



Bishop Auckland College (BAC) Group

Corporate Board meeting

Thursday 4th December 2025

5.00pm-7.00pm

The Park Head Hotel, 13 Park View Terrace, Bishop Auckland. DL14 8QB

MINUTES

Present: Mo Dixon (MD), Chair of Corporate Board, BAC
Alyson Shields (AS), Corporate Board member, BAC
Carol Gaskarth (CG), Corporate Board member, BAC
Christopher Hutchinson (CH), Vice Chair of Corporate Board, BAC
Dominic Raymont (DR), Corporate Board member, BAC
Gavin McIntyre (GMc), Corporate Board member, BAC
Kim Nielsen (KN), Corporate Board member, BAC
Michelle Andelin (MA), Corporate Board member (staff rep), BAC
Paul Brennan (PB), Corporate Board member, BAC
Sarah Harris (SH), Corporate Board member, BAC
Shaun Hope (SH), Principal/Chief Executive Officer, BAC

In attendance: Anne-Marie Chiswell (AMC), Assistant Principal Business and Community, BAC
David Richardson (DR) (items 1-4) Armstrong Watson
Judith Layfield (JL), Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality, BAC
Lynn Heighton (LH), Assistant Principal Finance and Resource, BAC
Marie Nigrelli (MN) (minutes), Clerk to Corporate Board, BAC

NO	ITEM	ACTION
1	Election of new Board members The Corporate Board elected Alyson Shields and Carol Gaskarth as members.	

2	<p>Welcome and apologies for absence Apologies received from Joy Allen, Keith Ivory and Matthew Hedley, Board members, BAC.</p> <p>Resignations Pamela Petty, Board member, BAC</p> <p>1.1 Chairs address <i>'As we approach the end of the calendar year it's an opportune time to reflect on the achievements and some of the more difficult decisions that we have had to make in the last twelve months It's also time to look forward and see how the college will operate in an ever changing environment and how it will succeed in its mission of creating positive change through education and learning.</i></p> <p><i>This time last year we were in the middle of the sale of the Spennymoor site and we had long and protracted discussions regarding the various options open to us, the sale price, the overage charge and the financial impact it would have on the college. We finally made the necessary decisions and the site was sold to Durham County Council. This decision meant that in April 2026 the college will be in a much stronger financial position, as the last of the loan payments will have been made.</i></p> <p><i>This decision came only days after the college had undergone a visit from Ofsted - the outcome of which was graded as 'Good with Outstanding features'. This excellent outcome was a real boost to college morale and the senior team have worked hard to ensure the outstanding practices identified by Ofsted have been maintained and good practice shared. In the areas that were graded good staff have worked hard to improve performance and the 2024-25 college Self Assessment Review showed evidence of progress. However, there were still some areas that need to be improved, but staff were aware of this and action plans were in place to address. Board members will continue to monitor these through Curriculum and Quality Committee.</i></p>	

