Minutes

RNN GROUP

Corporation Board

11.00-12.15 on Wednesday 25 March 2026, as part of the Board Strategy Day, The Bridge Skills Hub, Bridge Place, Worksop, S80 1DT

Membership:	Paul Lomas (Chair); Jason Austin (CEO); Katie Asgari; Simon Ashton; Stephen Bulley; Margaret Cobb; Shirley Collier; Debbie Marshall; Kay Mulcahy; Alan Srilachai; Carol Stanfield; Ian Sutherland; Hayley Tingle; Louise Woodcock; Sohil Zokari
Attendance:	Tracey Mace-Akroyd (Deputy CEO); Scott Cryer (interim Director Finance); Jane Hartog (Executive Director Marketing, HR and OD); Cath Mollart (Executive Director of Strategic Planning and Corporate Services); Sarah Connerty (Director of Governance and minutes)
Apologies	Sohil Zokari; Jane Hartog

	Item	Action
1	**Welcome, introductions and apologies** The Chair welcomed colleagues to the meeting. The Chair shared the Map of Change which came to the Board earlier in the year. The focus is being the best we can be for our students, staff, the Group, and as governors, and delivering on our vision and Strategic Plan. The strategy day is an opportunity to come together with three areas of the day – Insights team workshop, a Board meeting, an afternoon focusing on the Bassetlaw region and its stakeholders, and a check in on the Strategic Plan and the upcoming Accountability Agreement linked to the LSIP priorities. Improvements as a Group since the Map of Change was developed last year include: • Insights as a foundation to be better, challenge, support, scrutinise, interact, and develop as a Board and as governors, and an understanding of the management governance relationship and boundaries • How we make it easier to be a governor and reduce the burdens of paper. The Director of Governance has done some great work on this around reporting to Board from Committees, and the roll out of the new executive summaries • Ensuring that we are better at what we do	

	- Ofsted sessions and scrutiny and ways that governors should support and challenge - Governor links scheme revisited - Meeting local needs and wider stakeholder engagement and linking back to the Strategic Plan The Chair thanked everyone for all their work. Today's Board meeting has a shorter agenda and time so that there is longer for the strategic focus of the day, and hearing from some of our external stakeholders. Apologies received from Sohil Zokari and Jane Hartog. The Chair noted Donna Clifford's resignation and the Board formally recorded their thanks for the four and a half years Donna has been a governor, her role as Vice Chair, and for stepping into the Chair of Q&S Committee role in 2024.	
2	**Declarations of interest** There were no declarations received.	
3	**RESOLVED: The minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2025 were agreed as a true and accurate record** **RESOLVED: The Board ratified the following written resolutions:** 18.12.25 – Annual Financial Statements. 22.1.26 – Co-opted appointment. 30.1.26 – appointment of a senior post holder. 2.2.26 – appointment of an external governance reviewer. 15.2.26 – appointment of an independent director 13.2.26 – Dinnington approved bidder	
4	**Matters arising** There are two actions outstanding: **ACTION:** Health and Safety board briefing for governors. This is with the Director of Estates, Facilities and Health and Safegty, and the Executive Director Strategic Planning and Corporate Services (ED SPCS) with a date to follow **ACTION:** The Student Governor has shared a document on the biggest challenges facing FE colleges from an event he attended for student governors which will be circulated to governors.	ED SPCS/ Dir of Gov Dir of Gov
5	**CEO update** (see presentation for details) **Key updates:** **Current applications -** are very positive with increases on all three sites. This is in line with the demographic trend. Further information will be shared about the levelling off and decline in the afternoon session of the strategy day. HE is currently down on this time last year due to the flexible application process. **Open days** – 27% increase at Rotherham, 41% at DVC, 58% at NNC (overall a 39% increase). A lot of work has been done in Marketing and more people are coming through the doors. This is a trend for the last three years.	

