Northampton College

Minutes of the meeting of the Northampton College Corporation held at Daventry Campus on 30 April 2026 at 5.00 pm

Governors (in person)	Anne-Marie Kilday (AMK) (Chair) Rod Wood (RW) (Chair) Laura Crandley (LC) Kay Sellick (KS) Megan Roberts (MR) David Bailey (DB)	Jason Lancaster (JL) (Principal and CEO) Julie Teckman (JT) Steve Bunker (SB) Alison Hoyle (AH) Kiera White (KW)
Governors (via Teams)	Paul Beers (PB) Alric Pagon (AP)	Asif Ahmad (AA)
In attendance	Joanne Philipott (JP) (Deputy Head) Jan Hutt (JH) (Deputy Head) Sally Bamford (SB) (Director of HR)	Kathryn Berrill (KB) (Director of Governance) Andrew Pomeroy (AP) (Financial Controller)
Apologies	Lynn Drinkald (LD) Julian Wood (JW)	Alex Owen (AO)

1. Routine and Governance items

1.1 Apologies for Absence

Ane-Marie Kilday (AMK) welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received from Lynn Drinkald, Alex Owen, Julian Wood. The meeting was declared quorate.

1.2 Declarations of interest

1.2 None.

1.3 Minutes of the meeting on 19 March 2026

1.3.1 The minutes were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

1.4 Outstanding Actions

1.4.1 Staff Governor action: The interviews for the role are taking place on 14 May. All other actions are complete.

1.5 Governance

1.5.1 The terms of reference for the Due Diligence Task and Finish Group were recommended for approval by the committee. They were ratified by the Corporation.

1.5.2 On 14 April, Governors received a briefing paper relating to a capacity funding bid that required their approval. Unanimous approval was subsequently provided via email and the purpose of this item is for the approval to be formally recorded in the minutes.

<u>Staff voice</u>

1.5.3 Questions had been raised whether there will be duplication of training now that SmartLog has been introduced. It was confirmed that there has been a slight overlap between the existing and new systems but that Smart Log will be the training platform moving forward.

1.5.4 Following implementation of SmartLog it was noted that Technicians have been given access to the trackers but not Managers. JP confirmed that this point will be raised with the Head of Estates.

1.5.5 It was noted that the issue remains about the lack of first aid trained staff. JL confirmed that it is being addressed.

1.5.6 In relation to students using the smoking shelter during lesson time it was noted that this is a risk as staff are not able to leave the lesson. The point was acknowledged and noted that the different break times, to ease the flow during peak periods, means that the smoking shelters appear to be used out of lesson time. Governors noted, however, that the Government have been looking at public places and not allowing smoking or vaping on site which might mean that the Campuses become non-smoking and vaping sites in future.

<u>Student voice</u>

1.5.5 KW explained that the handover has taken place with the new President and Vice President of the Student Union.

1.5.6 Student Governor elections are currently taking place and KB explained how the process is progressing. A good calibre of applications was received and interviews will take place in May.

1.5.7 This was the last meeting for the Student Governors. They were thanked for being engaged and involved during meetings. They were thanked for their dedication to their role and the Board gave their best wishes for the upcoming exams and for their next steps.

1.5.8 KW and MR were presented with gifts as a token of their service.

2. Strategy and Priorities

2.1 **CEO/Principal's Report**

2.1.1 The document was taken as read.

2.1.2 ***Governors noted the change in achievement rate and relative position shifting. How confident are we of regaining where we want to be in the previously high achievement rate?*** It was previously understood that the transfers issue and the tailored learning would have an impact on achievement rates. The recent drop was largely the result of correcting the first issue.

2.1.3 Governors were advised that, while the College continues to work within some challenging curriculum areas, there has not been a fundamental change in underlying performance. However, ELT acknowledged a two-year declining trend. Governors were assured that leaders now have a stronger understanding of the issues and that the priority is to secure the impact of improvement actions. JP is leading this work with the Quality Team.

2.1.4 Governors were advised that achievement and position in the National Achievement Rate Tables are relatively crude measures within the FE sector, unlike schools where value-added measures are used. Governors also noted that the current achievement rate measure comparisons are problematic in future owing to forthcoming DfE changes including the introduction of new programme types (such as T-Levels) which are not directly comparable with some other qualifications.

2.1.5 In considering proportionality, governors heard that there is increased risk where larger numbers of students move from coursework-based programmes into examination-based programmes. A further risk relates to 1+1 programmes being extended to two years, as some young people may be reluctant to remain in education for a longer period. There will be value added scores for A levels and other courses due to the introduction of these programmes. Leaders recognised that further work is needed to ensure all teachers are well-equipped to prepare students for examined assessments.

