

Notes of the Corporation Development Event held on Friday 1st May 2026 at 11:00 hours at the Institute of Technology

Members Present:

Julius Adams	Paul Hartridge
Kaynat Ahmad	Diana Martin (CE&P)
Liam Butler	Mphathisi Ncube
Matthew Collins (4.9 onwards)	Paul Noon (Chair)
Sally Cornfield	Jason Parker
Wendy Davies	Simka Rifai (4.3 onwards)
Mireille Digard	Sarah Wood
Nirmal Gupta	
(items 1 – 4 only) (via Teams)	

In attendance:

- Rachel Corns (Vice Principal)
- Gill Darwood (Director of Governance)
- Debbie Goode (Executive Director Public Affairs & Marketing)
- Louise Jones (Chief Finance Officer)
- Claire Millard (Vice Principal)

External attendees: Duncan Adams, external consultant (item 6)
David Hughes, AoC (item 4)

1 **Apologies for absence and confirmation of quorum**

- 1.1 The DG confirmed that the meeting was quorate. Apologies for absence had been received from Liz Sithole.

2 **Declarations of interest**

- 2.1 There were no declarations of interest relating to matters on the agenda.

3 **Chair's welcome**

- 3.1 The Chair welcomed members to the development event.

4 **Sector update**

- 4.1 David Hughes, Chief Executive of AoC joined the meeting via Teams and provided a sector update presentation which highlighted the following:

4.2 The College of 2035 - Vision and reality:

- Challenge of keeping focus on both a vision for the future and facing up to the urgent here and now challenges. This tension has never been more important.
- Tough decade from 2010 experienced by the sector.
- Colleges now in a better place so need to seize the moment.
- Challenges for individual colleges.
- Collaboration between colleges and for AoC remain vital.
- Policy landscape is now becoming clearer.

S Rifai joined the meeting at 11.10.

4.3 Government priorities:

1. Achievement of young people.

2. Reducing NEET numbers (against backdrop of static/declining funding for 16-18).
3. Increasing young people at L4+ - aim of two thirds of 25 year olds at L4. Currently 60% of 19s at L3, so this needs to be much higher to meet progression to L4 target.
4. Reducing skills shortage vacancies in industrial strategy sectors, plus construction and health – asking employers to invest in training themselves. Challenge of filling these skills shortages as well as replacing those retiring from the workforce.
5. Engaging colleges as anchor institutions – health, safer streets, local economic growth.

4.4 These priorities reflected the AoC priorities they had asked of government.

4.5 New (part) funded opportunities:

- T levels and V levels for 16-19
- Youth guarantee and NEET
- Apprenticeships aimed at younger people
- HTQs, L4 and 5
- 29 TECs
- SEND grant
- Safer streets, preventative health, net zero/clean energy
- NOT adult education despite clear need

4.6 Current challenges:

- Highly dependent on government funding – 62% from 16-18 study programmes.
- Little room in DfE budget for new activities.
- Ministers likely to prioritise short term measures to make a difference before 2029 general election (need to work at influencing parties other than Labour and Conservative).
- Govt traditionally poor at implementation, co design and working with partners.
- Disruption and distractions from qualification reform and devolution
- And a long list of on-going urgent and difficult challenges.

4.7 Asks of government:

- Recognise that they are asking for a major change programme.
- Step up as the college regulator to support colleges to be successful and stable over the medium and long term.
- Involve College sector in the co-design and implementation.
- Bring forward the investment colleges need – adult funding, pay, capacity, capital, risk.
- Provide greater transparency on investment and funding.
- Cut out wasteful competition.

4.8 Colleges need to 'stick to the knitting':

- Risk of distraction from basics is higher.

- Harder when there are lots of growth opportunities.
- Higher levels of accountability locally and nationally.
- Focus on quality, achievements.

M Collins joined the meeting at 11.29.

4.9 Challenges for colleges and AoC:

- Fought hard to be respected and recognised.
- Earned a place at the table and must show it is deserved.
- Show what being an anchor institution means.
- Help government design policies that work, using our expertise.
- Work together locally, regionally and nationally.
- Present colleges as solutions to government ambitions.
- Ensure next decade is the opportunity decade.

4.10 For each individual college:

- Which priorities are most important for your community?
- Which are you best placed to grow into and develop?
- What is executive team and wider college capacity to invest in new partnerships and areas?
- What funding is available to help?
- What are the risks?

4.11 Locally/regionally:

- Elected mayor/strategic authorities.
- Regional image with partners.
- Does this focus require dedicated staff?
- What is the role of the Corporation in collaboration?

4.12 Opportunities:

- Government wants colleges to be anchor institutions.
- Colleges have enormous impact but can do more with the right policies, support, funding.
- Every college leader needs to step up and work collaboratively as system leaders but continue to deliver the basics.
- Need to use influence.