	Retention – trending above previous years for all ages. 19+ is 98.6% which is very high. A lot of work is being done to support students to stay. More than 58% of learners are disadvantaged. **Discussion and questions from governors:** **The Board raised the challenges around capacity for next year with the increase in open day attendance, and whether potentially many learners with have additional E&M needs.** **What national averages are included in the papers?** National averages are for 2024-5 which is the latest data available. **Rotherham Plan renewal –** RBC asks all its partners to approve its plan. The CEO and Principal shared an overview of the Plan. There are eight partners who are the main anchor institutions in the area. It was first launched in 2017 and relaunched in 2022. There is a longer ambitious plan for the next 10 years for aligning combined resources, partnership building and collaboration, to become an inclusive and growing economy, building stronger communities, promoting inclusion, supporting growth across the borough, the Rotherham Gateway and Don Valley development, and regenerating the town centre. **ACTION:** the Rotherham Plan will come out to the Board in April when the draft is finalised when all partners consider and approve. **Discussion and questions from governors:** **Are there any red flags in the Plan?** No and it aligns well to the strategy and direction of the Group. **Wakefield Futures Commission report focuses on key sectors to grow high skills jobs. Are they having those conservations at Rotherham?** Yes there is a focus on progressing people into higher levels. The UCR is cited in the plan. RBC are very supportive of the UCR and refer to it as part of the community in Rotherham. **Will there be a financial commitment?** There is financial commitment to be a partner, there won't be anything further. **The CEO and Principal shared updates on the external environment including:** • Key publications • The new qualifications environment • Technical excellence colleges – a bid has been submitted for defence which will be announced in the Spring • Regional hubs in construction • Youth guarantee and NEET prevention • Lifelong learning and funding reforms – opportunity to deliver from 2027 and the Group is already working on this • Growth and Skills Levy starts in April 2026	CEO/Dir of Gov

	• Some tuition fee uplifts. Decisions will be needed on HE provision charges as this has been unchanged for some time • Ofsted changes • SEND reforms and the new three tier support model. The consultation is still open for implementation between 2026-2030 • Transition gateways (the 16+ and 19+ cliff) a much better system in information sharing. **Discussion and questions from governors:** **Do the regional hubs bring in any funding?** There is £2m over four years across the region. Currently EMCCA are running and will share the funds with details to follow, SYMCA haven't decided yet how to fund, but it will be on a needs basis. **Strategic Indicators review** Information has been collated at a March update, RAG rated and shared for the four key themes and 20 indicators. **Discussion and questions from governors:** **One governor to share updates outside of the meeting with the CEO and Principal. This includes some areas which have exceeded targets and whether a review of the target is needed.** Because this is the first year on the targets some are interim milestones. The Exec have not adjusted for now even though for some the gap remains significant. For some areas the data is being measured in different ways, with different pathways that may distort the figures. **Careers looks positive and why it is amber rather than green?** Destinations is a really important area. The milestone is 100% of learners and it needs more assurance and evidence around sampling. That will be done through the Navigate records. **The link governor for Careers updated the Board on two key issues - providing individual support and guidance which is a massive ask for colleges. And the requirement for a Level 6 qualified careers person which is difficult to recruit. There are new people coming in with Level 4 qualification who will be trained up which is positive for the Group as a training organisation but it is a big ask. There will need to be clear conversations on inclusion and investment with the White Paper and SEND reforms.** **Meeting Local Skills Needs – Additional Capacity Needs at North Notts College (NNC)** *[confidential note]*	
6	**Finance** **Finance report and January 2026 management accounts** The interim FD provided a finance update, key points included: • The finance team are just concluding the February accounts • There are minor changes to the forecast, but it is still close to budget. A lot is down to staffing issues with agency staffing. This is not	

surprising with the growth in 16-19s both for teaching and capital needs

Financial Health Benchmarks (Year-End Forecast):

- Adjusted current ratio: 1.40.
- EBITDA as % of income: 6.7%.
- Borrowing as % of income: 3.3%.
- Financial Health Grade: Good (Score 210).
- Pay as % of income (excluding subcontracting): 69.5%.

Risks & Opportunities:

- Growth funding of £1.5m anticipated; DfE NIC grant confirmed.
- Apprenticeship income is forecast to fall slightly below budget; ILR data match errors are reducing.
- £0.5m Staff costs contingency within forecast.