2.1.6 Governors sought assurance on whether leaders remained confident in the quality of education being provided. It was emphasised that this is the key area where assurance should be focused, rather than solely on headline achievement figures.

2.1.7 ***Governors asked is there a target in the NART (national achievement rates tables)? Governors recognise that, given the changing landscape, it is important to review whether the current target remains suitable.*** It was noted that what is now required is a richer set of performance measures and the Strategic Plan is expected to support this approach. The College still aims to be competitive within the sector on student achievement and wider attainment measures.

2.1.8 ***How are students identified as a flight risk?*** It was explained that, in some cases, signs are not always evident in advance, particularly when students reach age 18 and decide that immediate employment appears more attractive than completing a qualification. However, systems are in place to identify students at risk, including targeted 1:1 interventions. In many cases, the underlying issues relate to anxiety, wellbeing, or a lack of understanding about the long-term value of qualifications. It was noted that the Government's curriculum reforms aim to strengthen the currency and value of qualifications.

2.1.9 The annual strategic conversation with the DfE took place last week and the discussion was open and honest. While the DfE is not overly concerned by the recent drop in outcomes, the decline is being treated internally as an important indicator that further improvement is needed.

2.1.10 ***Governors asked for more information on student satisfaction and experience.*** The concerns are owing to recent high-profile safeguarding incidents. The survey will be conducted again later in the year to see if there has been a positive impact on the actions implemented.

2.1.11 ***Governors asked about the fixed period appointment of the successful candidates for the new deputy curriculum manager posts.*** It relates to a partial retirement of current curriculum managers and acts to support with succession planning.

2.1.12 ***Governors noted that there had been fewer taster blocks and is that what is impacting retention?*** It was explained that tailored learning forms one strand of adult funding and can support progression routes for learners. For example, learners who begin on Level 3 ESOL may then progress to another course; however, an intermediate non-qualification course that previously supported this pathway has now been removed. As a result, some learners may be less likely to continue their learning journey. GCSE English and Maths are year-long programmes and some students, in the winter months, drop out of the evening courses so the tailored learning is conducted to see if learners want to undertake the study programme.

2.1.13 Governors were advised that the process of funding deep dives began with Study Programmes, followed by Adult Funding, and that Apprenticeships are now being reviewed as the final funding stream. Governors were assured that this has been a planned and structured process, rather than a response to unforeseen issues.

2.2 **Due Diligence Task and Finish Group**

2.2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 17 April were taken as read. It was reported that the committee were assured regarding the level of detail contained within the workplan for the ten workstreams and noted that activity is currently within the April to September phase.

2.2.2 Attention was drawn to the red line discussions set out in section 2.3. It was noted that four red lines had previously been agreed, with two additional red lines now added. One of the additional red lines relates to the £13 million loan and how this will be managed. The second concerns ensuring that the combined college has an agreed strategic vision.

2.2.3 ***Governors queried item 2.43 of the minutes that "there have been some autumn course that could be trialled" and asked but what if the merger does not go ahead?*** It was noted that this is an error in the minutes as it relates to September 2027 not 2026. KB will amend the minutes to ensure clarity.

2.2.4 It was raised that Moulton College disbanded the co-ordinator role and Governors asked if this would be phased out in Northampton College should the merger go ahead. It was noted that it is too soon to predict and a structure would be created that works for both colleges.

2.2.5 ***How will the pay difference be dealt with?*** Caution is required at this stage, as discussions remain at due diligence stage. There is currently no requirement to make commitments regarding pay parity. It was emphasised that the intention would always be to act as fairly as possible, but any decisions would need to sit within the parameters of affordability, long-term sustainability, and the future success of the organisation.

2.2.6 Governors noted the previously agreed red lines recorded in the minutes, including that if the long-term financial position is not viable, the proposal would not proceed. Governors were advised that relevant information is currently being collected and shared openly and transparently. This information will then be modelled, after which decisions can be properly considered.

2.3 **Estates Strategy Task and Finish Group**

2.3.1 There has been a delay in presenting the final strategy to the Task and Finish Group. Student number growth analysis has identified that this is higher than originally thought which means there is a requirement to look at an additional expansion project, which is now underway.

2.3.2 Two capital bids have been submitted; one is for a short term expansion bid for temporary accommodation to increase capacity in short term and the 2nd related to the B block extension.

2.3.3 Modelling around student numbers shows 38% growth over the next 5 years. However, the growth of the college has been greater than that in the past 3 years. Block B planning has been approved and there is a requirement to identify another block to be built.