	<p><i>In 2025 the college has seen much change and much success:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>• Increase in student numbers for a second year in a row.</i><i>• Outstanding apprenticeship success rates.</i><i>• A welcome pay rise for staff, the second in two years.</i><i>• Positive Strategic Planning Days with Governors and senior staff.</i><i>• Joining the NE Institute of Technology (IoT) showed the ambition of the college in wanting to be part of regional skills development.</i><i>• An excellent graduation ceremony celebrating the success of our Higher Education (HE) students at Durham Cathedral.</i><i>• Numerous community events such as the recent remembrance service and the Summer Pride Festival.</i><i>• Improved partnership with key stakeholders in local school had seen an increase in applications and it was hoped this converted to increased enrolments in 2026.</i><i>• Redacted due to commercial sensitivity.</i> <p><i>There were also some difficult decisions made in 2025 namely the closure of college nursery. However, all decisions were made in the best interests of the college and the student population. All children were relocated to other local nurseries and all staff found alternate employment, some in the college itself.</i></p> <p><i>Looking forward the college will:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>• Continue with NE Chamber and the North East Combined Authority (NECA) with the aim of 'putting skills front and centre which was at the heart of the government's 10 year industrial strategy.</i><i>• Continue to develop the craft of teaching amongst its staff, this will hopefully lead to improved retention, achievement and overall success for our students.</i><i>• Continue to be outward facing and work collaboratively with other education providers and employers to address skills needs.</i><i>• 16-19 year old funding still lagged behind the rates of 10/15 years ago so delivery costs in real terms continued to rise. Along with rising energy costs, staff</i>	
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	<p><i>salaries and other inflationary operational and materials costs, the college will feel added pressure on its finances. Governors will continue to monitor this through Resources and Audit Committees in 2026.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Investigate new funding streams.</i> • <i>Through new appointments, a diversity of skills and experience would be brought to the Corporate Board to support the work of Principal and the Senior Team.</i> <p><i>This year we have seen changes to the Corporate Board; Edward Perry, Peter Topping, Pamela Petty and Manorhan Dilukshan had resigned but we have been extremely fortunate to secure the services of Alyson Shields, Carol Gaskarth, Paul Brennan and Sarah Harris. All four of our new board members bring a wealth of skills and experience. This will be extremely helpful both to the Board and the various committees as we move into 2026.</i></p> <p><i>And finally I would like to thank:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The principal for his excellent leadership (as he approaches two years in post) and for putting the college at the heart of the community. This hard work was starting to pay off and the college was now a key player in a number of local initiatives.</i> • <i>The senior team for creating the successes highlighted previously -this has been done through a lot of hard work, commitment and collaboration with a variety of stakeholders. By encouraging staff to raise their game and improve performance.</i> • <i>To the chairs of all the committees and clerk for their hard work throughout the year.</i> • <i>To all the governors for the time and expertise they give to the college each year both in formal meetings and other college events during the year.'</i> 	
3	<p>Declarations of interest None were declared.</p>	
4	<p>Auditors - external 4.1 Final Audit Findings Report, letter of representations (LoR) – shared</p>	

	<p>David Hutchinson (DH) of Armstrong Watson (AW) led the conversation and highlighted salient points in the report:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The report was accepted by Audit Committee 19th November 2025. • Independence; AW was not affiliated with BAC. • Audit risks areas detailed six risks which were of no concern. There were also no additional risks to note. • One adjustment made to pension. Pension sat in an asset position and not on the balance sheet. This was the most appropriate position to be with local government pension schemes. Benchmarked and aligned with other colleges. • No regularity breaches made. • Numbers were well controlled and financial systems worked well. There were no observations to note. • BAC and South West Durham Training (SWDT) had an unmodified audit which meant a clean report. <p>Future risk:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change to regulation in future: a significant change to accountancy standards would be introduced in July 2027 and would see a change in operating lease statements. This would not affect BAC, however, AW would help with compliance. • Ensure bank interest was maximised on cash balance following Spennymoor sale. <p>Dominic Rayment (DR) as Audit Committee chair gave thanks to AW and Assistant Principal of Finance and Resource for audit work undertaken and commented that it was rare to see such a clean audit with no improvement.</p> <p>The report and letters of representation approved for sign off.</p> <p><u>Action</u> <i>Sign off letter of representation and LOR regularity.</i></p> <p>4.2 Financial Statement 2024-25 - shared</p>	<p>SH/MD</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The report provided financial outturn for the year ending 31 July 2025. Based off quarter 3 reforecast and Budget. • The Group reported a pre-pension deficit of £426,106 and a post-pension deficit of £101,917, which had significantly improved from the prior year's £1.152m loss. Total comprehensive income reached £804k. • Major developments included the £4.75m sale of Spennymoor (plus £750k overage), a £666k impairment charge, full repayment of a £4.084m commercial loan, and the closure of the Nursery due to sustained losses and declining usage. • As of 31 July 2025, the Group held £2.347m in cash. An Earning Before Interest, taxes and amorisation (EBITDA) asset score of 1.1 reflected £157k cash generated from operations, with a net cash reduction of £357k—an improvement of £349k over the Q3 forecast. • No errors were identified in accounts and the Group was in good financial health. <p>The financial statement was accepted on a going concern basis and confirmed that no material uncertainties had been identified that would cast significant doubt on the Groups ability to continue as a going concern.</p> <p><u>Action</u> <i>Amend and sign off Financial Statements.</i></p> <p>4.3 Quarter 1 Reforecast including going concern scenarios - shared <i>Redacted due to commercial sensitivity.</i></p> <p>4.4 The Regularity self-assessment report – shared The report confirmed the accuracy of the report and college’s compliance with regularity requirements. Approved at Audit Committee 19th November 2025.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Governance and Oversight – Use of Public Funds – Compliance with Laws and Regulations – Procurement and Tendering – Staff Remuneration and Expenses 	<p>LH/SH/ MD</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fraud and Irregularity - Gifts and Hospitality - Related Party Transactions - Subcontracting and Partnerships <p>Corporate Board agreed that to the best of its knowledge and belief, College has complied with the principles of regularity, propriety, and value for money in the use of public funds. It was satisfied that appropriate governance, financial controls and assurance processes were in place to support the declaration.</p> <p>The report was approved for sign off.</p> <p><u>Action</u> <i>Sign off Regularity Statement.</i></p> <p>4.5 Audit Committee annual report – shared The report summarised activity in 2024/25. Approved by Audit Committee 19th November 2025. Although IT was an outstanding concern, rapid progress was hoped for in early 2026.</p> <p>The report was approved for onward submission to Department for Education (DfE) by 31st December 2025 with Financial Statements.</p> <p><u>Action</u> <i>Submit Audit Committee annual report and Financial Statements to DfE by 31st December 2025.</i></p> <p>4.6 (Additional agenda point) <i>Redacted due to commercial sensitivity</i></p> <p>David Hutchinson left the meeting.</p>	<p>SH/MD</p> <p>LH</p>
5	<p>Minutes of the last meetings held for approval</p> <p>5.1 9th July 2025</p> <p>5.2 12th November 2025</p> <p>Both minutes were agreed to be an accurate record.</p>	
6	<p>Matters arising from the minutes of the last meetings held</p>	