Expenditure pressures:

- AoC 4% pay rise and one-off bonus; agency costs significantly above budget.
- Growth funding methodology is yet to be confirmed; £1.5m forecast based on last year
- EBITDA is in line with budget. This is primarily due to the growth in 16-18 delivery. The interim FD noted that he has not seen growth at this level in the FE colleges he has worked at, and it is tremendous work by teams to reach these unprecedented levels. This has resulted in short term issues around staffing costs, estates and capacity
- The Group is hopeful to receive lagged funding. An additional £1.5m is included in the budget. This is not the full amount and only just covers the real additional costs
- Additional staffing often come from agencies which is expensive. This is a short-term problem across the sector
- Cash is around £2.5m slightly below the KPI of £3m. This is due to additional students

Discussion and questions from governors:

When does the KPI on cash resolve?

When the lagged funding is received

Is there a risk around not receiving lagged funding, and if we don't receive the £1.5m is there the ability to pay bills as they are due?

There is a very low chance of not receiving lagged funding. If funding is received in the current year this would take cash back up to £4.5m. If no money is received this will be challenging but would not cause operational issues.

Is there a known amount of money for over recruitment?

It is hoped there will be 50% but it is not confirmed for this year yet.

We have set an internal KPI which we are now in breach of but it is ok, does this need review?

	The KPIs are influenced by the FE Commissioner which colleges tend to benchmark against. In June 2025 these were reviewed and cash days in hand has increased from >25 to >40 **When was the lagged funding payment last year?** June 2025 **Budget initial assumptions** The assumptions are preliminary to start the budget process. They are the same assumptions used last year at the same stage of the planning process. As the budget process continues the assumptions may be amended. There is an assumption of 2% funding growth rate. Since this was considered there will only be half of this. The FE sector is not getting the same treatment as other sectors. **Discussion and questions from governors:** **Pay awards and assumptions from AoC. Will bigger changes need to be made in the budget around pay rises?** The AoC are very clear that pay awards are only recommended for colleges where it is affordable, a lot of colleges don't follow this. **The AoC recommendation is a way of working through the numbers. It sends a signal to our stakeholders, and there are benefits of making certain assumptions early in the process.** **For HE given that applications are down a third on last year, and the Group have not raised fees is the assumption in the budget reasonable?** It is in line with the curriculum plan 2026-7 that everyone has been involved in which is showing a small increase. The applications are currently lower but applications do come in in May so are due to increase. Last year a contingency was put in the budget in case of lower numbers. The budget work hasn't yet started but it will be based on the curriculum planning process. **Does this refer to our traditional HE provision?** It covers our traditional provision accredited by Sheffield Hallam University, the University of Hull and Huddersfield University, and our own provision. **As a Board do we need a broader conversation about staff ratio to income?** **Making sure the increase in learners is properly covered in the budget is critical.** The Chair agreed that the Group has a lot of agency costs. There is a strategic discussion needed around people from recruitment to selection, onboarding, costs and agency. **ACTION:** The Chair to take forward discussions with the CEO and Principal and the chairs The interim FD explained that staff ratio is a target and a benchmark. The previous FEC was clear that it was dependent on a colleges' circumstance and shared that as a Principal she had never made the target. **The Chair shared that on his Chair leadership programme no college has a ratio below 70%.** **Does the 69% of staff costs include the £1.5m?** Yes. If the Group received the full amount of lagged funded for each student the ratio would come down.	Chair