3. Curriculum and Student Experience

3.1 The report was taken as read. JP stated that, following an action relating to Post 16 pathways at the last meeting, she has prepared a document summarising the Government Report. This will be updated once more information is provided by the DfE.

3.2 ***Governors noted that there is substantial industry placement with technical T-Level pathways and asked whether this will be difficult to arrange?*** Placements are organised by the College. There is a requirement to enhance the business offer and to seek these placements in the community. It is more difficult to arrange placements in business/admin type jobs than for more vocational roles. This is identified as a challenge nationally.

3.3 ***Governors asked what was meant by the phrase 'Skills bootcamps need careful management'?*** The initial grant is £99k, with the opportunity to receive up to £180k. In managing this, it is important to be clear with employers that we will recruit more students than the level of funding received. This is a new type of provision to the College so ensuring rigour programme design and delivery will be crucial to its success.

4. Finance and Operations

4.1 Management accounts

4.1.1 The largest impact on volatility of numbers is the proposed estates work during the summer. The forecast is a £1m spend but a 10% swing either way would be significant. Despite predicting that the 'outstanding' grading will remain, the spend on estates may bring this closer to 'good'. However, there is a requirement to bring the fabric of the estate up to scratch as discussed in previous Corporation meetings.

4.1.2 Inflation rates may go up owing to geopolitical volatility. Technology costs have also risen and these have been incorporated into the management accounts this month.

4.1.3 Governors discussed that, despite nothing causing immediate concern; we are managing a demographic boom, a merger and acquisition process, estate pressures, and safety issues. While the quality of delivery programme is currently under control, it could be impacted by these wider factors.

4.1.4 The key question is whether these pressures could converge and amplify one another, and how we maintain control if they do. Financial performance and numbers remain stable, but there is a significant amount happening beyond our immediate boundaries.

4.1.5 If all three or four pressures were to collide at once, the consequences could be serious. It would be prudent to consider what combination of events could cause critical harm to the organisation and to identify the three worst-case scenarios that could arise. This would enable us to strengthen mitigations, stress-test resilience, and ensure robust contingency plans are in place.

4.1.6 There is a lag in funding, and the allocation for next year is already known. This will enable short term absorption in the short-term impact and plan a phased programme of response. With £20m in reserves, the organisation remains financially stable; however, it will be necessary to adapt to operating as a leaner organisation in the future.

4.1.7 In terms of wider communications, engagement has been strengthened between the Senior Leadership Team and wider groups, enabling decisions to be made collectively and strategically rather than in silos. Internal management workstreams are aligned to the strategic plan.

4.1.8 Curriculum realignment is intended to create capacity for more students and support longer-term sustainability. While capital expenditure has been limited for some time, targeted investment is now required to avoid losing students and damaging the organisation's reputation.

4 Governors noted the accounts.

4.2 Board Assurance Framework

4.2.1 Risk 11 relating to cyber security was discussed in detail the Audit committee and the need to change the risk score to reflect the threat.

4.2.2 ***Governors raised that there are further risks emerging which have come to light by reading through the papers and require capturing, as follows:***

Performance with National Achievement Rates Tables (NART)

- Student and Staff satisfaction
- Apprenticeships

- The risk of not recovering quickly from a cyber attack
- The merger
    - The risk of falling behind schedule
    - The risk of non-progress of the workstreams
    - The change risk: once a decision on the merger is made, undertake stress testing and consider the associated change risk.

Given the highly changeable environment, it was discussed that it would be prudent to establish a working group of risk experts to determine how best to capture, monitor, and manage risk effectively.

Governors also felt that some of the existing risks should be reconfigured and that there is a refocus to reflect the current climate.

4.3 Health and Safety verbal update

4.3.1 There was a RIDDOR reportable accident at Daventry Campus related to a member of staff exacerbating a pre-existing injury in the canteen. JL explained the issue and that, as the member of staff went to hospital, it met the threshold of reporting.

4.3.2 JL provided details of the recent fire evacuation: A fire occurred in a student locker in D Block after a battery went into thermal runaway. The fire was dealt with quickly and effectively.

4.3.3 The principal risk arose not from the fire itself, but from the caustic gases emitted by lithium batteries (e-scooter battery), which created a potential inhalation hazard during the evacuation of the college. Vapour spread across all four floors of D Block.

4.3.4 The building is designed for horizontal evacuation; however, when the fire service instructed a full evacuation, occupants were required to use the same staircase, which created the main challenge. Due to the building's design, once the incident was detected the air conditioning systems automatically shut down, which significantly reduced the risk of vapour spreading further.