	<p>6.1 9th July 2025 6.2 12th November 2025</p> <p>There were no matters arising.</p>	
7	<p>Action log to date The action log to be updated: 1) OneDrive for one Board member remained outstanding. 2) Complete. 3) Ongoing. 4) On agenda, complete. 5) Evidenced in impact report, complete. 6) Complete. 7) Complete. 8) Included in capital development updated, complete. 9) Complete. 10) Included in Q1 reforecast, shared, complete. 11) Complete. 12) Complete.</p>	
8	<p>Committees Autumn term update with draft minutes of meetings for acceptance.</p> <p>8.1 Audit draft minutes dated 19th November 2025 - shared Internal and external audit reports received with a clean audit recorded.</p> <p>There were a number of outstanding internal audit risks in the Information Technology area but the committee had assurance this would be improved in the first quarter of 2026.</p> <p>The committee approved the following and proposed Corporate Board to sign off; Final Management Report, Group Financial Statements, Audit Committee Annual Report and Regularity Self-assessment Report. Approve: Risk Register/management report, Risk Appetite and Terms of reference. Separate agenda items.</p> <p>8.2 Resource draft minutes dated 19th November 2025 - shared</p>	

	<p>The overall position showed significantly strengthened financial health, improved forecasts, strong staff satisfaction, positive operational progress and clear actions to address remaining risks—particularly around IT infrastructure and compliance.</p> <p>The committee proposed Corporate Board to approve draft Group Financial Statements 2024/25, Quarter 1 Forecast and Group Forecast, Management Accounts to 30 September 2025, Policies: Safeguarding/Prevent, Safer Recruitment, Allegations About Staff, Whistleblowing, Anti-Fraud/Bribery/Corruption, Subcontracting Procedure. Staff pay award already approved. Receive update on capital development. Separate agenda items.</p> <p>8.2.1 Safeguarding and Prevent update by <i>Redacted due to commercial sensitivity.</i></p> <p>8.3 Search and Governance draft minutes dated 26th November 2025 - shared</p> <p>The committee proposed Corporate Board to; elect Alyson Shields and Carol Gaskarth. Extend staff rep term to end of academic year. Approval of the Internal Governance Review action plan (AoC Code of Good Governance). Agreement of the process for appraising the Principal and Chair, updated Scheme of Delegation, proposal to review the Corporate Board Terms of Reference alongside the Instruments & Articles. Separate agenda items.</p> <p>Corporate Board agreed the extension of the staff reps term and the process of appraisals being; Principal questionnaire sent to Board members and to all those directly line managed. Outcomes to be reviewed by Chair. Chair’s questionnaire to run concurrently and sent to Board members. Outcomes to be reviewed by Vice Chair.</p> <p><u>Action</u></p>	<p>JL</p>
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	<p><i>Questionnaires to be drafted and circulated for both Principal and Chair. Responses to be collated and a review to take place with each.</i></p> <p>8.4 Curriculum and Quality draft minutes dated 26th November 2025 - shared</p> <p>The committee proposed Corporate Board to receive;</p> <p>Curriculum, quality and performance update, Quality Improvement Action Plan (QIAP) 2025-26 progress report, Self Assessment Report 2024-25 for approval and Terms of Reference. Separate agenda items.</p> <p>8.5 South West Durham Training draft minutes - confidential <i>Redacted due to commercial sensitivity</i></p>	
9	<p>Strategic developments – confidential <i>Redacted due to commercial sensitivity</i></p>	
10	<p>Curriculum, Quality and Performance</p> <p>10.1 Curriculum, quality and performance update - shared and received for information There was positive progress across all areas with significant improvements in attendance for young people. Curriculum and Skills Strategy to be refreshed to reflect national policy changes and regional developments. Updates to be provided when necessary.</p> <p>10.2 Quality Improvement Action Plan (QIAP) 2025-26 progress report - shared and received for information Annual QIAP was reviewed with robust support and challenge from Board members.</p> <p>10.3 Risk Register/management report</p> <p>BAC Risk Register - five risks in total aligned to the college’s strategic risks; four high, one moderate.</p> <p>SWDT Risk Register to be presented for oversight- five risks in total aligned to the strategic risks; two very high and three high.</p>	

