRM would be of great benefit, as would a more holistic approach to triangulation of employer feedback.

Finally, the Committee considered the speed of impact of AI changes generally and also on the digital sector and the need to keep on top of this with assurances that the College Digital team were knowledgeable and keen to share best practice.

12. Governor Reflections and Board Membership

It was agreed that the meeting had been of great value.

Action - S Lane requested that Committee members complete the Sector Intelligence proforma ahead of each meeting where possible.

13. Time and Dates for next meeting

- Wednesday 24 June 2026 1.30-4pm

14. Any other Urgent Business

None taken

The meeting ended at 3.40pm