4.3.5 Fire consultants reviewed the arrangements before Christmas and were satisfied with the existing model. However, following this incident, there will be a further review to consider how the building can be evacuated more quickly and efficiently. Key lessons learned include reviewing evacuation assembly points and considering whether e-scooters should be banned on site. A formal lessons learned meeting is scheduled for next week. A deep clean was completed, and the building was operational again within 24 hours.

4.3.6 It was suggested that with regards to fire wardens, should technicians, who are consistently based in the workshops, undertake fire warden responsibilities. JL confirmed that this will form part of the current review, including consideration of having fire wardens on all floors to support future evacuations.

4.3.7 ***How did the students cope with the evacuation?*** Overall, the response was positive, with students following instructions calmly and promptly. Communication from staff was effective throughout, and credit was given to both staff and students for their handling of the situation.

5. Organisational

5.1 Safeguarding / Prevent update

5.1.1 There is nothing significant to report since the last update. The focus remains on supporting students and making sure vulnerable students remain on track. The team are not seeing anything abnormal in trends.

Northampton College

5.2 Equity, Diversity and Belonging: Annual Report

5.2.1 The report was taken as read. The overarching aim is to ensure that students, as individuals, remain our central focus. This is an ambitious objective for a college of 8,000 students, and the support provided continues to evolve in response to changing needs.

5.2.2 Increased diversity within the staff population is being seen, alongside a significant reduction in the gender pay gap. However, there is an important caveat: a large proportion of female staff are employed in lower-paid roles, which makes sustaining further improvement in the gender pay gap more challenging. In addition, from next year the Government will require organisations to publish how they intend to reduce their median pay gap.

5.2.3 Governors welcomed the structure of the report but requested the inclusion of more data tables. It would also be helpful to provide a breakdown of staffing groups, including managers, teachers, and professional services staff, together with the male and female proportion of managers. Governors also asked whether the staff profile reflects the profile of the student population.

5.2.4 ***Where is the diversity increasing – is it student facing?*** it was noted that diversity has grown significantly within professional services, while ethnic diversity within teaching staff is also increasing. However, ethnic diversity remains low within the management team.

5.2.5 Further discussion took place regarding the gender pay gap, particularly the concentration of female staff in lower-paid roles. It was suggested that future reporting should include analysis by grade, to provide assurance that pay equity is being maintained across all levels of the organisation, and that similar analysis should be undertaken in relation to diversity. It was noted that, from next year, organisations will also be required to undertake pay gap reporting in relation to ethnicity and disability.

5.2.6 In considering the gender pay gap, analysis of recruitment data indicates that women are disproportionately applying for lower-graded roles. It was acknowledged that this reflects wider sector trends and broader societal norms. Research also suggests that the language used in adverts and job descriptions can influence application patterns. From an ethnicity perspective, it was noted that inclusive and carefully considered language is equally important in encouraging applications from candidates whose backgrounds are more reflective of the local community.

5.2.7 ***Governors noted that there is a large staff population over 60 and are there retirement planning strategies for staff?*** To retain expertise, some retire and come back on an hourly paid basis. It is still the highest demographic but it is worth noting that the 30-45 age band is increasing.

5.2.8 ***Is there student anxiety around the world news and, if so, what support is being provided?*** It was confirmed that students are feeling more anxious, and that the college is responding proactively. A strong tutorial programme is in place, through which concerns can be identified early, support offered, and students encouraged to ask questions and discuss issues affecting them. The college is seeking to be responsive to the range of external pressures and information that students are being exposed to. Student Governors reported that teachers are often very effective in listening to students' worries, particularly where they are concerned about the future and how they can adapt to changing circumstances.

5.3 Modern Slavery Statement

5.3.1 Governors noted that the document identifies six key areas of focus, including the need for robust procurement policies and frameworks to ensure that suppliers operate ethically and comply with the requirements of the Modern Slavery Act. It was noted that, through the use of CPC procurement frameworks, suppliers are required to demonstrate compliance with the Act.

The statement also aligns with recruitment practices, particularly where agencies are used, with appropriate due diligence undertaken as part of those arrangements.

5.3.2 The Board approved the statement, and JH will arrange for the document to be uploaded to the Government website portal.

6. Closing Items

6.1 Any Other Business

6.1.1 <u>Overseas trip to Malta</u>

JL confirmed that he liked Governors to have oversight of all overseas visits. The cost is covered by the student contribution. JL is content with the risk assessments in place and the Governors approved the trip.

6.2 Date and time of next meeting

6.2.1 The date of the next meetings is:

- Thursday 25 June 2026 at 5.00 pm in the Boardroom at Booth Lane Campus

There being no further business the meeting closed at 6.50 pm

Anne-Marie Kilday
Chair of the Corporation