	<p>A new risk register format to be implemented which would allow the five key headline risks to be drilled down further to identify the main focus area within each risk.</p> <p>Corporate Board approved the Risk Register 2025-26 and accepted progress made to minimise risk.</p> <p>10.3.1 Risk Appetite - shared Corporate Board approved the level of risk appetite detailed in the risk register.</p> <p>10.4 Data Protection 2024-25.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2 x Subject Access Requests (down) - 2 x data breaches (down) - 14 x Freedom of Information requests (down) - 17 x departments Data Asset Register (DARs) outstanding. Required to complete Record of Processing Activities (RoPA). - 11 x GDPR risks, one very high, eight high, one moderate and one low. None reported to the Information Commissioners Office. GDPR SAR was complete. The correct migration of the L drive to Teams/SharePoint was the current focus. <p><u>Action</u> <i>Ensure all departments were GDPR compliant and trained on sharepoint/365.</i></p> <p><i>Data Protection update to be presented annually to Audit Committee.</i></p> <p>10.5 Self Assessment Report (SAR) 2024-25 for approval The SAR was scrutinised for the year with strong evidence of continued quality improvement. It fed into the QIAP. The process had been accelerated so information added was current and not lagged.</p> <p>The overall effectiveness grade for the college was good. This was in-line December 2024's Ofsted inspection, contributory grades were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quality of education; good - Behaviours and attitudes; good - Personal development; outstanding 	<p>JL</p> <p>JL</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leadership and management; outstanding - Education programmes for young people; good - Adults; outstanding - High needs; outstanding - Apprenticeships; outstanding - Contribution to meeting skills needs; reasonable with strong in some areas <p>The grades were supported by strong outcomes data and rapid improvements and developments made by leaders.</p> <p>The areas for improvement were carried into the QIAP against the year improvements had already been made.</p> <p>Corporate Board approved the SAR.</p> <p><u>Action</u> <i>Upload SAR to the DfE portal</i></p>	JL
11	<p>Finance</p> <p>11.1 Management Accounts for the period ended 30th September 2025 - shared <i>Redacted due to commercial sensitivity.</i></p> <p>11.2 Partnership Plan 2025-26 – shared and accepted Presented at Resource Committee 19th November 2025. No change since approved at Summer’s Corporate Board meeting. Partnership income £400k (reduced from £500), built into financial plan. Partnership cost £320k (reduced from £400k). Continued to work with one partner, GEM.</p> <p>11.3 Financial Matters - shared The second edition of the college Financial Handbook (CFH) was live. Compliance was a condition of the accountability agreement with DfE. The former Audit Code of Practice (ACoP) had been replaced by the new framework and guide for external auditors and reporting accountants. Committees had oversight on documents set out in the handbook and updates would be brought to Corporate Board when necessary.</p>	