4.13 Following the presentation, D Hughes responded to questions from members on a range of topics, including:

- Colleges are caught between the need for short term and forward looking focus – how do we align ourselves and be proactive rather than ‘done to’? D Hughes responded that there had been a broad consensus that colleges should offer everyone the chance to learn and get skills and are traditionally inclusive. Now feels different with more politically polarised parties and political individuals with non-inclusive views in some cases. It is really challenging to remain politically neutral as public institutions, but colleges have to engage positively with legitimate elected representatives.

- Co-design and working with partners – what could AoC do to have a greater influence and impact? D Hughes responded that AoC was working hard on this. Government had a national implementation plan of their policies and need to have levers to make it happen, but change happens when colleges do something different. AoC therefore recognises the need to engage at a local level and are trying to look at policy change on a local level across a range of issues.
- Relationships between FE/HE – were there any particularly strong examples of that and what was AoC doing to support greater effectiveness in this area. D Hughes responded that there were good examples around the country which were place-specific. AoC were working with Universities UK and had produced a paper last year [[‘Delivering a joined-up post-16 skills system’](#)] to give some examples of good collaboration and frameworks of what that might look like. Again, the aim was to bring this to a local level. An example was provided from Durham where the University was working with four local colleges. AoC was delivering a workshop with them to look at what more could be done. AoC would welcome opportunities to facilitate similar collaboration in other places as a broker between colleges, universities, employers and local mayoral authority.
- Differential between teacher and lecturer salary – was it likely that the pay gap would move closer together and what were AoC doing on this? D Hughes noted that the gap between college lecturer pay in certain sectors was also an issue as it was difficult to recruit and retain staff as lecturer pay was not competitive with certain industries. DfE had made this issue a top six risk five years ago and there had been some movement with additional funding but increases had only kept pace rather than closed the gap. A five-year period to close the pay gap was a more realistic horizon.
- How easy was it for AoC to lobby government - D Hughes responded that influencing people was the most challenging aspect and the need to ensure that systems did not continue to prioritise schools and HE over colleges.

4.14 Members thanked D Hughes for his valuable contribution, and he then left the meeting.

5 **Tour of Higher Education and Skills Centre**

5.1 Members and attendees undertook a tour of the Higher Education and Skills Centre which was now completed and awaiting fit out with equipment.

6 **Development of the next Strategic Plan**

6.1 The CEP provided an update on the activities undertaken across the College so far in developing the next Strategic Plan.

6.2 The proposal in developing the next Strategic Plan was:

- A five-year plan from 2027–2032.
- A shorter high-level plan of approximately 20 pages.

- A new mission/purpose statement.
- To clearly articulate the values of the College.
- Maximum 6-8 high level strategic priorities, underpinned by an annual Operational Development Plan which would contain the detail of activities.

- 6.3 Members undertook a range of activities to look at development of the new College Mission Statement and noted:
- Preference for a shorter, more memorable mission statement.
 - Clarity on who was the audience.
 - Strategic priorities – 6-8 or even less.
 - Importance of the community – what do they need, not what we think they need.
 - Priorities – what did we set out to do and have we delivered it. Need to be able to measure it and be a living document.
 - State the destination but not ‘how’ we will do it (this would be within ODP).
 - Move from a mission and vision to an ambition statement – more memorable.
 - Our ambitions should not change because of any change of government. Remain focused on our purpose which is to serve our communities.
 - Anchor imagery – focus on one of government priorities for colleges to be anchor institutions.
 - College as an anchor institution – what does this mean to us?
 - How do we make the local community see this as their college?
 - Value in getting anchor institutions together – what does it mean to them all?
- 6.4 A range of suggested mission statements compiled following staff engagement activities was circulated, and [Members were invited to send any comments on these, or suggested alternative mission statements, to the DoG by email following the meeting.](#)
- 6.5 D Adams, external consultant, joined the meeting to provide an overview of his proposed approach to gathering external stakeholder feedback to inform development of the Strategic Plan. He planned to interview around 30 stakeholders over the period to mid-June and would then work with SLG to blend this with internal feedback.
- 6.6 His questions for stakeholders were grouped in a number of categories to gain insight on perception, reputation, alignment to regional need, partnerships, future positioning, values and character.
- D Adams left the meeting.*
- 6.7 The CEP noted that the Corporation Development Event in September would include a detailed proposal relating to the content of the next Strategic Plan, with the aim of a final version being approved for publication by January 2027.

7 Any Other Business

- 7.1 There were no items of other business.

8 Chair's Closing Remarks

- 8.1 The Chair thanked members for their attendance and contributions to these important discussions.

9 Date of next meeting

- 9.1 The next meeting of the Corporation would be held on Tuesday 16th June 2026 at 16.30 hours (via Teams).

The session closed at 14.31 hours.

Approved by members at the Corporation Meeting held 16th June 2026