	The DCEO gave assurance that she and the ED SPCS have attended all curriculum planning meetings and average class sizes are 18+. The Exec are being as challenging as possible around curriculum numbers and staffing across all provision, including apprenticeships. **Draft curriculum contributions** The interim FD explained that the first draft of curriculum planning is complete and the plans will be reviewed by senior managers and amendments to planned student numbers and costs will be considered. A lot of refining work happens around this area.	
7	**Risk** The interim FD provided an update on risk, which has already been shared with the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) last week. Key points: • The Strategic Risk Register is consolidated to 15 high-level risks with the Executive Risk Committee (ERC) tasked with updating operational risks (around 85) to align with the Strategic Risk Register. This process aims to rationalise and update both registers for improved clarity and governance • The ERC met on the 26 January; the next meeting is 26 March. Misalignment of meetings are being addressed at the Board's request and future meetings will dovetail into the ARC and Board, with the following meeting at the start of May when the new ED Finance and MIS starts in role. This ensures governors receive the latest data. The ERC will look particularly at controls, and actions where risks are above target. There will also be a focus on the external climate focus. The Chair of ARC will attend the ERC meetings as an observer. There are no changes since the last meeting to the strategic risks that remain above appetite. These are: 1.Major Public Disorder / Civil Unrest (Risk 15) 2.Environment & Sustainability (Risk 13) 3.Artificial Intelligence (Risk 12) 4.Projects (Risk 08) 5.Talent Erosion (Risk 06) 6.Digital Transformation (Risk 07) **Discussion and questions from governors:** A full review of risk appetite which involves the full Board will take place. A working group will be convened with ARC members and any other governors that would like to join. Updates will come to the May ARC, and a substantive item on the June Board. A deep dive of some key risks will take place at ARC to be clear from an assurance level. Finance and Resources Committee (FRC) governors raised their discussions around wanting more information on controls in the reports. The interim FD explained that risk management is huge and the operational items have not come to this Group. There was a discussion about the Board and its Committees being strategic and how far into the detail do governors go to	

	get the assurance they need. At FRC some committee members felt it was difficult without the detail to have oversight of their delegated risks as there was no detail on the impact on resources or timings to mitigate risks. The Chair of ARC agreed that there is more work to do and this is being fed into the ARC. The VC confirmed that there has been a long journey with risk and it is about how do governors get assurance without getting into the detail. It was agreed that interaction of governors sitting on different committees was important. The DCEO explained that the Quality and Standards Committee approach risk in a different format with the risk report sitting alongside the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). The QIP is being loaded into the 4risk system and this may be another way for governors to have oversight and assurance of risk. The VC reported that she has asked for details of disadvantaged students and how the 58% is broken down. This will follow on. The Chair has asked the CEO and Principal to work with Exec and MIS to create an RNN on a page. The aim is to find a way to bring everything together into a sensible data pack which is up to date, clear, and provides governors with assurance.	
8	**Committee Chairs report:** **Audit and Risk Committee –**20 January and 17 March 2026 The Board noted the ARC update. Governors are invited to join a risk assurance working group which will feed into the June Board, timings to follow. **Finance and Resources Committee –** 21 January and 4 March 2026 **RESOLVED:** The Board approved the: 1. Reserves Policy 2. Treasury Management Policy 3. LGPS Policy 4. Financial Regulations 5. The Health and Safety Policy (subject to updating a typo on item 5.1) The Board noted the FRC outcomes of the **Gender Pay Gap 2024-5** report. **Search, Governance and Remuneration Committee** – 28 January 2026 **RESOLVED:** The Board approved the Board and Committee schedule 2026-7 The Board noted the progress against the Governance Improvement Plan and Map of Change, and current membership and gaps. **Quality and Standards Committee –** 10 March 2026 **RESOLVED:** The Board approved the RNN Group Self-Evaluation Document (HE SED) The Board noted the QIP and risk report, the safeguarding update, and the EDI update, and FREDIE action plan. The acting Chair for the last Q&S Committee thanked the team for the suggested questions in the new executive summaries which focuses	

	governors on the key areas, and made discussions at the meeting much more insightful. The Vice Chair updated on the work to revamp the governor link scheme, and thanked the DCEO for her support in aligning the scheme to the new Ofsted framework. The scheme is being done slightly differently with principles and suggested questions, and feedback on the impact of the visits from the staff member and link governor.	
10	**Any other business** There were no items raised.	
11	**Date of next meetings:** Tuesday 30 June 2026 at Dearne Valley College 15.15 visit to Iprosurv with the Board meeting at 16.30.	
Staff and student governors and Exec depart – 12.15		
12	**RESOLVED:** The confidential minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2025 were agreed as a true and accurate record	

Meeting closed: 12.20