	<p>Dominic Raymont (DR) and Chris Hutchinson (CH) raised concerns around resource as there seemed to be an exceptional amount of work involved. It was hoped that support would come from the newly created, more substantive role of finance manager, out to advert, following the resignation of the Head of Finance.</p>	
12	<p>Policies - shared</p> <p>All policies were approved by Resource Committee 19th November 2025.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safeguarding child protection policy inc Prevent – Updated aligned with the Keeping Children Safe in Education updates this summer. • Safer Recruitment Policy - Updated to reflect current KCSIE guidance, ensuring robust pre-employment checks and safer recruitment practices. • Policy on safeguarding concerns and allegations about staff - Revised to align with statutory guidance and strengthened procedures for managing concerns or allegations. • Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblowing) Policy – Updated to reinforce reporting routes and protections in line with latest ESFA and governance expectations. • Anti-fraud, Bribery and Corruption – Refreshed to meet current legislative requirements and strengthen internal controls and reporting mechanisms. • Subcontracting procedure - Updated in line with ESFA funding rules, ensuring strengthened due-diligence, monitoring and quality assurance arrangements. <p>All policies were ratified by Corporate Board.</p>	
13	<p>Governance update</p> <p>13.1 Code of Good Governance 2025-26 – shared and approved.</p> <p>An annual governance review was required under the Association of Colleges (AoC) Code of Good Governance, the Education, Skills and Funding Agency Accounts Direction and the Department for Education’s expectations regarding internal control and governance assurance. It provided a comprehensive evaluation of the Board’s effectiveness</p>	

	<p>across all six principles of the AoC Code and triangulated evidence from the 2023 external governance review, the December 2024 Ofsted inspection, internal audit findings, and Board documentation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance remained effective, strong and improving. • Strategic oversight, regulatory compliance, and leadership and integrity were particular strengths. • New Board appointments had strengthened skills in FE, NHS, business, HR, Special Education Needs Disability (SEND) and community leadership. • Internal audit rated Governance as ‘Strong’ in 2024/25. • Ofsted (December 2024) found governance well structured, with governors effectively monitoring performance. • Areas for development included Board paper standardisation, enhanced Equality Diversity Inclusion (EDI) visibility, SWDT oversight, and formalised stakeholder engagement structures. <p>Board agreed to bring forward the three year external review to 2026 due to the recent significant changes.</p> <p><u>Action</u> <i>Arrange in due course external governance review.</i></p> <p>13.2 Training update Five Board members were outstanding with training. All were informed. This was largely due to new Board members joining.</p> <p>13.3 Board member activity - reminder Any extra time spent on other activities outside of board and its committees to be reported to clerk.</p> <p>13.4 Scheme of Delegation – shared In first quarter of 2026 the Instrument and Articles would be reviewed along with Corporate Board’s Terms of References which will in turn influence the Scheme</p>	<p>SH/MN</p>
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	<p>of Delegation. Any amendments to committees ToR's as an outcome would also be made.</p> <p>It was agreed to proceed with existing documents until the review took place.</p> <p><u>Action</u> <i>Review Instruments and Articles, Terms of References, and Scheme of Delegation in due course.</i></p> <p>13.5 Corporate Board Terms of Reference – shared See item 13.4, approved.</p>	SH/MN
14	<p>Any other Business</p> <p>14.1 Remuneration Committee 27th November 2025 The minutes to be shared at next meeting. The following was agreed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3.1% pay award increase for senior team as well as staff. • Delegation to Shaun Hope (SH) when there was a change in salary point to executive team. • Delegation to SH for clerks ad hoc additional hours where necessary. <p>14.2 Conflict of interest mitigation The Chair of Corporate Board was also chair of NC Group. As SWDT would soon merge with BAC, the Chair agreed to step down from NC Group to avoid a conflict of interest. However, only positives had been gained upto this point with the two positions as it had enhanced working relations.</p> <p><u>Action</u> <i>Confirmation of resignation date from NC Group to be given to clerk.</i></p>	MD
15	<p>Redactions for published minutes</p> <p>Items: 4.6 8.5</p>	

	9.0 <u>Action</u> <i>Any redactions suggestions to be given to clerk.</i>	ALL
16	Date of next meeting Wednesday 25th March 2026, 5pm-7pm, Committee Room, BAC, Woodhouse Lane, DL14 6JZ	

Signed on behalf of the Corporate Board by Mo Dixon, Chair of Corporate Board.

Date:

Contact for meeting Clerk to the Corporate Board; marie.nigrelli@bacoll.ac.uk